

EUROPE NEEDS TO INTROSPECT

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Why cannot there be a security architecture in Europe which includes Russia? The world watches in horror the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and with consternation the pushing of arms into the conflict zone by NATO. Countries far away from Europe are struggling with the fallout, even though the full secondary and tertiary impacts have not yet rolled out. Europe is a prosperous continent, with per capita incomes and human development indices much higher than for most countries around the world. It has well developed agriculture, industry and services, higher education levels, more homogeneity in religion, and a general environment of peace. However, a deeper look beneath these surface appearances indicates something different. For the purpose of this article Europe will include Russia (while acknowledging that the Russian people are Slavs and transcend parts of Asia also). Asia has a population of about 4,710 million, divided into 54 countries. Compare this with Europe, which has a population of only 750 million divided into as many as 46 countries (and Cyprus). Even accounting for the concentration of population within two massive countries in Asia (China and India), Europe has a smaller average population per country. No other continent has such a proliferation of countries. Even small populations in Europe have subdivided, like Czechoslovakia into Czech and Slovakia, and non-Serb Yugoslavia into Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Others like Belgium have a movement for separation of small populations of Flanders (Flemish) and Wallonia (French) from each other. There are fissures within the UK and Spain. Part of this proliferation is because populations in Europe seem to be unwilling to live and adjust with those they see as “others” based on increasingly narrow considerations. This is not new. Since 1500 AD, the continent has seen an endless procession of wars, too many to list here, which often involved a large number of participants. Some of these wars, like the Italian wars (1542-), 80-year war (1568-), 30-year war (1618-), Chickasaw war (1721-), Napoleonic wars (1803-), Caucasian Wars (1817-), to name a few, have lasted decades and involved a rotating list of participants. The terrible WWI & WWII originated in Europe, and need no elaboration. It appears that there is an unwillingness in Europe to live and share space with those who are different, even though these differences are small compared to more heterogeneous societies in the world. Europe has a surprising number of persistent fault-lines and flashpoints.

All societies have their differences, wars have been fought throughout history, and some would even argue that war is a natural human condition. There are two aspects or consequences of the inability within Europe to adjust and live together which stand out as different. Since the 16th century, colonies around the world have been dragged into these Europe origin conflicts as pawns. Populations were transferred from one master to another based as spoils of victory or penalty for defeat, like the multiple transfers of Puducherry in India, and similar others areas in Asia and South America. Helpless poor people in faraway places suffered grievous economic damage, either directly in the form of taxes or indirectly. Even in the current conflict in Ukraine, distant countries who were never consulted by Russia before the invasion or NATO in its expansions eastwards are suffering serious consequences. As wheat exports from Russia and Ukraine stop, poor people in Africa are scrambling to secure dwindling supplies at sharply increased costs. Poor farmers and consumers in India face the prospect of shortage of fertilizers and inflation. The uninvolved, not consulted and reluctant, are being pressurized to fall in line.

The second aspect of the wars involving European combatant(s) has been that even in the modern world, there is a propensity to target civilian populations for achieving military objectives. WWI, WWII, Afghanistan (Russia), Iraq (1991 and 2003, Europe and USA), Grozny (Russia), Serbia (NATO), Afghanistan (Europe and USA), and now Ukraine (Russia) are clear examples. In these aggressions, infrastructure critical for civilian life has been systematically targeted, this has been justified as

degrading the “will to fight” of the enemy, and civilian casualties dismissed as “collateral damage”. Only WWII (Japan) has involved large scale cross-border civilian targeting by a non-European/NATO aggressor in this period. Europe is multipolar with several near peer powers, and faces the consequent risk of anarchy. Peace in Europe since 1945 was locked in place by the presence of an “offshore balancer” (USA), balancing an overwhelming land power (Soviet Union), and the prospect of MAD (mutual assured destruction) prevented the cold war from exploding. Institutions like the EU have kept the elephant in the room (Germany) locked into mutually beneficial relationships and avoided anarchy. Even the EU was disintegrating before the current Ukraine crisis, with different sets of participants feeling exploited by the other. A multipolar Europe with potentially disintegrating institutions, and deep fault-lines and flashpoints which erupt regularly is now planning to rearm. Europe continues with great power games, without the ability to manage the consequences of such games, and puts at serious risk the welfare of the entire world.

In the 21st century, Europe now needs to ask itself the following questions:

- a) Why cannot there be a security architecture in Europe which includes Russia and all others as partners, instead of treating some power as the “other”?
- b) Why was NATO interested on expansion into additional areas even after the end of the Cold War?
- c) Can the overwhelmingly powerful NATO, which claims to be a “defensive” alliance, commit to not placing offensive weapons in close proximity to non-NATO countries? (Definition of “offensive” and distance can be a subject for negotiations by experts).

Asia needs to learn to from the experiences of Europe, and proactively build institutions to manage its multipolarity. As the world struggles to come to terms with the horrors and impact of another European conflict into which distant and vulnerable populations are dragged in, Europe needs to introspect about itself, for its own security and also for welfare of the world. Perhaps an international body, with members from other parts of the world also, is needed to help Europe manage the “balance of power”, until the continent embraces the principle of security for all.

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