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Western Sanctimony Drives Global South Away From Supporting Ukraine

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Surprised that governments across the so-called Global South aren't interested in allied posturing over the Russo-Ukraine war? Imperious Western officials assumed they were leading the world against Moscow's aggression, only to turn around and find no one behind them.

Reported the *New York Times*: "Instead of cleaving in two, the world has fragmented. A vast middle sees Moscow's invasion as, primarily, a European and American problem. Rather than view it as an existential threat, these countries are largely focused on protecting their own interests amid the economic and geopolitical upheaval caused by the invasion."

A new survey of global opinion suggests that the allies have lost much of the world to apathy and worse. Self-righteous and wokish Westerners just don't have as much appeal to the rest of the world as they thought. Hostile opinions of Washington and Brussels are significantly undermining their objectives, including toward Russia.

If the U.S. and Europe can ruthlessly pursue their interests, with limited concern for the impact on others, they should not be surprised when the rest of the world acts likewise.

The differences in opinion are significant. For instance, observed Ivan Krastev, of the Centre for Liberal Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria: “[W]hile a plurality of Americans and Europeans want Ukraine to win even if it means a longer war and economic hardship for themselves, most Chinese, Indians and Turks who expressed a view said they would prefer the war to stop as soon as possible — even if that means Ukraine giving up part of its territory.”

Even more noteworthy, many in the Global South lean Moscow’s way. Far from treating the Putin government as an enemy, Krastev reports, “Russia is seen either as an ‘ally’ or a ‘partner’ by 79 per cent of people in China (unsurprisingly). But the same is true for 80 per cent of Indians and 69 per cent of Turks.” Notably, Turkey is a member of NATO, and India is the hoped for great counterweight to China.

Actually, it’s hard to blame leaders and peoples in what used to be called the Third World for their skepticism. The U.S. and Europe treat every issue touching the West as vital to the entire planet, even universe, of immediate concern warranting conscription of other nations into the allied cause. As for interest in problems, even crises, elsewhere, not so much. Moreover, Western governments have turned hypocrisy into an art form: complaining of international injustices against them but regularly engaging in similar practices against others. For governments outside Europe and North America, allied violations of manifold promises not to expand NATO and use of Ukraine to fight an intensifying proxy war against Russia look other than disinterested support for a helpless victim. And then there is allied, especially U.S., war-making.

The Global South’s grievances are many. Remember how America and Europe rallied to the cause of the Democratic Republic of Congo, when it become the epicenter of a multi-sided conflict that killed an estimated 5.4 million people? Probably not. Neither does anyone in the developing world.

In fact, there was scant Western attention to a horrific conflict in which as many people died as during the Vietnam and Korean wars combined. Fervent American and European demands for action, as previously in the Balkans, were absent in the DRC's case.

And then there are the Vietnam and Korean wars in which other people also died prodigiously. In the latter case at least something positive was attained, with South Koreans avoiding Kim Il-sung's tyranny and eventually creating democracy out of the ruthless, sometimes murderous regime backed by the U.S. In Vietnam in the name of peace Washington visited years of horrific war upon the Vietnamese people, only to eventually depart leaving the entire country under communism. Whatever the merits of American policy — surely it would have been better never to have taken over France's colonial position in Vietnam — one can understand why U.S. policy gained few friends elsewhere in the world.

A more recent, but equally horrid conflict, which did not much interest today's American and European moral exemplars, was the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Perhaps a million people died, with Iran suffering the most. And blame was clear: Tehran was attacked by Saddam Hussein's government in search of territorial booty. Rather like Russia, Baghdad gained ground initially, but soon was pushed back by Iranian counterattacks. Instead of helping the victims, Washington aided Iraq. That support, for Hussein's aggressive war, is one reason that he later assumed the U.S. would not interfere with his invasion of Kuwait.

The Reagan administration had its reasons for supporting the cruel dictator against whom America later fought two wars — fear of Tehran's new Islamist regime. Yet Washington's willingness to help kill untold Iranians because it did not like their government, though a traditional and even understandable foreign policy objective, contrasts sharply with the moralisms now flooding forth from Washington and Brussels. Such unfettered hypocrisy is one reason most Africans, Asians, and South Americans see little reason to join the campaign against Russia. The West is against aggression, *sometimes*, and for it when seen as benefiting them.

Indeed, the last two decades have demonstrated that the U.S. and its allies are ever ready to bomb, invade, and occupy other nations to advance perceived Western interests. At least a million people have died in the conflicts broadly constituting the global war on terrorism, and that number almost certainly is low. Not all these deaths should be blamed on Washington, of course, but many, far too many, resulted from wars that were dishonest, stupid, and bungled — Iraq and Libya, certainly, as well as the years of nation-building in Afghanistan. There also is Yemen, in which the U.S. has empowered Saudi Arabia's murderous crown prince to slaughter his neighbors for his own convenience.

