

Is the U.S. Fast Losing One of the Most Important Assets of Democracy: Capacity for Timely Corrective Action?

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Democracies score over authoritarian regimes and dictatorship in many important respects. One of the most important assets of democracies is their capacity to take timely corrective actions. It is not that democracies do not make serious mistakes; they do. However there is a built-in system that increases the chances very considerably of timely corrective actions, sooner rather than later. This system consists of close and continuing, independent and intense monitoring of government decisions and policies by opposition political parties, by media and academia, by civil society organizations and others, informed public discussion on this basis, its impact on public opinion and feedback to policy makers.

All this increases greatly the possibilities of timely course correction so that even big mistakes do not prove too costly as these can be corrected at an early stage. This greatly increases the resilience of democratic systems and adds further to their superiority over authoritarian systems and dictatorships where much lesser possibilities of independent functioning of opposition parties, media and academia reduces the possibilities of early correction of even very costly mistakes by the all-powerful authorities. It can be argued that it is this capacity of course correction on the part of the western democracies, when compared to the much lesser capacity for this in the Soviet Union, which resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the USA-led West emerging victorious in the Cold War.

To give just one example, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in the Union's last days was clearly a serious mistake, in fact it was more like walking into a trap, which could not be corrected for too long and proved immensely costly at a time when the Soviet Union was already overstretched and in the middle of serious economic difficulties.

Unfortunately it is becoming increasingly clear that in recent years even the USA is losing more and more the capacity for course correction. To give one important example, let us examine its relentless policies during the first quarter of this century of constantly and consistently being hostile to Russia, pushing NATO relentlessly eastwards towards Russian borders and more recently increasingly and dangerously using Ukraine as a proxy to harm and bleed Russia as much as possible.

What has been the overall result of this policy? This has led to a dangerous war within Europe which has already killed or seriously wounded and disabled over 500,000 people, apart from internally and externally displacing millions of people. It has led to enormous environmental ruin. Most dangerously, it has time and again increased risks of a direct conflict between Russia and NATO which can escalate rapidly into a nuclear war in which there can be no winners, only worldwide ruin.

While these costs are clear enough, no one in the USA establishment has been able to provide a clear and credible explanation of any real gains. There have been highly unethical statements of several politicians and others saying, more or less, that as long as without risking our soldiers we are able to bleed Russia to whatever extent this is good. If this is all there is to be said for this policy, then political discourse has seldom been so low and devoid of ethics as well as rationality.

Again, if one asks what has been gained from all the efforts made for demonizing Russia and from the policy of constant hostility, there are no credible answers to this larger question also.

As for the unrelenting War on Terror, which has claimed 4.5 million human lives directly and indirectly over about two decades, there is no credible justification for this most terrible but entirely avoidable loss of precious human life. What has been achieved from all these wars and where are these achievements in the form of a better and safer world?

Where has the relentless trend to use military power to assert dominance taken the USA? Are alternatives not available to the USA to maintain or increase its influence on the basis of a more enlightened approach that instead emphasizes increasing goodwill on the basis of many-sided enhancement of welfare? Certainly such alternative policies are available, but it is the willingness and capacity to correct big mistakes at an early stage that has been eroded badly.

Certainly USA has very strong political opposition, media and academia, but their capacity for course correction has been badly compromised over the years by creating a top-heavy system of decision making which listens only to those voices which appear to make favorable and familiar sounds, which rewards all other stakeholders for collusion and discourages, increasingly even punishes, the dissenters. While outwardly maintaining a system of freedom, over the years it has been distorted and twisted in numerous ways to ensure that the various available 'freedoms' are accessed most by those who collude and least by those who oppose.

So while dissenters can continue to have their say in small spaces still available to them, the big spaces on some of the most important issues are all in the hands of those who speak within a narrowly defined establishment version of important issues. Even the dissenters within the government are often discouraged from taking forward their views, within the government policy-making space, to such an extent that they soon stop trying.

All that has been done to create such a closed system is essentially a form of self-harm on a mass scale, as democracy's precious gift of course-correction and timely correction of costly mistakes has been squandered or even crushed.

This is creating serious problems not just for the USA, but keeping in view the immense influence and power of this country, this is creating problems for peace and welfare at the world-level too. Hence the task of genuine democracy reform in the USA has a much wider role and importance at world level.

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