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Changing World Order and its Implications for India and China

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ABSTRACT

The changing world order has significant implications for India and China, the two major emerging powers with distinct economic and political trajectories. This article examines the shift of power dynamics from West to East,shifting global landscape marked by the rise of new powers, changing economic paradigms and global realignments regarding issues of strategic importance at various levels. It also tries to map out the emerging trends of the changing world order while exploring the influence of the two major Asian powers in shaping the world order with one trying to dictate new norms through its expansionist policies while the other strategically manoeuvring its potential in order to maintain and reform the liberal world order guiding by its policy of strategic autonomy. This paper tries to analyse the changing world order and bring out the observable trends while situating India and China amidst these changes.

Key Words : World order, Geopolitics, China, India, Strategic manoeuvring

INTRODUCTION

'Change is the only constant' and that is true for the world order also. From the flames of the Russia-Ukraine crisis[1] and the choppy waters of Taiwan Strait[2], amid the staggering global economy marred by COVID-19 pandemic, a changed world is emerging. There is no doubt that prevailing world order is under tremendous strain. While a number of factors are responsible for this strain, the pandemic and Russia-Ukraine crisis has brought it to a breaking point. The world that we were used to, especially after the Second World War, is changing rapidly. The underlying system that created a sense of order is not the same anymore. There is a discernible shift in the geopolitics from Trans-Atlantic to Indo-Pacific[3] owing largely to the relative growth of several Asian countries along with the decline of erstwhile superpowers. Russia's attack on Ukraine lays bare the fault lines of the liberal international world order that was defined by interdependence. These fissures that were already hastened by the pandemic have forced every country to reflect on its national capabilities to find the way towards sustainability and self-reliance.

The world is not just different, the very structure of the international order is undergoing a profound transformation. Tectonic changes leading to an unfamiliar world order raise concerns about global security. The old-world order seems to have gone on a life support system. The definition of power and a country standing has also undergone a change. However, the nature and

1. The Russia-Ukraine war is an ongoing crisis that has influenced the entire world since it began on February 24,2022.
2. The tension around the "Taiwan issue" has been increasing in the past few years because of the rising US-China competition.It has been speculated that this might take the shape of a conflict in the changing geopolitical scenario.
3. "Indo-Pacific" is a relatively new concept in geopolitics demarcating the area around Indian ocean and the Pacific ocean, it also connotes the rising status of India as an important power in this area along with Japan,Australia and other like minded countries which are committed to the free and open lanes of sea communication.

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extent of these changes are debatable. What roles and positions does a country hold are yet to be determined. What kind of world order is going to emerge is still not clear. The liberal international order led by the US and its alliance has declined, but its system is still in place. Amidst a whole lot of uncertainties what is discernible is the growing importance of the roles that India and China have been playing in the changes that are seen around the world. This paper tries to bring out the changes that are being seen in the world order today and to mark the discernible trends, while also trying to analyse the different roles that India and China are displaying.

What characterises a world order?:

A "world order" cannot be defined in a way that is universally accepted.[4] The notion that there must be a collection of laws or institutions that recognise the important players and regulate their interactions, despite variations in conception, is shared by all of them. Any system of interdependent states needs a basic "operating system"—a collection of guidelines for managing trade, investments, communications, the moment of people, the conduct of diplomacy, the use of force, and a wide range of other problems. These laws may be formalised in international organisations and treaties or internalised as norms that direct the conduct of individual states.When most, if not all, participants find them to be desirable and fair, they will be most successful. To put it another way, even if some or all participants occasionally break some of the rules, these agreements must form a "semi-stable equilibrium" in which none of the major actors has enough motivation to forsake them.

International order is described by Hedley Bull as "a pattern of activity that sustains the fundamental or central aim of international society." According to Bull, a group of states that "conceive themselves to be bound by a set of common rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institutions"[5] constitutes an international society. The definition of an order according to John Mearsheimer is "an organised group of international institutions that help govern the interactions among the member states," and he adds that "institutions... are effectively rules that the great powers devise and agree to follow because they believe that obeying those rules is in their interests." [6] Henry Kissinger defines world order as "the concept held by a region or civilization about the nature of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world" and argues that such orders rest on "a set of commonly accepted rules that define the limits of permissible action and a balance of power that enforces restraint where rules break down,preventing one political unit from subjugating all others."

Following Kissinger, Robert Blackwill and Thomas Wright define world order "a shared understanding among the major powers to limit the potential for serious confrontation,"[7] and they claim that true "world orders" are historically rare. Scholarly discussions of the so-called liberal international order also stress the importance of rules. John Ikenberry's many works on the subject emphasize the role of institutions and the rules-based, multilateral nature of the U.S.-led order.

