

Ukraine invasion and the dystopian US political landscape



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ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

AS Russia’s invasion of Ukraine rages on, one of the strangest spectacles is a bunch of video clips of Fox News Channel’s conservative commentator and America’s top cable show host, Tucker Carlson, repeatedly showing up on primetime Russian state-owned television.

This is about as weird a development as an Iranian ayatollah popping up at a White House ceremony, or former US President Donald Trump showing up at a Black Lives Matter rally.

This is an extraordinary change in American politics. Domestic US reaction to global wars –and US involvement– used to break down along predictable ideological lines. Those on the left were the sharpest critics of US involvement in a war, while the further right you went along the ideological spectrum, the more unquestioned the support was for US policies, until at the very right, you had people bitterly turning on domestic war critics for “blaming America first.”

Going back all the way to the Vietnam war, right up to the Iraq war and Afghanistan, the American right has blindly backed US policies. (There is the odd historical exception–in 1972, US President Richard Nixon, a vicious, life-long red-baiter, went to Beijing and coziered up to uber-doctrinaire Communist leader Mao Zedong, whose government’s descriptions of the West and its allies used to include such choice endearments as “imperialists and its running dogs.” But exceptions just prove the rule.)

The war against Ukraine is exposing a new stark development in the American right, with its most tell-tale manifestation in its extreme fringes.

“Why do I hate Putin so much? Has Putin ever called me a racist? Has he threatened to get me fired for disagreeing with him?” Carlson has said. He has also called Ukraine “an obedient puppet of the

Biden state department”, and suggested that Putin’s invasion was nothing more than a “border dispute.”

Let’s turn to a few colourful conservative lawmakers whom the deceased Republican Sen. John McCain once memorably called “wacko birds.”

Take North Carolina Republican Congressman Madison Cawthorn. I’ll just quote a completely unsubstantiated remark of his and let the reader be the judge: “I took to the house floor a couple weeks ago to reveal the heinous



mutilitating techniques that Dr. Fauci has been using on puppies in Africa using YOUR tax dollars.”

Cawthorn recently called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky a “thug” and the Ukrainian government “incredibly evil,” criticising the country and its leader as Russia invaded it.

Georgia Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene backed him. To give you an idea of where Greene is coming from, she thinks that the suggestion that Trump is secretly fighting a worldwide child-sex-slavery ring is “worth listening to”, that “Zionist supremacists” are secretly masterminding Muslim immigration to Europe to outbreed white people, and that wildfires in California had



A local resident walks past a tank of pro-Russian troops in the besieged southern port city of Mariupol, Ukraine, March 18, 2022.

PHOTO: REUTERS

been started in conjunction with the Rothschilds, using a space laser.

Greene said that she agreed with Cawthorn’s highly criticised comment that Zelensky is a “thug.”

This political development is so contrary to Republican political culture that it’s enough to cause vertigo.

Carlson’s equivocation on Russian aggression is “not only confused, it’s almost dada,” former Syracuse University media studies professor Bob Thompson told *The Guardian* newspaper. “You see it

and Christian. Putin’s Russian muscular, macho nationalism has enough elements in it to resonate deeply. Russia, to be sure, has been capitalising on this with great skill on social media.

This White nationalist resentment has curdled into what journalist Matt Taibbi calls “reverse chauvinism.” So deep is the resentment against what the Republican right considers the overwhelming dominance of the “woke” culture that there is almost a Pavlovian response to lambasting anything it supports. If it includes supporting the egregious Putin, so be it.

This is not merely an affliction of the political right, however. The left-leaning Taibbi was actually referring to analysts on the left who were reluctant to protest Russia’s attacks. Ideological preferences can blinker sound judgement. Over the past decades, there have been powerful instances of this all over the ideological spectrum: the denial of Stalin’s purge or China’s terrible famines in the last century under Communist rule, and of course, America’s sordid history of toppling governments and backing thugs and crooks.

Today, as one witnesses Russia’s attempts to bomb Ukraine into the stone age, with millions of its citizens fleeing the country, there is no question that this invasion must be condemned in the most categorical terms.

However, it is the exaggerated claims of moral superiority by the West, led by the US, where things get trickier. US claims of its revulsion of Russia’s barbarity ring particularly hollow. Of the innumerable examples, I will mention two. Former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who died recently, was widely lauded in US editorials, yet under her watch, according to a UN study, 500,000 Iraqi children died due to sanctions imposed by the Clinton administration. Or take the more recent examples of unaccountable drone attacks in America’s global war on terror. Subsequent reports revealed that many of them killed unarmed and innocent civilians.

