

Concealing the Truth

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Concealing the truth from the people is not unusual in politics. It is perhaps more pronounced in global politics partly because it is more difficult to hold powerful global actors accountable. That might is right is an adage that rings true at the international level more than in the domestic arena.

There are currently a number of international issues where the truth is concealed or camouflaged. The demonstrations in Hong Kong for instance which have gone on for weeks are perceived by a lot of people as a struggle for freedom and democracy against an authoritarian government in Beijing. The truth may be a little more complex. It may be in the interest of certain elements in some Western capitals to encourage mass protests in Hong Kong as part of their larger agenda to create instability in China. This in turn may be aimed at curbing China's rise as a global power which its adversaries perceive as a challenge to their hegemony of the planet.

The crisis in Kashmir is another example of an issue where the entire story may not be known to the people. While changes made to the Indian Constitution have been presented by the government in New Delhi as an attempt to integrate the disputed territory into the national structure, the real reason may be more closely aligned to the ideological orientation of the present BJP leadership. This is why it may have serious repercussions for India's religious diversity which has been its civilizational hallmark.

A third region in crisis may also reveal that the underlying causes may be quite different from what has been portrayed in the media. Iran has been depicted as the country that is responsible for the present tensions in West Asia. Even if we confined our observation to the immediate circumstance, it is obvious that it is the United States' decision to scuttle the Iran nuclear deal of July 2015 that is the real reason for the tensions. Why President Trump moved in that direction has a lot to do with increased Israeli and Saudi influence over the White House and their misperception of the power dynamics in West Asia.

Perhaps an even more blatant instance of concealing the truth is the continuing crisis in Venezuela. The US and some of its allies are trying to convey the impression that if the oil-rich state is grappling with serious economic challenges it is due entirely to an oppressive leadership pursuing socialist policies. The truth is that unending schemes and ploys by the US since the presidency of Hugo Chavez which even witnessed a failed coup against him in April 2002 are the main cause of Venezuela's woes.

If the truth about what is happening in relation to Venezuela, Iran, Kashmir and Hong Kong is not widely known it is largely because the media, old and new, serve the interests of the powerful. This may not be obvious to many of us because these are on-going crises in constant flux. A quick look at some past episodes may be useful.

In August 1964, the US leadership alleged that North Vietnamese ships had fired at US ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. The allegation provided the justification for the US to intensify its aggression against North Vietnam. The truth is there was no North Vietnamese attack against US ships. The incident was invented as the US Secretary of Defence at that time Robert McNamara admitted years later.

To justify US military action against Iraq when the latter invaded Kuwait in August 1990, a story was concocted that accused Iraqi soldiers of plucking babies out of their incubators and throwing them onto the floor of a hospital in Kuwait. The fabrication was designed to incite public anger against an “utterly brutal and inhuman regime” in Baghdad. A few years later a monstrous lie was invented about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction in order to convince the world that the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 was totally justified.

A more recent example of political lying was the accusation that Bashar Al-Assad of Syria was responsible for a chemical gas attack in Eastern Ghouta on the 21st of August 2013. It was the celebrated investigative journalist Seymour Hersh who revealed the truth: that the Western backed rebels were behind the chemical attack.

More than any country in West Asia it is tiny Cuba that has borne the brunt of its huge neighbour’s lies and distortions. Since its Revolution in 1959, it has been constantly accused of fomenting instability and violence in Latin America. And yet, it is the US through its agents and proxies that has orchestrated acts of terror against Cuba the most infamous of which was the downing of a Cuban commercial plane on the 6th of October 1976 that killed 73 people including a number of children. The mastermind of that heinous crime Posada Carilles was given protection in the US until his death in May 2018.

Why lies are propagated so frequently and the truth sacrificed so easily, it is not difficult to understand. It is because the powerful want to protect their power at all costs. Sometimes this would require targeting their foes without proof.

This may be true of two final episodes which I have kept to the end because both have not been investigated thoroughly and therefore one cannot draw definite conclusions. The 9-11 tragedy and the MH 17 disaster though different in many ways are similar in some respects. In both cases, a certain party pointed fingers at the “culprits” almost immediately without presenting an iota of evidence. US officials and the media accused Osama bin Laden of planning 9-11 within hours of the attacks upon the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Similarly, the then US Secretary of State, John Kerry stated that

“There is overwhelming evidence of Russia complicity in the downing of a Malaysia airline plane,” as quoted in the BBC on the 21st of July 2014, 4 days after the disaster. Kerry did not bother to provide any evidence.

It is equally significant that in both cases important questions about the actual episodes have remained unanswered. In the 9-11 episode, it is still unclear what caused the collapse of a third tower in the vicinity of the Twin Towers and what exactly hit the Pentagon. Likewise, in the case of MH 17, the official version of what had caused the downing of the plane does not blend with some eye-witness accounts or with expert analysis of the nature of the damage to the cockpit.

9-11 was the *raison d'être* for the US led onslaught on Afghanistan on the 7th of October 2001. More important, it ignited the US led War on Terror that lasted more than a decade and was seen by many Muslims as an affront to their identity and their dignity. Is it a coincidence that after the July 17th air disaster — the overwhelming majority killed were Europeans — European governments were more supportive of severe economic sanctions against Russia proposed by the US some months before? Did the disaster unwittingly achieve some geopolitical objective?

It is only if we continue to ask probing questions that the truth that is concealed will be revealed for the good of everyone.

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