The Ukraine war and the return to Euro-centrism

Why in news?

The political and military aftermath of the Ukraine conflict could set the stage for the return to the Euro-centric world order.

How has Euro-centrism been all these years?

- For centuries, Europe imagined itself to be the centre of the world, its order, politics and culture.
- **Decolonisation**, the emergence of the United States as the western world's sole superpower, and the rise of the rest dramatically diminished the centuries-old domination of the European states and their ability to shape the world in their own image.
- The **contemporary international order is hardly Euro-centric**: dominated by the U.S., and challenged by rising great powers or superpowers, it is moving toward a multipolar order wherein Europe's system shaping capabilities have been rather limited.

How will the future transpire post-war?

- The political and military aftermath of Russia's war on Ukraine could potentially tilt the current global balance and take us back to the Euro-centric world order, although far less powerful and dominating than its earlier forms.
- The U.S. will continue to dominate the trans-Atlantic security landscape and this is likely to remain so.
- Yet, the new security consciousness in Europe will reduce Washington's ability to continue as the fulcrum of the trans-Atlantic strategic imagination.
- If Donald Trump returns to the White House in 2024, the Europeans are likely to take their own security far more seriously.
- In any case, there is little doubt that Europe, going forward, will emerge as a major locus of trans-Atlantic security imagination.
- The process has clearly begun and if wars have the potential to shape international orders, it is Europe's turn to shape the world, once again.
- The United States, fatigued from the Iraq and Afghan wars, does not

appear to be keen on another round of wars and military engagements.

- However, the mood in Europe seems to be changing; there is a shift in narrative from pacifism to insecurity-induced militarism, and this is where the shape of the international system could well be decided.
- The Russian aggression against Ukraine has led to an unmissable feeling of insecurity in Europe.
- A pervasive sense of **existential insecurity** has brought about a renewed enthusiasm for the future of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- The European Union (EU) Commission in Brussels has backed Kyiv's bid for EU candidature, and the 30-state military alliance, NATO, has two more members in its fold, Finland and Sweden, due to what the Europeans call Putin's war in Ukraine, making a careful distinction between Russia and Vladimir Putin.
- This new military unity is not just words but is backed by political commitment and financial resources from the world's richest economies.
- Berlin, for instance, has decided to spend an additional €100 billion for defence over and above its €50 billion annual expenditure on defence.
- It is set to announce a new national security strategy early next year, and the hope of 'changing Russia through trade' is no longer popular amongst most German policymakers and thinkers.
- While there is a deep sense of insecurity and vulnerability in contemporary Europe, there is also the belief that NATO and the EU will see better days going forward.

How has the war impacted the institutions?

- Germany, the engine of this new security thinking in Europe, is coming out of its self-image of being a pacifist nation.
- A country that has for two decades spent no more than 1.3% on defence will now spend more than 2% to beef up its defence.
- **The United Nations:** There appears little faith in the United Nations or the UN Security Council anymore in Berlin, they have decided to put their faith in a revitalised EU and NATO.
- European states are deeply worried about **globalisation-induced vulnerability** and this has set in a rethink about the inherent problems of indiscriminate globalisation.
- What this turn away from multilateralism in favour of 'Europeanism' will do is to further undercut global institutions.
- The combined effect of European re-militarisation, its loss of faith in multilateral institutions, and the increased salience of the EU and NATO

will be the unchecked emergence of Europe as an even stronger regulatory, norm/standard-setting superpower backed with military power.

- Instruments such as the Digital Services Act and the Digital Assets Act or its human rights standards will be unilaterally adopted and will be unavoidable in other parts of the world. While these instruments and standards may in themselves be progressive and unobjectionable for the most part, the problem is with the process which is unilateral and Euro-centric.
- There is an irrefutable ethical problem in a democratic Europe using non-democratic processes to adopt seemingly progressive measures for the rest of us.

What have been the implications of the war on the rest of the world?

- The recent statements emanating from Europe that 'democracies' should come together to defeat a non-democratic aggressor is a taste of the things to come: a euro-centric worldview of friends and enemies will define its engagement with the rest of the world.
- India is a friend, but its take on the Ukraine war is not friendly enough for Europe!
- Receding multilateralism and rising Euro-centrism would invariably mean that norm-setting and system-shaping discussions are likely to be conducted by Europeans, among Europeans, for Europeans and non-Europeans, leading to fewer consultations and even lesser consensus with the rest of the international community.
- The EU will lead the way in setting standards for the rest of us and we will have little option but to follow that.
- For sure, Europe will seek partners around the world: to create a Euro-centric world order, not a truly global world order.
- This unilateral attempt to 'shape the world' in its image will also be portrayed as an attempt to counter Chinese attempts at global domination.
- When presented as such, countries such as India will face a clear dilemma: to politically and normatively oppose the setting of the global agenda by Europeans or to be practical about it and jump on the European bandwagon.

What is the way forward?

- The key message from the European narratives about the Ukraine war is

that European states would want to see their wars and conflicts as threatening international stability and the ‘rules-based’ global order.

- Needless to mention that there is little recognition in the West today that the global non-West’s political priorities are altogether different, from addressing abject poverty and underdevelopment to managing social cohesion and local conflicts.
- The lack of interest in other parts of the world about the Russian aggression in Europe, and the consequent unease about the lack of empathy from the rest of the world, is indicative of the inherent Euro-centric view of the European nations about the world.

Reference

https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-ukraine-war-and-the-return-to-euro-centrism/article65644943.ece

