



Flux in West-led global order

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(Mains GS 2 :Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India’s interests, Indian Diaspora.)

Context:

- According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia launched “special military operations” with the objective of “demilitarizing Ukraine” but not “occupying” it.
- Just days prior to this, Russia had upped the ante by recognising the sovereignty of the Peoples’ Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, two of Ukraine’s easternmost provinces and deploying Russian peace-keeping forces in these territories.

Accumulated grievances:

- The Russian actions have been strongly condemned and sanctions imposed by the U.S., the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and Japan.
- After 1945, this is the second time that national boundaries are being redrawn by force; the first was the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) air strikes on Serbian forces that led to the creation of Kosovo.
- Mr. Putin’s grievances, beginning with NATO’s bombing of Serbia in 1999, interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and colour revolutions to engineer regime changes, the U.S.’ unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 coupled with missile defence deployments in Poland and Romania that Russia perceived as offensive, were accumulating.

Crisis in the making:

- In 2022, Russia fired the first shot but the Ukrainian crisis has been in the making for over a decade and NATO is also responsible for the crisis.
- After the fall of the Berlin Wall in late-1989, then U.S. Secretary of State James Baker was meeting Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow in February 1990 to help ease the way for German unification.
- He assured Mr. Gorbachev that NATO understood the “need for assurances to the countries in the East”, adding that even with Germany a part of NATO, “there would be no extension of NATO’s jurisdiction one inch to the east”.
- By end-1991, USSR had broken up into 15 countries and the newly independent Baltic and central European states rather than look for a new European security framework, sought security in a U.S.-led NATO.
- The old caution that the cost of expansion goes up as it reaches closer to the Russian border was discarded and NATO adopted an ‘open door’ policy.

Sanctions on Russia:

- Hours before the invasion, the western countries had imposed a new round of sanctions against Moscow and Germany suspended certification of Nord Stream 2, a major gas pipeline between Russia and Germany.
- United States President Joe Biden, in his response to the invasion, has suggested that Washington and its allies would respond in a united and decisive way to “an unprovoked and unjustified attack by Russian military forces” on Ukraine.
- Charles Michel, the head of the European Council, has continued to insist on the need “to be united and determined and jointly define our collective approach and actions”.
- The European Union has announced a “massive” package of sanctions as it comes to terms with “the darkest hour in Europe since the Second World War”.

Energy dependence:

- The EU’s energy dependence on Russia is a reality that has to be factored into strategic considerations.
- The EU imports 39% of its total gas and 30% of oil from Russia, and the Central and Eastern European countries are almost 100% dependent on Russian gas.
- The West has responded reactively to the developments around it and it is in the very nature of great power politics that smaller and weaker nations such as Ukraine struggle to preserve their very existence.

Balance of power:

- This ineffectual western response has emboldened not only Russia but also China as the focus of the West is in danger of moving away from the Indo-Pacific.
- The Russia-China 'axis' is only getting stronger as the two nations seem ready to take on the West that seems willing to concede without even putting up a fight.
- Today, the balance of power is in flux as China develops a strategic partnership with Russia; thus, the future of the West-led global order will be defined by how effectively it responds to the crisis in Ukraine.

Outlook for India:

- India has to brace itself for some immediate challenges flowing from the Russian actions as it will have to balance the pressure from one strategic partner to condemn the violation of international law, with that from another to understand its legitimate concerns.
- As Russia-West confrontation sharpens further, the U.S. Administration's intensified engagement in Europe will inevitably dilute its focus on the Indo-Pacific, causing India to make some tactical calibration of actions in its neighbourhood.
- However, geopolitics is a long game, and the larger context of the U.S.-China rivalry could, at some point in the not too distant future, reopen the question of how Russia fits into the European security order.

Conclusion:

The tragedy of great power politics is unfolding in Europe but its embers will scorch the world far and wide, much beyond Europe.