

The Russo-Ukrainian War and the American Hegemony

On the 24th of February 2022, the Russian forces began their ‘special operation’^[i] in Ukraine. The conflict brought with itself an abundance of sanctions being levied upon the Russian Federation. From the expulsion of the Russian Federation from various world fora and sporting bodies such as FIFA and UEFA^[ii] to the myriad sanctions that beleaguered Moscow. In the early days of the conflict, the general zeitgeist, led to the passive observer to believe that the Russian economy would crumble under the burgeoning sanctions and leave either a free path for Kyiv or backing out of Ukraine by the Russian forces to ensure the protection of its territory.

Fast forward to April 2023, what was devised as a ‘special operation’ to last in seven to fifteen days has gone on for more than a year with no plausible end in sight. In its early stages, the United States pushed hard for condemnation from all corners, almost every EU and NATO member state provided an official statement denouncing Russian actions. Even India, which is a member of neither, felt international and internal pressure for disapproving Moscow’s operation. But India could not do so, owing to its long-standing ties with Moscow.^[iii]

In global power contestations, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States of America had emerged as the sole hegemon. Although in the recent years, Beijing has started contesting the position of Washington, the days of American dominance are far from over. But there are signs that the US’ heft in the international fora is decreasing and the fear of American retaliation is not what it was in the past.

Washington’s actions in the past few years coupled with the resurgent Russia, ascending China, emergence of middle powers like India, and the prolonged conflict in Ukraine which the US for all intents and purposes has forced Russia into though the eastward expansion of NATO^[iv], has severely dented its position globally.

On the western front, even the European powers have now begun speaking against the hegemonic status of the US. One of the most important prongs that ensured the continuance of the dominant position of the United States has been the use of the United States Dollar (USD) as the global currency since the end of the Second World War. France, one of the staunchest of allies of the Americans, has recently made their intention clear to reduce their dependence upon the dollar.^[v] The French PM, Emmanuel Macron, has spoken against the reliance of, not just France, but Europe at large on the Americans and USD. Not only France, non-western powers have begun doing the same. The members of the BRICS alliance: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa have recently committed themselves to establishing a new currency which has considerable potential to harm the dominance of the dollar in the international markets.^[vi]

For years the EU and NATO states have followed the dictates of Washington and the now they have begun to question the Americans. France has, in no uncertain terms, cut to the bone of the matter by committing itself to a multipolar world order citing lack of trust among the western allies. Macron has further stated that the status of allies conferred upon the European Union and NATO member states does not portend towards a vassal of the United States.^[vii] Moreover, The non-Western and Western powers are growing tired of the condemnations that are heaped upon Russia. These condemnation and boycotts come

not at the cost of Moscow but at the cost of the condemners. As it leaves them hurt economically. The Americans are levying the sanctions upon the Russians but the Europeans have ended up paying for it. Bereft of Russian Gas, Europe has had to buy LNG from the United States which is nearly three times as costly.^[viii]

Such actions and reactions do not endear the Americans to either the Western or non-Western powers^[ix] and it shows in the functioning of the various global bodies. The G20, under Indonesian Presidency, refused the excoriation of the Russian action in Ukraine and went as far as to openly state that the “G20 is a forum for economics not national security” in the 3rd para of the Bali Leaders Declaration 2022.^[x] Times have changed for the Americans. This blatant refusal though unexpected by the US is further compounded by the Chinese spreading their influence by the creation of the organisations such as the SCO. The Valdai Discussion Club, a Russian think tank close to the Russian establishment, in their annual report enunciated “A World without Superpowers”^[xi], the assertion was followed up in the Eastern Economic Forum, SCO, and the G20 Summit. The narrative of non-hegemonic world order includes the development of the Far Eastern Region and pivoting to Asia. These actions have led to the emergence of regional organisations. While the Americans have been trying to send the message that the US is still the dominant power by consolidating the Euro-Atlantic alliance, expanding the NATO, and tying up with Indo-Pacific democracies, its National Security Strategy (NSS) terms Russia as a serious threat to Europe and calls China as a long-term systematic threat, terming the Middle Kingdom as the ‘Pacing Challenge’.^[xii]

War makes for strange bedfellows; such is the case in Ukraine. The American intervention in Ukraine, which was succeeded in turn by the debacle that was the American exit from Afghanistan; turning the region into a tinderbox ready to burst^[xiii], has put both China and Russia in an alliance, as uneasy as it may be due to their own territorial disputes^[xiv] and the goals of domination. Resulting in the formation of two power blocs, the US led West and the Russia-China Nexus. Hence, the increasing importance of the middle international powers such as India by virtue of both the power blocs vying for the heft of the middle powers to bolster their own on the global chessboard.

All said and done, The American dominance seems to be waning, however, India can gain from allying itself to the Americans without alienating itself from Russia and its allies. India must balance the needs and wants of both the power blocs without committing to any one exclusively as both come with their own pros and cons along with a history of abusing those under their thumb.

Endnotes

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