

Blinken's 'Variable Geometry' for a New Cold War

What is clear is that the ruling strata in Washington are settled on the primacy of containing China.

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Last week, Secretary of State Blinken, in a speech at Johns Hopkins University, said bluntly:

"What we're [facing], is no test of the post-Cold War order. **It's the end of it** ... a hinge moment in history ... Countries and citizens are losing faith in the international economic order - their confidence rattled by systemic flaws ... The longer these disparities persist, the more distrust and disillusionment they fuel in people, who feel the system is not giving them a fair shake".

So far, so good — but he continued:

"the US is leading in this pivotal period from a position of strength ... One era is ending, a new one is beginning ... We must act, and act decisively ... We must live history forward. We must put our hand on the rudder of history, because ..."

"No nation on Earth has a greater capacity to mobilize others in common cause. Because our ongoing endeavour ... allows us to fix our flaws and renew our democracy from within. And because our vision for the future - a world that is open, free, prosperous, and secure - is not America's alone, **but the enduring aspiration of people in every nation on every continent**" (emphasis added).

The 'new era', then, resembles the familiar 'old one': Our Western 'liberal vision' and its economic doctrine is that of everyone, everywhere in the world - claims Blinken.

But the 'new era' challenge is that,

"'our' competitors [Russia and China] have a fundamentally different vision ... The contrast between these two visions could not be clearer. And the stakes of the

competition we face could not be higher – for the world, and for the American people”.

So we — Team America — are working “to align our friends in new ways so that we can meet the three defining tests of this emerging era: a fierce and lasting strategic competition; existential threats to lives and livelihoods everywhere – and the urgent need to rebalance our technological future and our economic future, so that interdependence is a source of strength – not vulnerability”. (Interdependence? ... hmm)

“We’re doing this through what I like to call diplomatic variable geometry. We’ve aligned scores of countries in imposing an unprecedented set of sanctions, export controls, and other economic costs on Russia”.

Ahh — so the old Cold War is over? And what is to replace it? Well, a new Cold War of ‘variable geometry’. Plainly, the message emanating out from the BRICS and the G20 summits has not ‘sunk in’.

The message ringing out in a clear peal of bells from these summits was that the collective Non-West has coalesced around the urgent demand for radical reform of the global system. They want change in the global economic architecture; they contest its structures (i.e. the voting systems that lie behind those institutional structures such as the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF) — and above all they object to the weaponised dollar hegemony.

The demand — put plainly — is for a seat at Top Table. Period.

To that demand, Blinken’s response is that of outright challenge — Variable Geometry:

“We’re assembling a fit-for-purpose coalition. We’re transforming the G7 into the steering committee for the world’s most advanced democracies; combining our political and economic muscle ... We’re taking critical bilateral relationships, [especially] with the European Union to a new level. We’re using that power to shape our technological and economic future...” .

Plainly put, the Variable Geometry to the new Cold War on China and Russia amounts to continued weaponised financial war:

“We’ve aligned scores of countries in imposing an unprecedented set of sanctions, export controls, and other economic costs on Russia. We coordinated the G7, the European Union, and dozens more countries to support Ukraine’s economy, to build back its energy grid. That’s what variable geometry looks like”.

The new Cold War tools — as defined in Blinken’s speech – are firstly, ‘Narrative’ (our vision is the world’s vision); a weaponised economy; new lending capacity for the US-controlled IMF; and a protective ‘belt’ that constrains the commanding heights of western tech from finding an exit to China.

What is clear is that the ruling strata in Washington are settled on the primacy of containing China. Debate over.

There are, however, two principal paradoxes contained within this blueprint: The first is that financial war on Russia has resulted in an economically stronger Russia, and a weaker, poorer US ally: Europe. Similarly, as one Chinese official highlighting the breakthrough

represented by the Huawei Mate 60 Pro noted: “Sanctions are not such a bad thing. They only strengthen the ‘de-westernization movement’”, as it is informally termed in China. In other words, ultimately they strengthen China, and weaken the US.

The second paradox is that in framing the ‘New Cold War’ in such explicitly Manichean ‘with or against us’ terms that foreclose on any ‘middle ground’, BRICS waverers such as India will have little room in which to play ‘both ends’. Geography alone, finally, will impel India to mesh unreservedly into the Heartland sphere.

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