**Employing the Yalta model**

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With threats of sanctions against Russia by the UK and the US, the situation in Europe is taking a dangerous turn. It is believed that the US has drawn up a list of individuals and relatives who could face sanctions in case President Putin decides to invade Ukraine.

London, which has always stood behind Washington during many wars, conflicts and crises, is also planning sanctions against Moscow. British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss announced new legislation to expand the UK’s sanctions regime in the event of ‘Russian aggression’ against Ukraine.

The new planned sanctions are going to be more lethal for Russians. Even those that are believed to be close to President Putin or might throw support behind any possible aggression against Kiev could be targeted by these sanctions. Assets being frozen is also a possibility. Currently London can only impose sanctions on those directly linked to Russian actions in Ukraine but the new powers will allow it to target a much broader range of individuals and businesses.

Ms Truss’s statement came amidst reports of a deepening crisis with the UNSC meeting at the request of US President Joe Biden to discuss Russia’s troop build-up. Biden released a statement at the start of the meeting, warning Russia of “severe consequences” if it chooses to “walk away from diplomacy”. Russia had tried to block the meeting, with its UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya accusing Washington of unacceptable interference in its affairs. Moscow believes that new sanctions would backfire, harming the interests of British companies and shareholders. Russia asserts it is an attack on business with Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov vowing retaliatory measures based on Russian interests.

Russia has reportedly placed an estimated 100,000 troops, tanks, artillery and missiles near Ukraine’s frontiers, but Moscow vehemently denies Western claims that the giant country intends to commit any aggression against the former Soviet republic, which has been seeking to cozy up with the European Union and wishing to join Nato. The possible joining has infuriated the ruling elite of Russia that views such inclusion as a grave danger to the borders of a country that was twice invaded by Western powers, plunging it into the abyss of death and destruction.

Although Nato is also trying to counter this possible Russian attack militarily, hardliners in Europe and America believe the West is placing too much reliance on the Helsinki Model which advocates the resolution of disputes through diplomacy and talks. They assert that such an approach is encouraging Moscow to intimidate its neighbours and blackmail Western countries. Some claim that the West has adopted a policy of appeasement that ignored the way Russians treated Georgiana and Ukraine in the past, depriving Kiev of Crimea as the EU looked the other way.

While moralists are lambasting Russia for its alleged expansionist policies and hardliners are demanding the toughest military action, some following the realist school of thought believe that the Yalta model – which allowed global powers to accept the sphere of influence of the US, France, the UK and Soviet Russia in various parts of the world but primarily in Europe – might work. They believe that such an acceptance could lead to a permanent detente between Russia and Europe. Although it is claimed that the Yalta conference primarily discussed the joining of the USSR against the anti Japan war besides some other issues, some realists assert it also accepted the sphere of influence of Moscow and other allied powers in Europe.

Such understanding prompted Western powers to adopt silence as country after country in Central and Eastern Europe embraced communism. This tacit understanding between Moscow and Western powers brought a modicum of stability to Europe that had been devastated by World War II. Initially, Germany was divided into four zones with all powers holing presence in their respective zones. Later the entire continent was divided along ideological lines – Eastern and Central Europe falling under the influence of the Soviet Union, and the Western part of the continent going to non-communist countries like France, the UK and the US.

Although the US and the USSR, along with their allies, kept fighting in other parts of the world, they accepted the status quo on the European continent which not only led to political stability but peace and prosperity as well. While the Korean Peninsula was in the fire of war in the 1950s and Vietnam was engulfed by a terrible conflict in the 1960s and 1970s claiming more than six million lives, Europe by and large was peaceful. Similarly European and the Western powers continued supporting various anti communist governments in the Middle East, Latin America, parts of Asia and Africa but they did not dare to pick a direct squabble with Moscow which could have led to mutual annihilation.

Many critics believe that Western powers still hold influence in various parts of the world. For instance, North Africa and several other African countries are still under the influence of Paris that had contributed to bringing stability to the states that were devastated by wars and conflicts. A number of states of the African Union look to France for guidance on many global issues. French companies are one of the largest investors in the continent.

The UK also exerts direct or indirect pressure on its former colonies on several global issues. No one can dare interfere in the islands and territories where London has an immense influence and which encourage tax evasion and money laundering. The Philippines and the entire Western Hemisphere cannot think of challenging the authority of the US which sees them as its area of influence.

It is argued that if areas of influence for the Western powers could be tolerated then why can’t Moscow be allowed to have its own area of influence? Such acceptance would not amount to surrendering to Moscow but it would be a recognition that the former superpower is also one of the biggest powers of our times. To be under the influence of a big power does not mean that the country has lost its sovereignty, but it might mean supporting a global power on certain international or in some cases international issues. For instance, a number of countries from Latin America and Africa that threw their support behind China in recent years over the issue of Taiwan were not Chinese protectorate but independent states with sovereign right to say yes or no to anything.

Russia considers Central Asia its backyard. Millions of people from Central Asia work in the second global military power, sending crucial remittances that are essential to run their economies. But despite this all Central Asian States made independent decisions, some of them even permitting the US to set up military bases. Moscow did not use military might to kick the US out of that region; it employed diplomatic, economic and other tactics to persuade the Central Asian States that American presence could jeopardise Russian interests. It was also because of the Russian influence that the Central Asian States were able to stamp out religious extremism that was threatening the entire region just two decades ago.

Many experts of international relations believe that, although it is unpalatable to accept the global powers’ right to have an area of influence in various parts of the world, in practical politics such acceptance is important to avoid tensions, wars and conflicts. Therefore, they believe following the Yalta model may help ease tensions.

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