How the US Expands the European Conflict to China

The US has been using war and geo-political conflicts to advance its global influence more explicitly than any other state for the past three decades or so. The Russia-Ukraine conflict - which is primarily an outcome of the same US strategy and stands to bring the US some tangible benefits - is yet another opportunity for Washington to use to expand the ambit of this regional conflict into a global conflict to force the world’s different regions into a straitjacket within which countries must choose between a ‘with us or against us’ position. This is particularly evident in the case of China. Ever since the beginning of the crisis (not the war), the US has been directly threatening China not to side with Russia (but expecting Beijing to side with Washington by not doing business with Russia in ways that could ease the impact of US sanctions).

On Sunday, March 13, Joe Biden’s National Security Adviser (NSA) threatened China, only a day before he met with Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi, with “consequences” if it helped Russia in any way (i.e., by not supporting the US view of the war). To quote Sullivan, “We are communicating directly, privately to Beijing, that there will absolutely be consequences for large-scale sanctions evasion efforts or support to Russia to backfill them”, adding that the US “will not allow ... a lifeline to Russia from these economic sanctions from any country, anywhere in the world.” The US, in simple words, wants every country in the world to side with it, with those not supporting it facing consequences.
In many ways, this is the same message the US gave when the 9/11 attacks took place and it started a global ‘war on terror.’ In 2001, the US told many countries ‘either you are with us, or against us.’ Those who sided with the US, such as Pakistan, were made non-NATO allies. With the US now threatening China directly, it is evident that the US is seeking to expand the crisis in ways to create a scenario in which smaller countries could once again be forced into taking positions. Only a week ago, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan said that Western states were pressuring Pakistan to condemn Russia. But Pakistan, following China’s lead, has so far refused to side with the US while emphasising a bi-laterally negotiated solution to the crisis.

Given China’s resistance, therefore, it is highly unlikely that the US will stop its military build-up in the Indo-Pacific region. This crisis – and China’s anti-US position – has made it all the more necessary for Washington to pursue even more aggressively its recently released “Indo-Pacific Strategy”, which said that “American interests can only be advanced if we firmly anchor the United States in the Indo-Pacific and strengthen the region itself, alongside our closest allies and partners.”

What is worst for the US is that China, while maintaining a neutral position (which Washington thinks is an anti-US), thinks that the core reason for the problem the world is facing today is the US-led trans-Atlantic security system.

A recent report published by Global Times, the official mouthpiece of the Communist Party of China, said that China has been encouraging European nations – especially, France and Germany – to establish a European security system, because “existing security mechanism in Europe established by the US, with the US-led NATO having a dominant position, is problematic, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict just proved that the US-built security mechanism for Europe makes everyone in Europe insecure.”

As is evident, the US politics of pushing NATO into Eastern Europe to encircle Russia followed by its policy of forcing other – especially, non-European – countries into taking a pro-US position has invited a backlash including an assault on the very security arrangement the US is seeking to galvanise to maintain its hegemony; hence, Washington’s adamant position.

In his most recent 2-hour long meeting with China’s Xi, Joe Biden, once again “warned” China of severe consequences if the latter offered Russia any help. Even though China has repeatedly said that it aims to maintain its current neutral position, the US aims to push Beijing into conflict by taking an aggressive position against its neutrality to create yet another crisis, including around Taiwan.

Elaborating the potential consequences that could follow, the White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that sanctions were “only one tool in the toolbox.” As Psaki further mentioned, the US aims to take its European allies onboard vis-à-vis China as well.

This, in other words, is a simple repetition of what Washington did with Europe vis-à-vis Russia. Before the US adopted a stubborn position with regards to expanding NATO into Ukraine, Europe was on its way to consolidating its economic ties with Russia via Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. By pushing Europe into a crisis, Germany, Europe’s leading economy and, until recently, a leading proponent of a strictly European security mechanism, has not only increased its military budget but is also going to buy F-35 jets from the US to enhance its nuclear deterrence against Russia.

By pushing further against China, the US hopes to include Europe in its anti-China posturing in the Indo-Pacific as well. In simple words, the US eyes an AUKUS like alliance in the Indo-Pacific with help from Europe to build an anti-China coalition it has been chasing for some years now. The above-mentioned “Indo-Pacific Strategy” gives a clear clue, which says that the US will “foster security ties between our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region” and “we will bring together our Indo-Pacific and European partners in novel ways, including through the AUKUS partnership.”

Therefore, expanding the Russia-Ukraine conflict geopolitically, if not territorially, suits the US interests insofar as it could directly allow Washington to achieve its cardinal global objective i.e., preservation of a US-led global political and economic system by snubbing the Russia-China bid to build an alternative, multi-polar system.

_Salman Rafi Sheikh, research-analyst of International Relations and Pakistan’s foreign and domestic affairs, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”. _