



What Comes After Brexit?

News:

Last week, the British Prime Minister Theresa May triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty and sent a formal notification to the EU about Britain's decision to leave the union. Britain's divorce from the EU comes after a period of 44 years, and will last for a period of 2 years. The Prime Minister also took the opportunity to galvanize the country to work together during the separation period. She said, "We are one great union of people and nations with a proud history and a bright future. And now that the decision has been made to leave the EU, it is time to come together." The President of the EU Council Donald Tusk struck a conciliatory note and said there was "no reason to pretend this is a happy day" adding there was "nothing to win" and that now the Brexit process was about damage control. Brexit is now fueling intense speculations about the future of the European Union.

Comment:

No matter how hard British and European officials try to put a positive spin on Brexit - Europe will never be the same again. Tusk's remarks belie the harsh realities facing Britain and the EU. Both sides are competing in a positive sum game that is swiftly assuming epic posturing of geopolitical intrigue.

The EU has tipped the balance of power in Spain's favour over the disputed territory of Gibraltar, and Britain has sided with American demands for NATO members to increase defense spending to 2% of GDP or risk irrelevance. Meanwhile, Russia eager to capitalize on the EU's dilemma is selling fighter jets to Serbia, and is supporting populist movements across the continent. The positioning of different fault lines spells uncertainty for Europeans.

Yet, widening the context of the divorce talks is a deliberate ploy intended to bolster bargaining positions, but has long-lasting consequences for Europe. Interestingly, it was Monne - founder of the EU - who famously once remarked, "When you have a problem you cannot solve, enlarge the context". From Britain vantage point, a divided Europe to emerge after the talks is the intended goal. On the other hand, the core member states of the EU aspire to strengthen the union by making an example out of Britain.

Great power politics have always been a feature of European politics, and many Europeans wrongly believe that the present day EU was shaped entirely by them. The American scholar Kagan has rightly emphasised that without American security the EU would not exist. American ingenuity and money was central to the European project. Post WW2, America's principal aim was to counter Soviet expansionism and a unified Europe thriving on capitalism was the obvious insulation to Russia's communism.

Monnet supported by America's Marshall Plan engineered efforts to transform the European Coal and Steel Community into a unified block that could stand against the

red empire. The humiliation of the Suez fiasco for Britain and France, the atomic race between the bipolar powers and Russia's invasion of Hungary rammed home the awful truth that Europe had been displaced into third place unable to shape global and local events. This provided the necessary impetus for the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which set the foundations for Europe's integration experiment.

If present day EU is indebted to external powers like America the actual idea of a unified Europe has even stranger origins. In the 15th century, some Europeans fearful of Ottoman power attempted to bring unity to the continent. George of Podebrad, the King of Bohemia, led one such effort called the Message of Peace. In the 17th century, the Duke of Sully proposed a "Very Christian Council of Europe" - consisting of 15 countries - in response to Ottoman hegemony.

Apart from the idea of Europe, Islam has played an instrumental part in shaping Western civilization. The interaction points between Islam and the West - like Spain, Sicily, the Levant, trade routes, and the Ottoman's politicking in the heart of Europe - provided Europe with the necessary intellectual capital to revive. For instance, the nobility returning from the crusades, made significant contributions in calling for more rights between the King and his subjects. The Magna Carta in 1215 is an example of England's noble class borrowing political ideas from Islam to mould domestic rights.

No matter how hard Europe tries to disguise its Islamic past, Islam is bound to play a pivotal role in Europe's future. It is very unlikely that EU27 - EU without Britain - will survive in its present form. For one, Britain will never tolerate a powerful continental force. The same applies to America and Russia - the two will seek to carve out their own spheres of influence. Then there is the voracious appetite of populism, which is likely to encourage hyper-nationalism that will ravage the continent.

Despite these forces contesting for primacy on the continent, the challenge of Islam is not far away. Europe is currently engrossed by a plethora of Islamic issues, ranging from security to the accommodation of Muslims living in the West. The return of the rightly guided Caliphate is likely to accentuate these issues in the favour of Muslims. One French scholar, Boualem Sansal is already predicting the demise of Europe and is forecasting Islam will rule the world by 2084.

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