What characterises a changing world order? :

As the Cold War came to an end around the 1990s, it was widely believed that the world was going to be in a unipolar system. The unprecedented stature of the USA with its economic and military might characterised this unipolar world order. Some enthusiasts claimed it to be the "end of history". However, this unipolarity proved to be very short spanned than expected. Infact there were signs of stress in this unipolar world within a decade only. Twenty-first century began with the shocking 9/11 incident and in response to that the US and its NATO allies launched its operation "war on terror". Against this backdrop, sanctions that were imposed on India and Pakistan in response to their nuclear tests in 1998 were lifted off. And later on, India and US signed a civil nuclear

4. "World order" is a contested term, international relations scholars often use "international order" or "global order" interchangeably.

5. Bull, Hedley (2002). The anarchical society : a study of order in world politics. New York :Columbia University Press,p.8.

6. John J. Mearsheimer; Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order. *International Security* 2019; 43 (4): 7–50. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342

7. Blackwill, Robert and Wright, Thomas,The End of World Order and American Foreign Policy, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, p.5.

deal in 2005[8] that got operational in 2008. This was an indication of the undergoing shift that was happening gradually. Russia and China slowly started to resurrect themselves to challenge the US hegemony. Developing countries started to question the Western ideas and institutions. We also saw the growing difference within the West, not all the European powers supported the US in ventures such as the invading of Iraq. There were differences also on how to deal with the New World Order.

The changes that were undercurrent for around a decade, have now come to the surface. This is having its impact on almost every aspect of how the world functions today. While the change is happening in many ways, several trends are clearly discernible, and these trends can be summarised in the following subsections.

Great-Power rivalry:

Past few years have been dramatic for the changing world order. The US- China rivalry that was brewing even before has taken the centre stage after the COVID-19 hit the entire world and brought it to a standstill. Their rivalry has acquired a new intensity in recent times. The trade disputes that had already begun during the Trump administration has now begun to envelope new areas of conflicts and tensions. Within them one of the central issues is of course how China is actually testing the US alliances particularly in Asia.

China's rise has not been peaceful, it is marked by conflicts and tensions which was visible initially in Asia and now elsewhere also. As China tries to reshape its periphery in an aggressive way, it has come in conflict with other Asian powers such as India and Japan. Several other powers such as Australia and European nations have also gone cautious against China. Russia's attack on Ukraine is another illustration of the brewing great power rivalry. Infact the phenomenon is far more pervasive than these illustrations.

Globalisation on a downslide:

Starting from the 1980s and 1990s, various economic models based on state-led development cracked up in favour of a new consensus towards economic globalisation. A new economic order emerged from the USA which was based on the Washington Consensus and China was very much part of it. India also followed the path as the rest of Asia and other parts of the world did.

The central feature of economic globalisation was, if one were to find, 'open borders and free trade with minimum restriction'. The borders must be open for the movement of capital and labour. That they should be able to move freely as the world seeks for a more efficient way of global productions and distribution. Emphasis was laid on efficiency as the guiding principle. It was believed that a single set of rules for all the economies around the world will benefit all and this would decrease the chances of clashes and tensions, as every country becomes interdependent in this system.

For a while it looked like everyone benefited from this arrangement. A large part of Asia reaped the benefits of economic globalisation. China saw a meteoritic rise in its economy. And India also followed a similar path of economic growth. But as the gap between the East and the West, especially between the US and China started narrowing, resistance started to emerge in the West. And COVID-19 brought a culmination to this resistance. Efficiency is good for capitalism, but emergencies demand resilience. More and more countries have come to realise this while harking back on policies of self-reliance. and increased protectionism. And this has led to what Peter Zeihan calls as 'deglobalization'.

Technology as a precursor of change:

Starting from the 2000s when the internet came around the world in a popular form, the sense that the new digital technology could liberate human beings from the control of the state and that borders do not matter. This kind of dominant utopian view proved to be a myth.

Apart from its obviously visible benefits, digital technology has also proven to be alarming in many ways. We have seen the rise of surveillance states as well as the rise of surveillance capital, where technology is used to collect data and use it for unauthorised purposes in a number of ways. It has also changed the very nature of the world. This is visible in the wars that are being contested, both overtly and covertly.

Changing nature of the institutions:

As World War-II ended, a number of institutions sprung up to create a sense of order and system in an otherwise anarchic world. It was believed that this would

8. https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/c17361.htm

avert the possibility of any other wars that had already been witnessed. And this has somewhat worked till now, although not with perfection.

However, as the great power rivalry began to unravel itself in various domains, the pre-existing institutional setups have come under stress. This is true for all sorts of institutions, regimes and associations both regional as well as global such as the UN, IMF, WB, WHO or WTO, NPT and even for ASEAN or EU for that matter. The conditions for cooperation that existed before are no longer there. New institutional forums of varied nature such as QUAD, AUKUS, I2U2, and others are emerging in response to the changing geopolitics. QUAD is becoming a bone of contention as

The US is trying to contain China by partnering with like-minded countries that are threatened by aggressive Chinese behaviour. While China and Russia call it the "Asian NATO" , that is guided by the Cold War mindset. It is being argued that multilateralism has given way to minilateralism. Also, the upcoming institutions are more issues specific in nature.

How the nature of pre-existing institutions change, how much of it will be reinforced, what roles the emerging institutions are going to take and what will become redundant, all these remains to be seen.

