**Is Europe different from America?**

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January 14, 2020

On a number of occasions in the last few decades, Europe has projected itself as a separate political entity with its own norms, principles and political agenda which are different from the US. It has created an impression that its policies are to follow international law, respect sovereignty of nations and work for the peace and prosperity of the world.

During the illegal invasion of Iraq, Europe especially tried to distance itself from the reckless aggression that is said to be responsible for the loss of more than 2.5 million Iraqi lives besides the unimaginable destruction that has befallen on the hapless country. The invasion also tore the social fabric of the country, dividing one of the most educated Arab nations along sectarian lines and pushing them towards a conflagration that they are still trying to grapple with.

It may be mentioned that it was not the entire continent that opposed the illegal war; only France and Germany did and these two giant European countries were taught a tough lesson by the US that did not award any contract to their companies in the reconstruction of Iraq. However, firms from the UK and other countries that threw their support behind the illegal invasion were showered with lucrative contracts.

The lesson seems to have worked. France and Germany are no more recalcitrant children but are amenable to the idea of accepting US hegemony, falling in line in most of the cases and raising a meagre voice of dissent in some. France is said to have played an active role in the destruction of Syria that witnessed the killing of more than 550,000 besides causing a loss of over 200 billion dollars to the devastated country. More than 11 million people in that Arab state were also rendered homeless. The tentacles of Western-backed jihadis spread to parts of Europe where they targeted hundreds of innocent citizens in knife, bomb and other types of terrorist attacks.

After this calamitous destruction, they eyed Libya, a country with one of the best infrastructures in Africa and with one of the highest human development indices in the region. No one with a modicum of political consciousness would deny that Qaddafi was a dictator but was it not the sanctimoniousness of the West that they first tried to persuade the Arab dictator to buy their arms and award them different types of trade deals and later ditched him. Who can forget the hobnobbing of Tony Blair, the greatest democrat of the 21st century, with Qaddafi? What they ended up doing there is open to everyone -- the virtual destruction of the country, and total anarchy. Large swathes of land are now being ruled by armed thugs pampered by regional states or Western powers. The country is not only a hub of militancy but human trafficking as well.

It is true that historically Europe and the US were rivals, with the European powers backing different groups in the American civil war. America in a way was a British colony and a toy into the hands of several European powers. Then it grew powerful enough to kick out the European powers not only from its own soil but the entire region. After years of isolation, it somehow got interested in European affairs during the First World War, to be back in isolation for some more years. It was the Second World War and the rise of communism that forced Washington to lead the Western capitalist world.

Europe remained a junior partner of Washington during the cold war, doing its bidding wherever American wanted. Though there were dissenting voices, most of the European countries toed the American line. Washington-led Nato effectively countered its communist rival's Warsaw Pact. After the demise of the USSR, it was expected that Nato would also be dismantled because it had primarily been formed to counter the Warsaw Pact. But to the utter surprise of Russia and several other states, not only did the Western military alliance remain intact, it also expanded, bringing in ex-Soviet states into its fold.

Towards the end of the cold war and after the end of the USSR, the US and Europe emerged as a giant war machine, waging the First Gulf War, destroying Yugoslavia and participating in various other conflicts of deaths and destruction. Even today there are amazing similarities between the two political entities, with the US having a defense budget of over $700 billion and the EU around $300 billion. If we add the defence budget of the UK, which is no more a part of the EU but still a member of Nato, then it would be close to half of America's military budget.

America and European powers are also biggest arms suppliers with the US topping the list of those selling these tools of death and destruction. France, Germany, the UK and even some smaller countries of the West are also involved in this obnoxious business of arms sale, which is said to be one of the biggest factors of the killing of humans in modern times. So, despite all tall claims of being different from the US, it seems that Europe in general and the EU in particular is no more different from the mighty US that is on a war and conflict spree. Ironically, European leaders are now even buying the populist rhetoric

of Trump, which is fomenting anti-immigrant sentiments and promoting xenophobia.

The recent statements of European leaders in the aftermath of Iranian General Soleimani's assassination indicates that Europe is once again going to toe the line of the United States. It is clear that if the US at all plans any invasion of the Islamic Republic, the EU states will not lose time in joining in. France, Germany and the UK have already in a way hailed the killing of the Iranian general. None of them questioned the legality of the American action. None of them pondered over the ramifications of such action. None of them seems to be concerned over the possible consequences of this escalation. Many wonder why European leaders do not summon enough courage to challenge American unilateralism. What makes them mum over American exceptionalism, despite knowing it could push the world towards terrible destruction?

The question is: If Germany could infuriate the US over a Russian pipeline that would supply gas to it then why can it not challenge Washington over a matter that could affect millions of people? It is not enough for a country or political bloc to save its own skin, if it wants to lead the world. A world leader should also be adroit at protecting the world from human-made disaster. If the EU really wants to prove to the people of the developing countries that it is different from America, then it must prevail upon Washington and Tel Aviv that are whipping up the war frenzy.

They must investigate why Soleimani was targeted at a time when he was reportedly holding talks with the Iraqis that might have enabled Tehran to normalise ties with Riyadh. The political bloc must make efforts to facilitate talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It must put an end to this endless arms sale and stop supplying arms to states that have bitter hostilities. Only practical actions and not rhetoric will help the EU prove that it is different from Washington and does not countenance its belligerent and unilateral policies.

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