

Netanyahuism: The Zeitgeist of Our Times?

October 11, 2024

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It's been more than a year since the October 7 terror attacks took place. One year down the line, the world looks more unstable and war-prone. The major powers seem to have discarded moralpolitik for realpolitik. The multilateral institutions are losing their relevance. Israel's declaration of the UN Secretary-General as persona non-grata is unprecedented, portending a normless world in times to come.

While there are many layers of analysis to explain the volatility in the world of today, this piece focuses on the role being played by the actors of international politics in perpetuating global instability. The humanitarian crises unfolding in West Asia and Eastern Europe, along with the inability of the international community to enforce peace in these regions can be captured in a larger phenomenon engulfing the world today – 'Netanyahuism'.

Every age in human history has a corresponding zeitgeist – the ideas and beliefs defining the spirit of an age. The 1930s was the era of fascism, the 1940s-50s

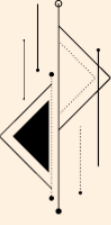


The rise of neofascist parties within the EU, the return of hard power, the fading boundaries between domestic and foreign policy instruments, the banality of evil and ruthless killing of innocent civilians flouting all international norms while also threatening multilateral institutions like the UN and ICC are all what constitute today's 'Netanyahuism'.

being that of liberal institutionalism. The decades thereafter were influenced by the ideological and strategic bipolarity of the Cold War times. The 1990s was marked by a mood of optimism and a belief in neoliberalism.

Similarly, the post-COVID times can be called the era of 'Netanyahuism' – the zeitgeist of our times. The policies, beliefs and approach of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, especially post-October 7 attacks, are being emulated not just in Israel, but all across the world.

The world of today is a world where domestic politics is guiding international politics at the cost of international institutions. Before October 7, Netanyahu's political future looked bleak. Israel was



witnessing massive protests against Netanyahu's proposed judicial reforms. Today, Netanyahu is firmly in control, with even opposition leaders like Benny Gantz supporting his hardline stance. That Netanyahu disregards the international norms which restrict Israel's disproportionate retaliation against Gaza only adds to his 'strongman image'. Using war as a tool of domestic policy to gain political currency is also visible in Putin's recent nuclear sabre-rattling.

'Netanyahuism' also represents what can be called the 'technologization of geopolitics'. While technology was being weaponised even in pre-COVID days, its use was limited to surveillance or grey-zone tactics like influence operations, technology denial etc. What the world is witnessing now is a 'no-limits' approach in weaponizing technology - the recent pager attacks in Lebanon being the case in point. The great powers of today are weaponizing every small technology to inflict physical damage on their adversaries. Even more scary is the impunity with which they are doing this, disregarding all international laws.

Furthermore, Netanyahu's approach of 'eye for an eye' has become popular all throughout the world. The taboo against the use of instrumentality of military actions to achieve foreign policy

objectives is declining. China's aggressiveness in the South China Sea, India's cross-border surgical strikes, Russia's revanchism to counter 'NATOisation' in its neighbourhood, Iran's barrage of missiles against Israel to avenge Nasrallah's assassination are all manifestations of the declining taboo against militarism. The eliminationist speeches being delivered by the warring parties in West Asia openly also show that the premium on the global perception of a peace-loving nation is now declining. That militarism is gaining currency even in the erstwhile pacifist states like Japan and Germany reinforces this proposition.

Today, we are returning back to the future, where the 'banality of evil' reigns supreme. Over 45,000 Gazans have already been sacrificed in this West Asian Great Game. Now, the Lebanese, too, are at the altars. The absence of international voices against this humanitarian crisis implies that evil has indeed become banal today, thanks to the moral weakness in the global leaders of our times - be it the CEOs of Big Tech, the media barons or the state heads.

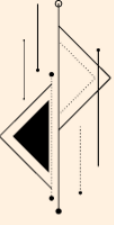
The world is today witnessing the rise of the 'Netanyahu' brand of leaders. The rise of neofascist parties within the EU, the return of hard power, the fading boundaries between domestic and foreign policy instruments,

the banality of evil and ruthless killing of innocent civilians flouting all international norms while also threatening multilateral institutions like the UN and ICC are all what constitute today's 'Netanyahuism'.

Even more distressing is the fact that 'Netanyahuism' is now influencing the policies of even the leaders of the bygone pacifist era, like Joe Biden. Unfortunately, there is an uncanny resemblance between Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler at the Munich Conference, 1938, and the West's steadfastness behind today's Israeli actions, turning a blind eye towards all the violations of international norms being committed by the Zionist state.

Unbridled 'Netanyahuism' is a recipe for total war. It must be checked from becoming the zeitgeist of our times. Or else, it can push the whole world, especially the Global South, back by at least a century. Mahatma Gandhi once said: "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." The international community must show moral courage and start calling out the militaristic approach of both Iran and Israel. Solutions need to be found on the diplomatic table, not on the battlefield.

As far as India is concerned, Dr. S. Jaishankar, while joining his office as the Minister of External Affairs, had said: "Bharat First and



Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam will be the two guiding axioms India's foreign policy". Israel-Hamas/Hezbollah War transforming into a regional West Asian conflict is in favour of neither 'Bharat First' nor 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. It's time to put words into action. India needs to don the role of 'Vishwa Bandhu' and make serious efforts towards mediating peace in its extended neighbourhood.

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