**Beyond the assassination**

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The actions of of American President Donald Trump have pushed the world towards one of the biggest crises of the 21st century. The assassination of Iranian commander Major General Qassem Soleimani does not only seem to have sown the seeds of chaos in the Middle East but has also created a spectre of a dangerous escalation that might trigger a conflagration that will be difficult to snuff out.

The military strike that killed the Iranian commander and his ideological comrades has raised important questions about international law, American belligerence, the utility of the democratic system, the concept of sovereignty and the tall claims of the civilized world regarding peace and harmony.

Greek philosopher Thrasymachus once said, “Justice means to protect the interest of the stronger.” That means that laws only protect the powerful. This is not the first time that the world’s sole superpower has violated the sovereignty of an independent country. In fact, Washington has militarily intervened more than 223 times in different parts of the world since its creation. In recent years, it has violated international norms and laws by targeting several individuals and groups through its drone terror.

American exceptionalism has become so embedded in Western culture that no country bothers to debate the legality of American action. In the aftermath of the recent attack on the Iranian general, London has urged Tehran to show calm. Imagine if a British general had been droned by Iran. What would be the reaction of France if a French military officer had been targeted by North Korea? How would Germany have reacted if a senior officer of the German army had been targeted by Bhutan?

The three attacker states would have been wiped out from the face of the earth. Their people would have been annihilated. Every trace of their existence would have become untraceable by now. They would have unleashed a reign of terror against these three states that would have not only taught a tough lesson to these states but to anyone who might have dared to counsel these mighty states to be calm and peaceful. It is very disheartening to see that Trump even threatened to target some of the cultural sites of Iran. Such acts fall in the category of war crimes but even then no word of condemnation stemmed from Western capitals. Such blind acceptance of American exceptionalism is a recipe for disaster.

It is the great dilemma of our modern times that Western states expect one reaction from the weak and another from the strong. What they do not tend to remember is that if the weak has no option but to perish, then it would cause as much harm to the stronger as possible.

Instead of lecturing Iran, Western democracies should summon enough courage to convene an urgent session of the UN Security Council, condemning this blatant violation of international law by Washington. They should counter the arrogant mighty power with economic and financial sanctions, ensuring that it never resorts to such action against a member of the United Nations in the future. However, the alacrity with which these modern capitalist states imposed inhuman sanctions on Iraq was missing here. Why? Because the state that happened to perpetrate this crime is the most powerful political entity on earth.

Trump has carried out this strike at a time when he finds himself mired in a political quagmire. His fellow countrymen want to impeach him for abuse of powers. It is ironic that the American system impeaches a president who may have accumulated some millions through illegal means or harmed a few individuals using his executive authority but when the same individual starts bombing country after country, sending several states into the Stone Ages, he is rewarded.

It seems that democracy, American democracy in particular, has turned out to be a curse for the world. When Bill Clinton landed in trouble over his scandal with Monica Lewinsky, he unleashed a barrage of missile attacks on the poorest countries of the world – Sudan and Afghanistan – destroying a pharma factory in the African country and killing several in the Asian country that has witnessed nothing but death and destruction for over four decades.

Now, Trump is trying to divert attention from the political crises that he is facing at home. But it is the people of other regions who will be paying a heavy price for his idiosyncrasies and flaws of modern democracies where the corporate media can turn anything into an issue by diverting people’s attention.

Western countries always claim to follow a rules-based world order. It is their top ally that has violated the tenets of this world order by unilaterally demonstrating reckless power. This is a litmus test of Western powers. They will have to show that they can prevail upon a state that has been endowed with unbridled power. They need to restraint the mighty state of America that has not only violated their own world order but also trashed the nuclear agreement that the West hammered out after long debates. The unilateralism of the US will not only harm Iran and other developing states but will also jeopardize the interests of the Western democracies that are heavily dependent on Russian gas and Middle Eastern energy resources.

The attack has created a complicated situation. If Iran does not respond, it will strengthen the position of hard-liners. If Tehran does try to respond, it could infuriate the mighty American state that could unleash a reign of terror. If Iran chooses to target Israel, they are likely to face an undeclared nuclear country that is being governed by someone who eulogizes death and destruction and sees glory in wars and conflicts.

The dangerous escalation is likely to harm China and Russia as well. It has the potential to derail the Belt and Road Initiative, of which Iran is an important part. Once the US is in a state of war, its European allies will have no option but to fall in line. Washington could use this situation to pile pressure on its European allies, coercing them into giving up the energy projects of Moscow. This could greatly harm Russian economy which is already grappling with the American sanctions.

Therefore, Russia, China and the EU should make joint efforts to control the US which seems to want to trample all norms and principles of the modern world. Any dereliction on their part could push the world towards a dangerous escalation that might end up in a devastating conflict. For Tehran, restraint is the only way forward. Any provocation will only strengthen the war-mongers sitting in the power corridors of London, Washington and Tel Aviv.

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