The sobering lesson is that global politics is a murky business. Our conscience requires that we condemn what is unacceptable, even if the company we keep is not entirely salubrious. We cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Covid, Reawakening and Ramadan



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MILIA ALI

I begin with an apology to my readers for my long absence. Covid played havoc with our lifestyle and livelihoods. Even then, we could make choices still within limited parameters. My choice was to remain passive and wallow in my bad fortune—being traumatised by cancer during an epic pandemic. To compound matters, I had lost the one thing I valued the most: my passion for music!

Interestingly, it took just one innocuous walk on a beautiful spring afternoon to break the recurring cycle of depression and despair. Dusk was descending... there was something ethereal about the first blooms of spring against the setting sun, the chirping of

birds flying home, the soft breeze rustling through the leaves and caressing my hair. The entire ambience and experience stirred my inner core, which was struggling to overcome all that was dark and distressful in the recent past.

In addition to the misfortune of my illness, I was weighed down by the grief of losing dear ones to Covid. My deepest regret was that I could not hold their hands as they said goodbye to the world. The remorse had left a gaping wound inside me. But, standing alone in the tree-lined path, I had a “reawakening”. I needed to move away from what destructs, distorts and disorients to what heals, rejuvenates and empowers. I realised that this might be the right moment since nature has given us a respite from the scourge of Covid. No one knows if this is an interval or a finale, but why not seize the opportunity to reflect on how to restructure the contours of our lives?

It is perhaps no coincidence that this is also the time when Christians are observing Lent. And for Muslims, the month of Ramadan has just started.

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During Lent, Christians acknowledge misery, sorrow, and remorse and enter into a lamenting mode, seeking healing from the Divine. For many, lamenting is not just mourning, but also accepting that struggle is a part of the general drama of happiness and pain.

Ramadan, on the other hand, is not about finding a new path via remorse and lament, but trying to attain higher spirituality and resolving inner conflicts through reflection and action. Self-restraint through fasting provides a rare glimpse into the miseries of the less fortunate, making us aware of the injustices and unfairness of life. Prayers and meditation, on the other hand, help us understand that so many things are beyond our control, and that inner peace lies in some kind of surrender to a greater force.

In both practices—Lent and Ramadan—people strive to find catharsis through introspection, restraint and sacrifice. However, each one of us will need to find our own path whether it is Lent, Ramadan, Puja or simply meditating in the solitude of our homes. We will need to

go through our own healing process and rid ourselves of our past baggage. It will be easy to clean wardrobes and cupboards by removing all that is inconsequential, but cleansing our emotional cobwebs will be much harder! As we restart our journey of life, let us concentrate on resetting our priorities and discarding all that is inessential, especially the monster within, called ego.

Even so, questions will persist... Why were some chosen to survive while so many others succumbed to the pandemic? On a broader plane, what is this miracle called life? Is it the spirit’s desire to break free from the Source and explore, as the Sufis say? Or each one of us is sent on this earthly adventure by the Divine Will to test our love for Him through endurance and compassion!

Whether we find definitive answers or not, for now let us be thankful that we are alive and celebrate each new day as a gift. Through its cataclysmic upheaval, Covid has taught us a valuable lesson: that despite its sham, broken dreams, suffering and disenchantment, it is still a beautiful life!

QUOTABLE
Quote

Noam Chomsky
(Born 1928)
American linguist and philosopher

If we don't believe in freedom of expression for people we despise, we don't believe in it at all.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Church service

5 _ Christi

11 massage target

12 Anxious feeling

13 Steel ingredient

14 Feel bad for

15 Indian capital

17 Director

18 Miniature map

22 Knee, e.g.

24 Lively dance

25 Radius setting

26 Crew need

27 Turns suddenly

30 Risque

32 Useful skill

33 Many a time

34 Madrid miss

38 On the go

41 Turkey neighbor

42 Blues-based

43 Mint product

44 Swindled

45 Invites

DOWN

1 Big pipe

2 Lot unit

3 Movie listing info

4 Mail, as payment

5 Area under a wave

6 Kind of musical wonder

7 King of

“Watchmen”

8 Hole number

9 Try out

10 Match part

16 CPR pro

19 Winter driving need

20 Old oath

21 Conservative, in London

22 Coffee, slangily

23 Metal sources

28 Quit

29 Wonder of music

30 Scary shout

31 Kalahari setting

35 Require

36 Refinery sight

37 Crumb carriers

38 Jackson 5 hit

39 Pigeon sound

40 Load unit

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

M	E	T	E	S	C	A	M	P	S
A	X	O	N		H	A	W	A	I
S	P	U	D		O	R	A	T	E
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	J	E	T		F	U	R	Y	C
A	V	I	A	T	E		S	U	M
G	A	N	G	E	S		A	S	K

BEETLE BAILEY
BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES
BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT