

**Topic: Does the West have the right to claim the moral high ground - a discussion led by Peter de Groot****Summary**

Most people in Western Europe and North America assume that the West, led by the US, occupy the moral high ground. This claim may have been justified in the immediate aftermath of WW2 in 1945 but it is questionable whether it still holds true now that 75+ years have gone by. A discussion paper authored by Peter was circulated prior to the meeting.

**Discussion*****Developments after the end of WW2***

The United States became alarmed with the growth of communism in Europe and set up the Marshall Plan (in June 1947) to control its spread. This Plan was an economic support program funded by the United States. The Russians could not tolerate the American Plan because it included aid to the recently defeated enemy, Germany, and in the same year they set up an alternative Molotov Plan which gave aid to rebuild countries in Eastern Europe. Both plans were clearly earmarked to strengthen influence over and engender a feeling of obligation to whoever supplied the aid.

***The United Nations***

The US and Allied WW2 victory led the way to the formation of the United Nations and brought about the reorganisation of the international financial system during the Bretton Woods conference in 1944. The US took a leading role in establishing the IMF and the World Bank ensuring inter alia the primacy of the US dollar and thus providing the US with an immense advantage in international trade and thereby the opportunity to influence the economies of other countries.

Some 50 countries (47 allies of the US including nationalist China) signed the Charter of the United Nations in June 1945, thus agreeing the objective of "the UN to take collective political action to prevent war and joint military action to ensure that any nation which starts a war will lose it."

***Truman Doctrine***

With the Truman Doctrine, President Harry S Truman established that the US would provide political, military and economic assistance to all democratic nations under threat from external or internal authoritarian forces. It was first used to justify involvement in the 1947 civil war in Greece. The US was convinced that the control of the Turkish Straits by the Soviet Union was the real aim of this uprising. The doctrine was used to support many involvements in future years.

***Other conflicts and interventions***

Iran 1953- The US was involved in a coup to ensure the (pro-Western) Shah remained in power and to prevent oil fields being nationalised without compensation by a democratically elected Iranian parliament.

Vietnam 1963- After the Geneva Convention in 1954 the US, which sought to ensure the partition of both Vietnam and Korea in order to preserve a bulwark against communism, was

overruled by the UN which agreed that the Vietnam division should last for only 2 years. Ngo Dinh Diem, who had lived and studied in the US, was appointed Prime Minister of South Vietnam in July 1954 and became president in the following year. Encouraged by the US Diem ignored the Geneva agreement and refused to allow the agreed elections to take place.

In Hanoi, the Vietminh government had been leading the fight against French domination from 1945 to 1954. As Diem refused elections in the South, the Vietminh now formed the Viet Cong in South Vietnam with the aim of waging a campaign of assassinations and bombings in support of a people's war. After Diem's assassination, he was succeeded by a series of repressive dictatorships supported by Kennedy's successor Lyndon Johnson. The inhuman Vietnam war cost numerous human lives, not only of combatants but also of civilians.

Iraq 2004- the invasion of Iraq was never legally justified and any suggestion of compliance with the UN charter was a pretence. The US ignored the central tenet of the rules-based-order namely that regime change could not, by itself, be a lawful objective of war by a state acting alone without the authorisation of the UN security council, nor could it be a legitimate basis, on its own, for invading a foreign country. Only four countries approved the invasion and supplied combat forces, the UK, Denmark, Australia and Poland, almost all other countries opposed the invasion, and in two of those four countries there were political repercussions.

### **Conclusion**

The Press in the Western World is far more critical of any 'undemocratic' action taken by Russia and its allies (like the poisoning of dissidents in the UK, the arrest and subsequent imprisonment of Navalny) whilst, being largely uncritical of the imprisonment by the US in Guantánamo Bay of people perceived to be 'enemy combatants' without trial or access to legal representation. We should not think that this attitude is good for us.

It was suggested that the discussion paper exaggerates to make a point. We (i.e., the West) don't conquer nations like the Soviet Union did and the present Russia still does. Russia's action in Georgia, the Crimea and the Ukraine are perfect examples. Similarly, the way that China treats Hong Kong, the Uyghurs and Tibet is not acceptable either. These actions are worse than say the American intervention in Chile to replace the Communist regime by a government which they would approve of. Moral decline is relative rather than absolute.

The best is the only good, everything else is anything but. The founding philosophy of the United Nations Charter sets out what is best, but in the real world, the founding nations knew they couldn't actually achieve that. The aim should be to keep everything as peaceful as possible.