**Geopolitics sans morality**

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Geopolitics has been epitomised by a ruthless, remorseless and relentless pursuit of national interests by the major powers of the world. It has always been a pitiless exposition of brute power bereft of all inhibitions, morality, regret, justice and/or fair play. They have devised (and continue to create) flexible, self-serving moral values, standards and justifications to exploit any given geopolitical or geostrategic environment. They do so without any compunction or qualms of guilt, whatsoever. They suffer from “convenient and selective amnesia”, at will. Lesser powers are held to much higher moral ideals and are roundly ostracised and penalised whenever required. Of late, these major powers have demonstrated a stunning lack of morality in world affairs, brutally violating international law, conventions, pledges, obligations and norms.
The current Ukraine War is a case study. In 1991, President Gorbachev agreed to a re-unification of Germany only because the US vowed that, “NATO will not move one inch to the East”, thereafter. Today, of the twenty-eight European members of NATO, fourteen are former Soviet Republics (and NATO threatens to suffocate Russia further by absorbing Ukraine and Georgia, too). Ukraine, at independence, held about one third of the former USSR’s nuclear arsenal comprising ICBMs, heavy bombers and 1700 warheads. It was persuaded to give it all up. Under the Budapest Memorandum of December 1994, the US, UK and Russia undertook to essentially safeguard its independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. Ukraine too fell for their ploy and now must be roundly ruing its fateful decision to “denuclearise itself”. Today, it could have deterred Russia, bluntly rejected NATO’s less-than-subtle overtures and secured its own independence. Alas.
Thus, driven by their respective geopolitical imperatives both the US and Russia have trashed their international obligations and maneuvered imperiously to secure their respective national interests.
The US has contrived the current geostrategic environment in Eastern Europe in pursuit of far deeper geopolitical objectives. It is its well-known Strategy of Offshore Balancing, yet again. It allows the US to “lead from behind”. It exploits favoured regional powers, here Europe and NATO, to check the rise of potentially hostile powers, here Russia. This strategy lures and entraps Russia in Ukraine, leaves Europe to bear the multidimensional deleterious fallouts of the war while the US itself romps home safe and at minimum cost in men, materials and treasure! Déjà vu.
Russia’s einmarsch into Ukraine might be the first step in the restoration of US’ global hegemony and leadership. The US will not allow it to extricate itself from this quagmire. The Ukrainians will be encouraged to start off a resistance movement with ample help from the US, EU and NATO. Anti-tank and air defence weapon systems are being provided to Ukraine in bulk. The induction of notorious US contractors (and volunteers from Europe and elsewhere) to beef up, assist, guide and control the Ukrainian resistance is a given. Fortress defences will be created in major Ukrainian cities/built up areas to embroil the Russians in manpower intensive urban warfare, something they have ardently avoided thus far. The Ukrainians will never venture forth from their cities to meet the Russians in open warfare—the forte of the latter. Russia, will prefer to lay siege to these cities and wait till they run out of stamina and provisions. Nevertheless, it would rather seek a quick realisation of its war aims; the demilitarisation and de-Nazification of Ukraine, its avowed rejection of NATO membership, its assured neutrality and role as a buffer and an early withdrawal of its forces.
NATO and the EU have not granted Ukraine memberships because of the inherent obligations then to come to its defence (Article 5, NATO charter, collective defence). That would mean direct combat with Russia and serious escalation in the war. They have shown no will, determination or intention to commit forces to Ukraine’s defence. In real terms, Ukraine stands alone against Russia. A temporary or provisional membership of NATO and the EU, at the right point in time, would have given courage and moral support to Ukraine and might have imposed caution on Russia if not deterring it outright. However, both NATO and EU have, despite the vociferous pleading, beseeching and imploring of President Zelensky, taken refuge behind ludicrous procedural matters. Are the US, the UK, NATO and the EU then agreed upon primarily exploiting Ukraine’s plight to their geopolitical advantage, only? Are they deliberately letting Ukraine be destroyed? Do they want to isolate, demonise and weaken Russia while they themselves acquire the supposedly higher moral ground by only imposing sanctions on it?
The Ukraine war furthers US’ geopolitical ambitions. A Europe, at war and destabilised, helps it achieve many of its foreign policy objectives. It reinforces its claims to global leadership as Europe looks up to it for military assistance and guidance. It has engineered a crucial disconnect between Europe and Russia through a very well thought out sanctions’ regime. This eradicates European dependence on Russian oil, gas, wheat, minerals et al and helps evolve a US-centric supply chain instead. Flourishing European-Russian economic ties have thus degenerated into undisguised belligerence. The world, more-so the Europeans, will now bear the ramifications of these double-edged sanctions. The US is in a formidable win-win situation—this time at the cost of the Europeans! This war creates a favourable strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific Region, too. A weakened Russia helps the US defeat the twin-threat that it and China pose to its global hegemony, piecemeal. Tellingly, it has yet to engage Russia in peace making in Europe!
The recent voting in the UNSC, UNGA and the UNHRC clearly indicates unmistakable defiance to US diktat. Many countries, (representing 53 percent of the world’s population), abstained from the UNGA vote. Recently, the de facto rulers of KSA and UAE have reportedly baulked at taking President Biden’s calls! The US is clearly losing its high moral ground and its coercive diplomacy, its sting.
Pakistan must remain realistic as it adopts a balanced, righteous, principled, idealistic and morally correct position in international affairs, particularly in the Ukraine war. The world powers generally frown upon such mavericks and move synergistically to penalise/discipline them!