

## US Sparked off Conflict between Ukraine and Russia

With the presence of Russian forces on the Russia-Ukraine border hectic diplomatic activity began from the second week of January. Talks between US Deputy Secretary of State and Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs were started in Geneva and were shifted to Brussels for a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) – Russia council meeting on January 12, and at the 57 member Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) meeting in Vienna on January 13. The diplomacy continued with meetings and phone calls at the highest level. These talks were conducted in cross purposes. While EU and NATO at the behest of the US were trying to force upon Russia not to oppose Ukraine's membership in the European Union and NATO, Russia was pressing upon the West to go by the Minsk Agreement and ask Ukraine to start the process of dialogue with the nationalist Donbas and Luhansk region and accept their autonomy. Meanwhile Russia and Belarus started a preannounced military exercise. Both Russia and Belarus are contiguous states bordering Ukraine. The US started its game with the propaganda that Russia is preparing to invade Ukraine. Rather the US and Britain had been arming Poland and Ukraine.

By the first half of February situation became hot. The US-UK Combine started propaganda in a crude and belligerent manner. They started talking about economic sanctions and forcible stopping of the NORD, direct gas pipeline under construction to supply gas from Russia to Germany. Russia time and again declared that it was conducting military exercises in its own territory. But the false alarm raised by US has raised tensions among the EU member countries with regards to the security concerns of their countries. They were worried if at all an armed conflict occurs between Russia and Ukraine, it would have serious impact on their countries. So the European leaders Hungary's Victor Orban, France's Emmanuel Macron and Germany's Olaf Scholz have visited Moscow and held talks with Russia's President Putin. He clearly told them that Russia is not going to invade Ukraine but was conducting military exercises. He raised the security concerns of Russia with them due to the expansion of NATO in to Russian borders and explicitly expressed with them that Russia does not want Georgia and Ukraine to be members of NATO, that Russia wants the NATO and US to roll back their military presence and drills from Eastern Europe, specially Poland and Black Sea and that Russia wanted the civil conflict between Kiev and ethnic Russians

living in Donabas and Luhansk which is on the Russian borders – the Ukraine crisis – to be resolved through the Minsk II process. He assured them that Russia will pull back its troops from Ukraine’s borders after the completion of its exercises very soon. He also made it clear to them that Russia will not invade Ukraine without any armed provocations against it. Even Putin in his parley with French President Macron agreed to have direct talks with the US Joe Biden to defuse tension. President of US was not prepared to be active with any move to the de-escalation of tensions raised by it. So he neither refused to have discussion nor took quick move for it. On the other hand started mobilising support of other countries including members of QUAD and other countries. Most of the countries including India were for de-escalation through active diplomatic measures and direct talks between the two presidents. But US President and NATO Chief have announced that Russian forces from the border are not being withdrawn. Their analysts indicated them that Russian forces are remaining very much in threatening position and that they had not so far had seen any de-escalation on the ground and that Russia’s military build seemed to be continuing. With such statements creating panic, US has been stoking tensions, disallowing any possibility of peaceful solution to the issue through diplomatic process.

It is clear that US has been inciting European Union countries against Russia to gain its hegemonic as well economic interests over the world. From the past right from Vietnam to Afghanistan, US has consistently rendered the global economic and political environment in disarray with its provocative actions. It is adopting same strategy even now to the advantage of its interests by raising tensions and creating panic over the Ukrainian issue.

Though US now still is a predominant power in the world, it has lost its position of 1990’s, unipolar status. Now it wants to return to its 1990’s position. After the messy withdrawal from Afghanistan, the NATO allies of US are doubting long term commitments with US, previously the former US President Donald Trump called NATO as a “drain on US” and the French President Emmanuel Macron called NATO as “brain dead”. A rift between France and US is widening after the creation of AUKUS – a trilateral security pact between Australia, US and UK – that led Australia to cancel its multi-billion submarine deal with France. These were fewer and fewer NATO candidates ready to host US nuclear weapons. In these conditions President Joe Baiden seeks to rebuild alliances by way of rejuvenating NATO and show it as an instrument for European security. Though Russia poses no direct security threat to any NATO country, US is stoking the fears among them against Russia, to gain its hold firmly on the west.

US also has been unhappy and sore with NORD-2 stream Baltic Sea gas pipe line project built by Russia that could provide Germany, Russian gas at very reasonable rates since US is seeking to sell its expensive oil, which would be a great and captive market. Added to that any armed conflict between countries will promote its armaments sales. That is why US has been raising tensions and creating panic, to profit itself from the crisis. Even while the diplomatic talks are under process, the US defence secretary on 18<sup>th</sup> Feb. had announced at Warsaw, the sale of 250 Abrams tanks to Poland under the pretext of strengthening defences of Poland due to the deployment of Russian forces in the neighbouring Belarus. With these moves and its rhetoric at international forums against Russia, by raising tensions and creating panic, US is trying to be benefitted by serving its own hegemonic interests at the cost of stability in the world. These machinations of US and its NATO allies forces made the Ukraine Government in Kiev (Kyiv) adamant and instead of having discussions with the nationalist forces in Donbas and Luhansk started attacking them. In this situation Russia played a major move by announcing final recognition of Donbas region, oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine besides ordering peace keepers in to the region. Russia refused to be managed or 'handled' by NATO or its backer US without security guarantees. It has been demanding too for regulating the NATO expansion to Russia's neighbouring countries and pulling out of the Western troops from this region and also for stopping induction of weapons in the region. With such a move Russia threw the ball in to court of the US and its European allies. Even at this stage of developments the US and its allies have not chosen to return to diplomatic process for resolving the crisis, but arrogantly resorted to sanctions behest of US, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia sparked off.

(By the time of conclusion of this comment, the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine has already begun.)