[**Backstage of a fratricidal war**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1739566/backstage-of-a-fratricidal-war)

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THE first anniversary of the intra-Slavic war in Ukraine — of family members murdering each other to the applause of an imperial Coliseum — is as sombre an occasion as any to analyse the backstage. Whenever the chips have been down in modern history, the war economy has bailed out some nations while others suffered the consequences of the conflicts. This was the preferred escape from the smouldering burnout of capitalism in the Roosevelt presidency. Does the soufflé rise at will though, any time one wishes?

“America’s response to World War II was the most extraordinary mobilisation of an idle economy in the history of the world,” wrote Doris Goodwin in The American Prospect barely three months before Russian troops waded into Ukraine on Feb 24, 2022. “During [WWII] 17 million new civilian jobs were created in the US, industrial productivity increased by 96 per cent, and corporate profits after taxes doubled.” Benefits of the war economy surpassed that of Roosevelt’s New Deal.

The times have changed but only just about. War economies of yore have made way for unabashed plunder, an economic atavism rooted in the colonial past. The bonanza that wars fetch is still crucial, but the methods have changed. The crisis of the overstretched US economy requires countermeasures. Europe was experiencing a similar turbulence on the eve of the Ukraine war. The desperation became evident in President Biden’s unusually public exultation over India’s order of 220 Boeing planes worth all of $34 billion. Tata Group, the buyer, has ordered a similar number from Airbus. Biden said the India deal would create thousands of jobs for Americans. His adulation for Prime Minister Modi was pronounced as his country hurtled into a deepening economic crisis yet again. Biden is not alone here. Donald Trump made a similar spectacle of himself. A $100bn arms contract dangled by the Saudis found him sidelining the widely demanded censure of the ruler who butchered Jamal Khashoggi. Contrast the few hundred billions thus earned against the $2 trillion cindered in Afghanistan under the spurious pretext of liberating women and eradicating terrorism, not to speak of the body bags the 20-year long invasion brought to American homes.

An alert from The New York Times on Feb 1 is instructive to understand the scale of the crisis staring the US in the face. America leans on Treasury bonds to pay its financial obligations, including military salaries. Once it hits the cap, the Treasury begins using “extraordinary measures” — suspending some investments and exchanging different types of debt — to stay beneath the cap for as long as possible. “But eventually,” says the report by Alan Rappeport, “the United States will need to either borrow more money to pay its bills or stop making good on its financial obligations, including possibly defaulting on its debt.” Biden’s ‘Made in America’ plan aimed at relocating American industries back to the US, from China primarily, is seen as riddled with challenges, including the European fear of losing US investments and technology. There is also the problem of making American goods competitive. How would relocated units find labour as cheap as China offers? Will there be a change in the visa regime to induce foreign workers? It’s an airy-fairy plan.

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The hunt for resources to finance the profligacy often borders on criminality. This is where Seymour Hersh’s new revelation on the blowing up of the Nordstream pipeline that carried gas from Russia to German homes and industry comes into play. Hersh, who came into prominence by exposing the 1968 My Lai massacre by US troops in Vietnam, has claimed in a new report that it was American agencies that blew up the pipeline — and blamed it on Russia! Inevitable official denials flew in the face of strong early hints including from President Biden that something to the effect was nigh. The evidence: America’s fuel supplies to Europe grew exponentially although the inadequacy of meeting the huge demand and the humongous cost escalation left much of Europe running for cover in the freezing cold.

On the peripheries of the de facto Nato-Russia war are glimpses of the cannibalistic colonial conflicts of the 19th century (whereby European rivals coveted and fed off each other’s colonial estates and treasures in bitter wars). The AUKUS — the newly formed Anglo-Saxon conglomerate of UK, Australia and the US — ganging up to steal the Australian nuclear submarine deal from France is a more recent example. The desperation to extract resources to finance profligate consumerism is writ large in the ongoing conflict in Europe. One country has tapped the phones of those it calls allies and has blown up an arterial gas pipeline to Europe to force its agenda.

While mainstream Western media has been faithfully tom-tomming an untenable official account of the war, Western analysts including US academics, former intelligence and defence officials have steadily and convincingly challenged the narrative. Apart from Hersh, one has developed high regard for Jeffry Sachs, Richard Wolff, Col Douglas Macgregor, Raymond McGovern and John Mearsheimer among others for starkly explaining the perfidy underway at a prohibitive cost to countries in conflict. The best hope now is that a new Chinese peace plan would find traction with the warring parties.

Pause, however, to note President Zelensky’s desperate request for tanks and planes to vacate the Russian occupation, and the tardy response from his allies. The US will grudgingly send 31 Abrams but it could take months. The UK has offered a few Challenger 2 tanks, possibly the ones that are due to be retired in 2025. No planes. It’s possible that the way the poorly armed Houthi rebels destroyed Saudi-owned Abrams in Yemen became a deterrent. Imagine the market plummeting for Western warplanes and tanks if a few go down. Besides, who wants to part with the equipment meant for the big all-in war that no one wants to ever happen?

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