**Foolhardy brinkmanship**

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US foreign policy is apparently driven by two overwhelming imperatives, amongst various others; one, a compulsive obsession to singularly dominate the world as an uncontested superpower and hegemon and two, its military industry complex’s (MIC) self-serving, insatiable appetite to keep it embroiled in distant wars against real, self-created and/or imagined threats, ad infinitum. These two impulses have largely defined the conduct of US’ international relations in the post-World War II era. Of late there has been a very discernible paradigm shift in US foreign policy. It has disentangled itself from Afghanistan and perhaps from the South-Central Asian Region (SCAR), too. Simultaneously, it has skilfully manipulated the abject capitulation of the Gulf Arabs to itself and Israel through the Abraham Accords. It has also offered Iran some relief from sanctions on its civil nuclear programme. Thus, the US-Israel Combine now totally dominates a largely pacified Greater Middle East Region (GMER). Having principally freed itself from the distractions of the GMER-SCAR Complex, the US is now focused on the two major powers that ostensibly threaten its global hegemony—Russia and China. Its grand strategic design is apparently based on the classic mould of a twin-threat or a two-front war scenario. It will tackle them piecemeal. In the preparatory phase, already underway, it is operationalising its European and Pacific Deterrence Initiatives (The Simmering Cold War, by this scribe, The Nation, January 7, 2022). These initiatives are intended to deter Russia and China from all aggressive measures that threaten US supremacy at the regional and overall global levels and lead to pre-positioning of potent combat forces in Eastern Europe and Indo-Pacific Region (IPR) theatres of war. Furthermore, this military coercion is being reinforced by potentially debilitating diplomatic, economic and technological sanctions to compel both antagonists to comply with US diktat. In phase one, it will hold one front (China), while it deals with the other (Russia). In phase two, having ostensibly dealt with/neutralised Russia, it will concentrate all its resources and powers to overwhelm China. As a rider clause, it will manoeuvre to isolate both its adversaries and prevent them from forging a united front against it. Two potential major regional conflicts are thus in the offing.

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This is a direct clash of spheres of influence of the US on the one hand and Russia in Europe and China in the IPR on the other. Russia considers itself the successor of the erstwhile USSR and expects its sphere of influence and its perimeters of security in Eastern Europe to be similarly respected and considered sacrosanct, uninfringeable. The US, having cut the then USSR to size, disagrees and has moved decisively to circumscribe its influence and strategic reach in Eastern Europe. NATO’s current aggressive expansionism threatens to absorb former Soviet republics and deploy its awesome offensive firepower right at Russia’s doorstep. Russia will resist NATO/US attempts to ring-fence it in Europe and the Pacific Ocean. Ukraine has thus become the bone of contention between them. Russia is amassing troops on the Ukrainian borders and in Belarus while NATO and EU are rushing in with diplomatic, economic and military aid to Ukraine. The US is initially deploying three thousand troops to Germany, Poland and Romania, to bolster NATO’s eastern flank.

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China’s meteoric rise has the US seriously worried. It perceives China as the most potent threat to its global dominance and hegemony. China’s massive BRI (and CPEC) is expanding phenomenally and concomitantly enhancing its sphere of influence and strategic reach, much to US’ chagrin and assumed detriment. Furthermore, the US considers China’s assertion of its legitimate rights in the South and East China Seas as direct threats to its self-professed “rules-based international order and a free and open Indo-Pacific.” China obviously disagrees. The US perceives this as a challenge to its sphere of influence and is determined to counter and deter it. Taiwan will be the inevitable flashpoint whenever the balloon goes up. Both the US and China have significant military presence in the region. China will proactively contest US attempts to ring-fence it in the IPR and Himalayas, (through India). The Biden Administration is thus moving in very aggressively to restore its pre-eminence in the world while Russia and China ominously close ranks to oppose it. US’ hubris and arrogance of power, its influential MIC and its fixation to control and micro-manage world affairs will not allow it to share the world’s apex and leadership with either China or Russia, much less with both. It is marshalling its forces. NATO is assuming threatening postures in Eastern Europe while QUAD and AUKUS have materialised in the IPR. Coalitions of the willing will be created in both potential theatres of war, as and when required. Economic, diplomatic, technological and military coercions/sanctions have become preferred weapons and are being brandished about freely. US policies have caused Russia and China to inexorably coalesce in geopolitical congruence, strategic convergence and economic interdependence.

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The US is clearly paranoid about losing its pre-eminence in the world. Its brinkmanship is acute, foolhardy and impulsive. Its policy lacks a well-defined end state and therefore viable ways and means to get there. Is the US unwittingly manoeuvring itself into a strategic cul de sac with no feasible options but war? Is war really the only way forward? If not, then will its threatened economic, diplomatic, technological and military coercions/sanctions realistically browbeat Russia and China into spineless submission? If they do not acquiesce will the US then resort to war? Russia and China could yet come up with their own joint strategy to counter the US-led West’s multifaceted stratagem. War ought to have been obviated by the mere ferocity and destructiveness of their respective nuclear and conventional arsenals alone. Prudence and sanity demand dialogue and negotiations. The US, China and Russia ought to meet, a la Yalta, to resolve this imbroglio peacefully. The US will have to accept the prevalent geopolitical realities. It has no pragmatic and sensible options but to concede geopolitical space to both Russia and China. The spheres of influence of all three major powers need to be defined, mutually acknowledged and considered inviolable by all.