**Understanding the Russia-Ukraine War**

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Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The world had a long-standing tradition of regional empires, with their vassal states. Czarist Russia was a great empire. The Scientific Revolution (1543-), the Enlightenment (1685-), and the Industrial Revolution (1760-) led to the rise of western Europe, which resulted in other continents being colonized by it (1800’s). This brought about unprecedented material progress, social justice and prosperity to western Europe.

The First World War (1914-1918), the Bolshevik revolution in Russia (1917), the fall of the Ottoman empire (1924), and the Second World War (1939-1945), were events happening in the pan-European world that changed the world. Nation-states were born from it.

The world then saw the rise of two superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union. The zeitgeist of the time was the polarized world of the Cold War between the pro-Soviet communist countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact (1955), and the pro-American capitalist countries belonging to NATO (1949).

It was essentially a race to emerge dominant economically, scientifically, militarily and diplomatically.

The Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989 by invading the Great Game or Afghanistan-the graveyard of empires.

The US was then able to dominate the globe and establish military bases at strategic locations across the globe. In 2021 it had 750 bases in 80 countries.

As a successor to the Soviet Union, Russia was still a major power.

Russia is the resource-rich largest country in the world. About 40 per cent of the Russian government’s budget comes from energy (oil and gas) sales to Europe and the US. It is a nuclear power and produces top-notch military hardware, which countries like India depend upon.

From opening up their homes to women fleeing the war to providing land and air transport, they are going all out.

It is helpful to note that India was one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) founded in 1961, which is a collection of 128 countries that are neutral in terms of area of influence.

However, India did have a strategic partnership first with the Soviet Union and then Russia, built on five major components: politics, defence, civil nuclear energy, anti-terrorism co-operation and space. Of late their mutual trade has risen considerably and they desperately need Russian weapons to face China.

The US emerged as the world’s sole superpower in 1989, but it began to sense competition from China, due to its technology transfer thanks to outsourced manufacturing for cheap labour. China’s technological and material progress combined with its expansion in Asia, Africa and Europe was a threat. The US then focused on India as a counterweight to China. India, while economically and technologically significant-due to its technical talent at home and within the diaspora- is still very far from being a counterweight to China. The rise of Hindutva Fascism is additionally put a damper on the works for the US’s capitalist interest. Hollywood, consumer goods and Disney Diplomacy made it easy for American (and western) corporations to make inroads in Europe and the world at large. American democracy and capitalism became the model for European states.

Superficially it seems to be all about power and influence, which it undoubtedly is. However, there is a strong religious element to the equation of global dominance.

The American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington propounded the thesis that people’s cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. He termed it the “Clash of Civilizations.”

Huntington defines the following major world civilizations: Western; Orthodox; Latin American; Sinic; Muslim; Japanese; Israel; Africa; Buddhist; and Hindu.

While the demarcations are religious, they are not about faith per se. They are all about a certain faith establishing its dominance upon the rest of the world.

Western civilization is primarily based on the Catholic-Protestant church while the Orthodox civilization is based on the Eastern Orthodox Church. It’s helpful to note that the Roman empire used the title of Caesar and when it fell from grace, Russia took the title of Czar-the Russian term for Caesar.

Ukraine happens to be on a faultline of two civilizations, as there is a cleft between its Eastern Rite Catholic western section and its Orthodox eastern section. The Eastern side also has a significant population of Russian-Ukrainians.

The Catholic-Protestant western civilization maintains hegemony on the world with NATO the military arm; UN the diplomatic arm; the IMF, the World Bank and the western banking system as the financial arm.

As NATO expanded and pulled almost all former Soviet or Warsaw Pact countries into NATO, Ukraine too decided to align itself to the Western Civilization.

This was viewed as poaching by Russia and it invaded Ukraine. China, India, and the UAE have abstained from condemning the Russian occupation at the UN, due to their vested interest.

Ukraine is fighting the war and the whole western civilization is backing it. President Zelensky requested NATO to create a no-fly zone over Ukraine, and this motion was deliberated at a special meeting of European ministers but the request was denied.

Ukrainian military and ordinary civilians who took up arms are putting up fierce and brave resistance to a much stronger Russian military. Their courage deserves applause. In the most recent news, three top Russian army commanders have been killed in battle-which must have lowered their morale.

Europe is trying its best to contain the conflict within Ukraine and is thus avoiding a military engagement. Russia has strong military might and nuclear weapons. Additionally, recent fears over the safety of Ukraine’s nuclear power plant are another cause of concern for other European states. The recent attack on Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station in Enerhodar, Ukraine-the largest nuclear power plant in Europe-was a close call.

The leaders of the western world are prudently avoiding cornering Putin and are taking all kinds of non-military measures to stop the war. The western world has adopted a sophisticated strategy apt for a digital global village. They are attacking Russia on other fronts: social media; global finance, diplomacy; and cultural and commercial boycotts.

NATO’s big brother, the US vice President, Kamala Harris, will be travelling to Poland and Romania. Her office said that the trip is aimed to offer assurance to allies “in the face of Russian aggression,” and to support Ukrainians “through security, economic and humanitarian assistance.”

French luxury giants LVMH, Moët Hennessy, Louis Vuitton and Hermes have shut down stores in Russia. US internet service providers are blocking Russian internet access. The public took to the streets to protest in the European capitals of Bratislava, Frankfurt, Lyon, Prague, Tbilisi, Vienna and Vilnius. A Republican US senator even made a call to assassinate the Russian president.

A massive cyberwar is being waged on Russia. Vigilante volunteer hackers are attacking Russian sites. On social media, an online hacking group tweeted to its 7.7 million followers of the @youranonnews Twitter account recommending that they leave messages about “what is happening in Ukraine” in Google Maps reviews for Russian businesses and restaurants. The Russian sites were flooded by reviews containing political statements. Google has temporarily blocked new reviews, photos, and videos in the region. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday said that 16,000 foreigners have volunteered to fight for Ukraine against the Russian invasion.

I am a member of a Facebook female travel group and have witnessed unprecedented support extended to Ukrainians, by women across the western world from the US and Canada to Europe and Australia. From opening up their homes to women fleeing the war to providing land and air transport, they are going all out.

The famous European train network Eurostar has now made train travel free for Ukrainians entering the UK from Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam.

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