Yet promiscuous U.S. and allied war-making with bombs and bullets is not all. Over the last three decades Washington has increasingly turned to economic war, attacking friends and foes alike. And American officials, especially, have shown little interest in the impact on the helpless and disadvantaged throughout the Global South.

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For instance, in 2020 Congress came up with the curious theory that punishing the Syrian people by preventing them from rebuilding after a decade of civil war would force Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power. It was a mind-blowingly stupid policy but was avidly embraced by U.S. policymakers such as James Jeffrey, the “Never Trumper” who was unaccountably appointed to handle Syria policy and who violated his responsibility to the American people by misleading President Donald Trump about the number of U.S. troops in Syria to thwart the president’s desire to withdraw them. Jeffrey said his objective was to turn the country into a “quagmire” for Russia, ignoring the interests of the Syrian people. The “Caesar sanctions” have turned millions of distressed people into an impoverished means to Jeffrey’s end — a policy which, alas, has failed entirely.

Yet his callousness paled compared to that of then-UN ambassador (and later secretary of state) Madeleine Albright, long one of Washington's most celebrated doyennes. Rarely was so much hubris and hypocrisy concentrated in one person. She said much to offend Americans as well as foreigners, but perhaps her most noted gaffe, meaning speaking an embarrassing truth, was her response to the question regarding the justification for sanctions on Iraq that allegedly had killed a half million children. Said Albright: "We think the price is worth it." Although she later recognized the stupidity of that response, she regretted her carelessness, not cruelty, having insisted that she and others in the America's foreign policy establishment saw further than the mere mortals living in the Global South.

Indeed, grievances against the West run deep when the U.S. and Europe attempt to pull moral rank. Colonialism, a grotesque affront to human dignity and life, was an ugly practice even by the British, and was much worse under others, especially Germany, Portugal, and Belgium.

There also are more pragmatic reasons that the Global South has not joined with Washington and Brussels. Oppressive governments, quite common throughout the developing world, are unlikely recruits for conflict being sold as authoritarianism against democracy. Even nominal democracies, such as India and Pakistan, object to allied hectoring.

Moreover, officials the world over see no reason to worry about a conflict that, for them, is beyond distant. The war simply poses no danger. Indeed, contended Krastev, other countries no longer see Moscow as threatening: "For countries such as India and Turkey, Russia has become like them, so they do not need to fear it."

Finally, poor nations are loath to miss an opportunity to pick up energy supplies and perhaps other goods on the cheap. Moral grandstanding is cheap for rich countries which applaud themselves for their contributions to Ukraine. Even though the U.S. is functionally bankrupt, with the Congressional Budget Office recently reporting that over the last year alone

estimates of this year's deficit jumped by *\$426 billion*, it still can borrow. Most nations are not so insulated from the world's economic oscillations. China remains poor, with four times America's population, despite possessing the world's second largest economy. India and scores of Third World states are much worse off.

Although the Global South's abstention from the allied cause has caused much wailing and gnashing of teeth in Washington and Brussels, there is nothing much they can do. Moral suasion obviously is kaput. Diplomatic pressure includes no meaningful stick. Threats of sanctions inflame resentment. Bribery might help, but there is no guarantee that "friends" so procured would stay bought. And Washington already is finding it difficult to win many of the same countries to its anti-China campaign.

Consider India, long seen by the U.S. as a potential ally against Beijing. New Delhi hosted the G-20 this year, but, according to Reuters: "India does not want the G20 to discuss additional sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine during New Delhi's one-year presidency of the bloc, six senior Indian officials said on Wednesday, amid debate over how even to describe the conflict." It turns out that the Modi government doesn't even want to use the word "war," preferring "crisis" or "challenge"!

India's relationship with Moscow runs back to the Cold War, when the U.S. backed Pakistan. Russia long has been New Delhi's chief armorer. And India hopes a friendly Moscow might help restrain China in a future confrontation. In contrast, concern for Ukraine and interest in the West's support for Kyiv barely register with the Modi government.

If the U.S. and Europe can ruthlessly pursue their interests, with limited concern for the impact on others, they should not be surprised when the rest of the world acts likewise. Rather than bewail the failure of the Global South to follow allied dictates, Western nations need make a stronger case for more limited action — and address their own failings. President George H.W.

Bush's "What we say goes" era really never was, and certainly is now over. The U.S. must do better promoting its interests in the future.

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