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Mad Politics in a Multiplex World

The nature of geopolitics today reminds one of the Stanley Kramer's 1963 classic slapstick comedy and Hollywood blockbuster *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Much like the plot of the movie, today's world, especially after Donald Trump's return to White House, is characterised by a frantic, "every man for himself" energy where long-standing norms, conventions and principles are tossed out in favour of a desperate race for tangible rewards. Post-cold war world exited the bipolar theatre of international politics and entered a brief unipolar moment before slipping into what some would call a 'multiplex' cinema hall. The multipolarity that tentatively defined the nature of international relations was marked by multialigned, multilateral and multinodal power politics. The neorealist, neoliberal, critical and constructivist theories struggled to explain the turns and twists in world politics through their separate and combined lenses. Classical realists turned to their favourite hobby horses— anarchy, incessant quest for power-maximisation and will-do-anything-for-survival.

Looking at Trump, one would argue that the Mad Man theory could explain his politics because he would pose as a leader who could be irrational, volatile and unpredictable, capable of doing anything. Nixon and Kissinger had feigned 'madness' while dealing with an unrelenting Vietnam. However, Trump has taken it forward in the most menacing way possible. His slapping of tariffs— without bothering about who would be affected by them and how it would affect American power play in a world marked by perceived loss of US primacy in critical technology and possible decline as the pre-eminent power— betrays a sense of fear of loss of economic and military power and a sense of unprecedented urgency that might be the reason behind such behaviour seeking to restore American pre-eminence and authority in the world. Here authority is conceived in Jouvencelle's terms: the power of gaining someone's assent, against one's wishes.

The consequences of Trump's crass realist politicking are there for all to see. Europe feels friendless and does not know how to handle an errant friend. Smaller states in the Americas are scared. Asia is grappling with an assertive China. The so-called Dragon and the Elephant, not at ease

with each other, are confounded by the rise of a new power dynamic emerging in the Atlantic and the Pacific theatres. Russia and Ukraine are hell bent on killing each other seemingly without any remorse or concern for human life. The Middle East is in a muddle. Resident powers are clueless, working out feeble alliances (Saudi-Pak and now Turkey?) to deter any possible attack on them especially when Israel-US jointness under Trump has chosen to take Israel's Dahiya doctrine of using disproportionate force in the face any attack on its interests, to unforeseen lengths.

At another level, Trump and his men are picking up targets carefully in their bid to establish their hold on the Western Hemisphere. In a way, it is an indirect recognition of the sphere-politics in the international realm. Russia, China, Turkey, and possibly India may draw their lessons and strengthen their influence and hold on their neighbourhoods. If Trump could not intervene in Iran despite his help-is-on-the-way assertion, does it mean the US will not go beyond the hemisphere it considers its own? How does Europe respond to Trump if he invades Greenland? What about US anxiety about China then? There are many imponderables we are dealing with these days.

The main casualty in the world today are the universal norms recognised at the international level as central to civilised existence of human beings across states. It is true that these norms were always flouted by the powerful when they chose to uphold what they regarded as their core interests, but there was something like international conscience that acted as a check on predatory behaviour of states when they sought to expand their influence both at home and abroad. In a world vitiated by the free run of what is being called the Donroe doctrine, such norms may no longer hold. Did not Trump famously say that the only check on him was his own morality? Nobody has so far accessed Trump's inner recesses and what can hold him up.

We are living in interesting times where the need for collective thinking across borders has never been so urgent as it is today. There is a need to re-establish a moral order that could lead us all to a world where loss of any single human life to violence of any kind will rouse the conscience of the world, and the spirit behind the opening line of the UN Charter "we the people of the United Nations" will bind us all in a fraternal bond too strong for any war-monger to break. ■

Note for readers and subscribers

We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.

We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the references. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Chicago Manual Style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, preferably Ms Word. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

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