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**Tackling disputes**

Amidst the ravages of the coronavirus that has killed and infected millions, the US and other global powers are busy making policies that could have serious ramifications for the peace and security of the globe. Such policies, if implemented, would raise the specter of tension between heavily armed nuclear powers and their allies. Any possible miscalculation on the part of these powers could plunge the world into a devastating conflict that might incinerate the very existence of humanity. A specter of conflagration is now haunting pacifists across the world because of the recent policy initiatives taken by a number of global powers.

In the Pacific, the situation continues to be tense. Washington, its Western allies and regional partners seem to have a dogged determination to carry out a strict encirclement of China. For this purpose Indo Pacific Command Chief Philip Davidson has made a bid demand. According to Defense News, a report from US Indo-Pacific Command delivered to Congress on Monday calls for roughly $27 billion in additional spending between 2022 and 2027, with $4.6 billion for fiscal year 2022 alone. With a few key changes from last year’s proposal, the report calls for new missiles and air defence, radar systems, staging areas, intelligence-sharing centers, supply depots and testing ranges throughout the region, as well as exercises with allies and partners.

American policymakers seem to believe that this preparation and spending would deter any potential adversary from carrying out a pre-emptive military strike against Washington’s interest. The requirements outlined in this report are specifically designed to persuade potential adversaries that any preemptive military action will be too costly and likely to fail by projecting credible, combat power at the time of crisis. Many critics believe that the message is clear to Beijing that it is considered a threat to US power by Washington. The move is likely to set alarm bells in the country that is already facing a number of US allies in the region.

Tensions in the South China Sea have been simmering between Washington and Beijing but now other allies of the US have also thrown support behind Washington. France has recently sent one of its nuclear attack submarines over to the disputed sea. France is said to be the second European nation to sign up for Washington’s Indo-Pacific strategy, following the UK which has pledged to send a carrier strike group to the region later this year.

It is not only one region that seems to be witnessing an invisible sabre-rattling; other parts of the world are also moving in a dangerous direction. Nato carried out its annual anti-submarine warfare exercise in Italy last month. Submarines, ships and aircraft from eight Nato allies took part in a major naval exercise which started off the Sicilian coast. The purpose of this exercise, called Exercise Dynamic Manta, is to ensure that the US and its Nato allies can operate together seamlessly. Russia carried out Exercise Ocean Shield last year in August.

All major powers seem to be militarising the Mediterranean. Nato believes that Algeria, Egypt, Russia and Israel are now all operating submarines in the Mediterranean and thinks that it should not lag behind and therefore it is increasing its presence there. In normal circumstances, such exercise could have been dismissed as inconsequential but given that Russia and China are considered two main rivals of the US, they assume extraordinary importance. Analysts in Western countries might describe them as routine exercises, but they create an impression that the West is also trying to send a strong message to Moscow.

Manlio Dinucci, an Italian researcher, asserts that the purpose of the exercise was the hunt for Russian submarines in the Mediterranean that Nato believes would threaten Europe. Dinucci noted in an article published in the Canadian website Global Research, “At the same time, the Eisenhower aircraft carrier and its battle group are carrying out operations in the Atlantic to 'demonstrate continued US military support for allies and a commitment to keep the seas free and open.' These operations – conducted by the Sixth Fleet, whose command is in Naples and base is in Gaeta – fall within the strategy set out in particular by Admiral Foggo, formerly head of the NATO Command in Naples: accusing Russia of wanting to sink with its submarines the ships connecting the two sides of the Atlantic, so as to isolate Europe from the USA.”

It is not only military moves that are likely to pose a challenge to world peace and security but trade initiatives and business deals might also strain relations between global powers. China apparently did not resort to any military response to these moves of the western countries but it is carving out a place in the area which has been traditionally dominated by the US and its Western allies. China is making trade deals in the Middle East with the traditional allies of Washington. Chinese trade with Saudi Arabia reached about $36.4 billion in 2019 while with the UAE it was over $50 billion. Now Beijing is eying the Middle East’s $162 billion market that has a huge potential for information and communication technology products. Saudi Arabia, which is one of the largest suppliers of oil to China, announced it would open the largest Huawei store outside China in Riyadh. The two countries are also collaborating on AI and smart city projects.

Many defense analysts believe that the trade rivalries of the Western countries with China will continue to dominate the minds of policymakers in the advanced capitalist world while the US and its Nato allies will also be concerned over the ‘hegemonic attitude of an irredentist Russia.” Such rivalries can be sorted out through diplomacy and mutual agreements. But if diplomacy is not given space, then the world might plunge into a precarious situation which could be catastrophic in case of any miscalculation on the part of global powers that are armed with nuclear weapons.

Similarly, apprehensions about Moscow could be allayed by engaging the second global military power. There is no reason to believe that the West cannot allay the fears of Moscow regarding the expansion of Nato that is now sitting close to the borders of Russia. A promise to end the practice of regime change might go some way in assuaging Russia’s fears. Beijing and Moscow should also look into the genuine concerns of the West. If the West and the rest cannot sort out their problems themselves, then the UN and other international bodies should be invited to act as arbitrators. This constant tension on trade and the sphere of influence is haunting billions of people. A move towards peace and tranquillity should be considered the pressing demand of our time.

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