**Divided on America**

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“In terms of a Cold War… you have the vast majority of the rest of the world in total opposition to what [Putin] is doing… It’s going to be a cold day for Russia”, observed US President Joe Biden at a February 24 press conference shortly after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. But in the following few days, international reactions fell short of a universal denunciation of Moscow.

The two major Asian nations, China and India did not sharply condemn the Russian attack, nor did large African nations like Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt.

Brazil also wavered until it succumbed to US pressure to vote in favour of the UN Security Council condemning the Russian invasion on February 25. And while 11 out of 15 UN Security Council members did vote in favour of the resolution, many states stopped short of unequivocal condemnation and most just called for the cessation of violence and return to negotiations.

All of which begs the question, why? Why have the economically and strategically unified and dominant Western nations failed to secure unequivocal universal denunciation of what is evidently a blatant violation of international law?

The short answer: it may have less to do with Ukraine and more to do with America. There is fear and suspicion among nations of being dragged into another Cold War showdown between the US and Russia. Kyiv may be the victim and Moscow the aggressor, but in the eyes of many, Washington is not totally innocent in all of this.

As the self-appointed ‘world policeman’, the US stands accused or at least is seen to interfere in the internal affairs of other states under different pretexts, including in and around Russia and China.

It is also been accused of double standards when it comes to aggression, occupation and international law violations – one for allies and another for the rest, just as was the case during the Cold War.

That war might have been cold in the north, but it was burning hot in the Global South, where Moscow and Washington engaged in proxy conflicts to advance their interests, regardless of the cost.

A second Cold War would be as bad and even worse if today’s interconnected and interdependent world becomes deeply polarised between the West and Nato on one side, and Russia and China on the other – not only for individual states, but for humanity at large.

Since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, most states have diversified their economic and military relations with world powers and prefer not to choose between Russia and the US or between the EU and China.

Many countries are also looking out for their own interests amid the geopolitical polarisation, and some are dependent on Russia for wheat, energy, and military hardware or on China for investments, loans and trade.

And yet for decades, the US has repeatedly demanded nations get behind it in crisis times or pay the price. “You are either with us or against us,” warned US President George W Bush on the eve of his ‘global war on terror’ following the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington.

And soon after the US designated Iran, Iraq and North Korea the world’s ‘axis of evil’ and prepared to invade Iraq, it demanded that nations take its side or incur its wrath.

The following decade, Washington raised pressure on China and demanded of all its trading partners to get behind it or face the consequences.

The Trump administration even went as far as warning members of the United Nations that it was ‘taking names’ of those who voted in favour of a resolution condemning its decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

As the US is waning, China rising, and Russia coming back with a vengeance, the US’s coercive tone has become rather weird, tired and desperate, prompting countries to keep their options open.

No longer are states trusting Washington to help, protect, or defend them, not after its humiliation in Afghanistan and its defeat in Iraq; not after its blunders in Syria, Yemen, Libya and other world hotspots; and certainly, not after inciting Ukraine only to leave it at the mercy of Russian military might.

The world has also lost its innocence over the past decades and no longer buys into Washington’s lofty slogans of freedom and democracy, when both are under attack in America itself.

When the invasion of Ukraine started, Biden was quick to assure the American society that they would not have to fight, suffer or even pay more for gas. Or, as one observer commented sardonically, “America is about to fight Russia until the last Ukrainian soldier”.

It is too early to tell whether such international scepticism will lead to an initiative similar to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which was joined by over 100 nations during the Cold War. But what is clear, is that today’s global challenges require less polarisation and more cooperation.

Excerpted: ‘The world is united on Ukraine, divided on America’.

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