**Red Lines and National Interests**

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Signs of larger confrontations on global canvas are more imminent than ever. It can be termed as a complex revival of the cold war era. The US-Russia tensions might have reduced after the disintegration of the USSR but they existed in many forms. The Recent US obsession with China-containment policy doesn’t mean that Washington is no more concerned about Kremlin’s influence and alignment in the region. Western players led by the US share common concerns against Russia and China as evident from their meaningfully synchronised hostile stance on many issues. Deeper global divisions are visible on the issues of interim government in Afghanistan, the revival of the nuclear deal with Iran, Indian atrocities in Kashmir, the US-China rift over Covid outbreak and human rights violations in various parts of the world. While the world is more focused on events taking place in Afghanistan and confrontational vibes radiating among stakeholders amid the recent activation of the Quad forum, Kremlin’s tough stance about NATO is enough to ring many distant bells. The headline of a report published in RT about a meeting between Russian and Belarusian Presidents stated, “NATO expansion into Ukraine would cross red lines and force Russia and Belarus to act.”

This is undeniable evidence of growing confrontations triggered out of expansionist motives. NATO intends to expand its influence eastward by taking Ukraine into its fold. It is enough a reason to irk Russia especially once past US regimes kept assuring Kremlin that redlines at its borders would never be crossed. Ukraine’s initiative to host 13 countries military exercises in the coming weeks to solidify its bond with NATO has surely multiplied the provocative impact on Russia. Tough retaliation is evident as the Belarusian president has threatened to deploy missiles of appropriate range to tackle the looming threats. Interesting and equally intriguing facts surround the recent eastward push to NATO by the US in areas jealously guarded by Russia as its red lines. Back in the past decade, the Clinton regime was desperate to expand NATO in Ukraine to keep Russia fixated at its borders. This could not be materialized due to US military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Moreover, Russia never adopted a weak or tolerant response to any mischievous acceleration towards red lines demarcated in Ukraine and the Black sea. US is simultaneously provoking rather challenging Russia and China by using the NATO, Quad and AUKUS. The timing of these provocative steps seems meaningfully synchronized with much talked about withdrawal from Afghanistan. The unfolding of events reveals that the drawdown of troops from Afghanistan should not be taken as a reduction of US interest in the region. It is nothing but a change in strategy most probably dictated by the steadily growing influence of China in lands considered forbidden for all by the US. Major powers have demarcated imaginary red lines to safeguard the respective national interests derived mostly from ulterior motives. While the US opposed the annexation of Crimea by Russia, it could never justify its control over Guantanamo which belongs to Cuba. There prevailed a mysterious mutual accommodation between Russia and the US over such occupations which never crossed each other’s red lines. Act of opposing such interventions never moved beyond verbal cannonade. It is evident from the track record that the US always hinders the influence of major powers on global canvas through the application of multiple measures. After portraying a withdrawal from Afghanistan, now the US seems more poised against China and its allies. Though Biden, during a speech at UNGA, denied pursuance of cold war with any adversary but all recent actions reflect no change of heart in Washington. American acceleration to fulfil the old desire to pinch Russia by controlling Ukraine through NATO has the potential to trigger a new military conflict in the Eurasian region. Besides this, the US has pitched India as a wingman of Quad against China. What transpired in the Himalayan mountains after Indo-China military clash at LAC is enough to comprehend the further expansion of complex confrontation. India is crossing the red lines demarcated by China and gradually expanding the tensions from LAC to waters of Asia pacific and South China sea on the behest of Quad. Regional matrix turns complex due to persistent Indo-Pak confrontation over respective red lines related to Kashmir, cross border terrorism, proxies, hydro terrorism and politicization of international forums. There is no quick fix available for these deep-rooted issues with the people sitting on the helms of affairs in New Delhi and Islamabad. Confrontations are likely to ignite more if both neighbours continue to judge each other with the lens provided by their allies. While sitting a thousand miles away, if the US continues to cross the red lines by jeopardizing the regional economic projects led by China using a major country like India then how the region would gain stability. There is a dire need to learn pertinent lessons from the destruction orchestrated in Afghanistan by the US and NATO. Absolute confrontations would prove fatal in the peculiar context of Indo-Pak relations. Something good can be learnt from Turkey which is simultaneously buying the S-400 defence system from Russia and opposing the annexation of Crimea as well. So is the case with India which seems extraordinarily desperate in towing the US policy lines but has so far refused Washington’s proposals to cancel the S-400 defence system deal with Russia. Pakistan cannot judiciously safeguard its red lines without balancing the ties with global and regional players. Absolute support or confrontation must be substituted with rationale based response on various issues without compromising on well-defined red lines and national interests.