US Needs Fear of Russia to Keep Europe under Control

If NATO were to become irrelevant, the US would lose its influence on Europe. If Europe were to become an independent player in world politics, it will effectively defeat the US plan to prevent the systemic shift to multipolarity. Preventing both of these eventualities requires, from Washington’s perspective, a constant external threat to Europe that it cannot tackle on its own. Thanks to Washington’s aggressive pursuit of the question of NATO’s expansion to Ukraine and the crisis this relentless pursuit has ensued, a discursive shift in Europe towards strengthening NATO is already underway.

The idea of keeping NATO alive and relevant is now new. In fact, soon after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, policy makers in the US devoted their energies to devise ways to expand NATO to keep it in business. For instance, in his remarks made to the US State Department in as early as August 1993, the then member of the Senate Foreign Relations and Intelligence Committees and co-chairman of Senate Arms Control Observer Group, Senator Richard G. Lugar, made a clear case for NATO’s expansion under American leadership.

Lugar’s “Out of Area or Out of Business” talk directly implied how, without NATO’s expansion, multipolarity could find ways to reinforce itself at the expense of the US leadership. In other words, the US leadership, according to Lugar, was indispensably tied to its ultimate control of Europe via NATO. The present crisis situation directly evidences Lugar’s remarks at play almost 3 decades after he delivered them.

In this context, recent remarks by the French president, Emmanuel Macron, showcase how the US, by building a
crisis with Russia, has been able to seemingly bring a shift in Europe. Macron, who recently called NATO “brain dead” and has been seeking to build a European security system independent of NATO, recently warned Russia of “tough consequences” if it attacked Ukraine.

Macron’s remarks have come only two days after Biden held a virtual meeting with European leaders, including Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Boris Johnson and other European leaders and officials. As the White House readout shows, Biden was apparently successful in convincing his European counterparts of the “threat” that Russia posed and how “joint efforts” involving “severe economic costs” and reinforcing “security on NATO’s eastern flank” was necessary.

The US also hinted that they will activate NATO response force (NRF) and contribute 8,500 US soldiers to “protect” Europe from “Russian aggression.” Many European countries have, ever since the meeting, announced their own military contribution to the holy cause of defending Europe from a threat that, first and foremost, is born out of US expansionism and control over Europe.

By creating a crisis and “guiding” Europe through it, the US is only reinforcing its own dominant role. This is especially evident in how the US has placed itself at the centre of Europe’s energy geo-politics i.e., taking steps to supply enough gas to Europe in the wake of Russia blocking its supply of gas to Europe.

As reports in the western mainstream media have pointed out, the purpose of US search for alternative sources of gas supply to Europe is that European leaders, being sure of energy security, will be more willing to take appropriate measures against Russia, especially economic sanctions. Although the US is said to be searching from suppliers from the Middle East, it remains that Europe’s diversification away from Russia will ultimately benefit the US the most, as Washington will be able to supply more of its gas to Europe.

The US efforts have increased in the wake of Joe Biden’s last week admission of differences within NATO over an appropriate approach, or response, to Russia. Ever since then, the US officials have particularly hardened their stance towards Russia, sending multiple warnings everyday that any aggression towards Ukraine would bring about a coordinated allied response, unambiguously showing how the US is aggressively using its anti-Russia narrative to diffuse intra-NATO divisions as a means to consolidate its own dominance within the alliance.

But, the question is: can the US achieve what it wants to achieve? The answer to this question depends upon how strong the idea of European-ness is in Europe.

Even though Marcon sent a warning to Russia, Macron’s own politics remains pan-European rather than transatlantic. In his latest address to the European parliament few days ago, Macron, who champions Europe’s strategic autonomy, once again reiterated his ideas of a European security infrastructure independent of NATO.

As a hard-line European, Macron sees in the present crisis an opportunity to advance his agenda of multipolarity in which Europe acts as an independent player. Therefore, besides reiterating the idea of a European security establishment, Macron also supported a wholly European initiative to start a dialogue with Russia to resolve the crisis.

For the US, such an initiative, if it materialises, could be a major set-back to its politics of maintaining transatlantic unity.

Therefore, it is not surprising at all that the US officials were quick to blame Russia for disunity within NATO. As Antony Blinken recently said while on a tour to Ukraine, “I think one of Moscow’s long-standing goals has been to try to sow divisions between and within our countries and, quite simply, we cannot and will not let them do that.”

As it stands, the US is not misreading European disagreement with the US; rather it is deliberately tying Europe’s genuine differences with Washington to Russia to showcase how Europe is a “victim” of Russian politics, and how the US, being “aware” of Russian “conspiracies”, can and will “protect” Europe.

While this is not to suggest that the US can just make fool of European leaders like Macron, it also remains that constant projection of Russia as an aggressor tends to create tensions in Europe – in particular, in Eastern Europe – that directly help Washington undermine anti-US narratives being fanned out by some European leaders. By making smaller European states fearful of Russia, the US tends to defeat major European state’s dream of a pan-European international politics.

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