**Amidst the fifth wave**

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A new wave of the coronavirus seems to be gripping Europe, forcing governments across the continent to carry out strict lockdowns. The recently announced restrictions on businesses have triggered unrest in several parts of the region. Belgium and the Netherlands witnessed some violent protests, while Europeans in other parts of the region are also taking to the streets to vent their anger against their governments’ measures.

The spectre of economic hardships is haunting millions of people across the world. During the first few waves of the pandemic, people from the bottom layer of social stratification were badly affected by the steps taken by their governments to control virus transmission. While the ruling elite in the West showered lucrative bailout packages on capitalists, the working class and the poor received only a tiny share from the trillions of dollars that were announced for large corporations and big businesses.

Workers fear that they will face the brunt of these policies once again. Millions of them have already lost their jobs. Many have already spent their savings and are left almost without any money that could help them survive during the current restrictions; on the other hand, the looming risk of homelessness is also disturbing them.

Amidst this unfolding catastrophe, one had expected Western governments to come up with bailout packages to extend help to hapless people, but instead of focusing on the losses that may be caused because of lockdowns, the ruling elite in the West is coming up with anti-Russian and anti-Chinese frenzy to hide their gross incompetence in dealing with the situation. The military strength of Beijing and Moscow is being exaggerated to appease warmongers sitting in the power corridors of Washington, London and Paris.

Chinese and Russian leaderships are being accused of hatching conspiracies to work against the West. A few Russian and Chinese dissidents are being used to bash ‘communist’ China and ‘authoritarian’ Russia. The alleged military build-up by Russia is cited as a reason for huge military spending by the West. The intelligentsia in the West is urging its ruling elite to take notice of the vicious nexus between Beijing and Moscow that, it claims, is bent on destroying Western democracies. The annexation of Crimea by Moscow is being presented as evidence for Russia’s hegemonic designs. Europeans are given an impression that if the ‘Russian bear’ and the ‘Chinese dragon’ are not reined in, they might trample upon all the freedoms that Western people have been enjoying for decades.

It is interesting to see how the Western intelligentsia is distorting historical facts by coming up with arguments that fly in the face of reality. For instance, Crimea had always been dominated by Russian-speaking people. Previously, it was part of the Russian federation that was given away to Ukraine during communist rule. It was the xenophobic government in Ukraine with its blatant anti-Russian attitude and persecution of Russians which forced Moscow to claim this historical part of the Russian federation. The West still regards Crimea as part of Ukraine, while Moscow claims it to be part of the federation.

While the action of Russia was fiercely debated in Western intellectual circles, the policies of the West towards Russia were not critically analysed. The genuine security concerns of Moscow were also ignored. The encirclement of Russia by the US and its Western allies did not find any mention in any analysis of the situation. Only Moscow was held responsible for the tensions that seem to be rising between Europe and the second military power in the world.

Fear of Russian military power might be considered paranoia, but historically, it has always been the West that frightened Moscow. First, it was the Polish Lithuania Commonwealth that subjugated the Russians. During the early 19th century, it was Napoleon who played havoc with the lives of Russians, invading the country and teaching it a lesson for not being part of the continental blockade of the UK.

Had it not been for the shortage of food and the rough weather, the country would have been turned into a French colony. Napoleon himself went all the way up to Moscow waiting for a peace offer that never came. Harsh conditions in the country forced the French troops to retreat, but the deep wounds that they infected on Russians’ psyche can never be forgotten by the people.

Following the 1917 October Revolution, Western forces once again carried out military intervention in Russia, throwing their support behind the white forces that were battling the nascent Bolshevik government. Russians defeated not only the white forces but also their Western collaborators, defending a government that had been brought into power through the popular will. The West continued to hatch conspiracies against the communist government even after the withdrawal of their troops from the socialist country.

During World War II, it was again a Western power that wanted to annihilate the ‘Slavic’ race. Hitler, who had been appeased by the West in the past, was bent on destroying the communist government that subscribed to an ideology that was widely popular in several parts of the Western world including Germany. More than 27 million Russians sacrificed their lives to defeat the menace of fascism which protected not only the Russian territory but also that of Western countries.

So it was the West that has always invaded Russia, and not the other way around. The same could be said about China that suffered a century of humiliation because of the machinations of Western powers that occupied several parts of the giant state. The hostility towards China accelerated after the 1949 revolution with the West slapping sanctions on the communist country for more than 20 years, besides throwing support behind several separatists of the breakaway province of China. Even today, the West plays a double game: recognising the One-China policy on the one hand and throwing support behind Taiwan on the other. The attitude of the West and the US over the South China Sea is also provocative.

So, historically, it is not Moscow or Beijing that could be blamed for the current tensions between the West and the Sino-Russian alliance. Russia and China may not be ideal global powers, but the same could be said about France, the UK and the US. Therefore, the West should not have this strange sense of altruism. Turning China and Russia into a bogey will not help stabilise the world which is already reeling under the cataclysmic impacts of the Covid-19 virus.

The world is deeply interconnected with Europe heavily depending on Russian energy sources, the US relying on relatively cheap Chinese goods and China looking towards the West to market its products. The destruction of one country or one continent would not be confined within its borders or territorial limits. Therefore, sanity should prevail.

Leaders of major global powers should ensure that their bickering does not escalate into a full-fledged conflict. Such a situation would be devastating for a global economy that has already suffered close to $5 trillion in losses because of the pandemic. The recent statement of President Putin where he warned the West against crossing red lines and propaganda regarding the supersonic missiles of Russia and China indicates that not everything is well in the power corridors of Beijing, Moscow, Washington, London and Paris. This spells a disaster unless the UN and the people in the Western world intervene, forcing their leaders to focus on the virus instead of picking a new fight.

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