Geopolitical shift from Trans-Atlantic to Indo-Pacific:

As the pivot of the world shifted towards Asia, so did the geopolitics. Until the cold war ended, whether it was during the two world wars or after the US-Soviet conflict, the geopolitics of the world remained centered around the Trans-Atlantic. The US more or less remained as a hegemonic power in Asia without many contestations. However, China's rise has completely changed the geopolitics of this region. From South China Sea to Indian Ocean, it began to assert itself at times even by creating artificial islands. Many countries believe that growing presence of China in this region can jeopardize the free trade routes along the vital choke points. As a result, there is heightened geopolitical engagement around the Indo-Pacific region.

Changing relation between man and nature:

The relationship between man and nature has already been deteriorating for a while now. This has been reflected through a number of disasters that the world is facing today. Climate change is an issue of grave concern for the entire world. This is becoming apparent both spatially and temporally. COVID-crisis has laid bare the limitations of man before nature. And yet it seems that most of the country in the world are not paying the adequate attention that is required of them.

Forces of the changing world order have not escaped this aspect also. The initial success of climate change agreements such as Montreal protocol and Kyoto protocol due to the coordinated efforts of major powers seems to be a farfetched reality today. Every great power seems to be sceptic of others reaping benefits at their cost, thereby putting limitations on their efforts to solve the crisis.

Situating China in the changing world order:

China has emerged as the most significant major power today. This is an established fact now and no one doubts this. In fact, this indisputable reality has been the fundamental driver - although not the only one - behind the changes and challenges that have emerged in the liberal international order. China is often seen as the revisionist power that is trying to alter the world order in a way that establishes its supremacy around the globe. It had begun its effort while being a part of the US-led international order. In fact, China established itself as an indispensable part of the world trade system and used its position to manoeuvre the system to its advantage. Starting with its economic projects China slowly and steadily began to expand its foothold all across the world. And a number of countries came forward to join hands with China under the sanguinity of reaping the benefits of globalization and open trade just as China had done for itself. Countries got engaged with China in a number of ways. Its Belt and Road initiative is one such project. However, there were other sides to this. As China grew economically stronger, it began to show its military ambitions. And several countries often found themselves entangled in many ways. Sri Lanka, Australia, Pakistan and several others can be cited as an example to this Chinese economic entanglement.

China seems to be behind all the major shifts that are happening in the world today. It has ongoing border tensions with many of its neighbours including India and Japan. Its rivalry with the US is no more under the carpets, rather it has gained serious momentum. Events that happened around Taiwan are repercussions of that only. Similarly, Chinese misadventures in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean have further alarmed all of its

neighbours, both big and small. Also, on Russia

Ukraine issue, China is the only major power that is openly seen to be on Russia's side. This has irked many countries around the globe. China is also seen to be siding with Pakistan against India, at times even while promoting and protecting the non-state actors.

Even on technological aspects, China is seen to be using its digital forays as a weapon against the rest of the world. There have been growing concerns about the state control of Chinese companies and the data that they collect. The Chinese state has been found to use digital technology for surveillance and espionage. And this has created a huge uproar around the world, especially by the Trump administration. As a result of this many of the major powers mobilized against the Chinese 5G company – Huawei.

While talking of the multilateral institutions, China has been at the forefront of disregarding the existing set of rules and institutions. This was seen in its refusal to abide by the UNCLOS judgement relating to the disputes in the South China Sea. Recently during the COVID-19 crisis, China was involved in influencing the WHO functions. China has been often seen to use its position in the UNSC to hamper India's interests. Also, China has tried to create its own set of institutions, such as AIIB and NDB being the prominent ones, to offset the influence of US-led institutions.

When it comes to the issue of man and nature, China has crafted a new template of "coercive environmentalism". Until the early 21st century China was the prime example of putting growth and development above considerations of ecological stability. This has dramatically changed in recent years as China has moved decisively in addressing many challenges of climate change.

China is vigorously pursuing to be an ecological civilization under President Xi Jinping. Resolving the tension between development and environment has become an important part of building a harmonious society in China. Amidst the rising tension and conflict, climate change remains an issue of cooperation between India and China in the changing world order scenario.

Situating India in the Changing world order:

Traditionally viewed as a prominent leader of the South, India has transcended that role to play a larger global role which is endorsed by most of the countries in the world today. Due to its geographical location and its political- economic status, India is in a unique position to channel the direction of the changing world order. Sitting right next to China while having an ongoing border tension, it is pertinent for India to play a decisive role at this juncture. However, its choices have not been easy or straightforward; rather they're often quite complex and delicate to handle. Scholars are of the view that Indian foreign policy has moved from the policy of non-alignment to the policy of multialignment in the post-Cold War. Till now it seems that India has been successful at manoeuvring its interest while dealing with countries or institutions that are often at conflict. It is in this context that Chris Oglen has called India as Asia's chameleon.

India has also traditionally supported a multipolar world as opposed to a bipolar or unipolar world. Addressing a conference in June 2021, the then foreign secretary of India, Harsh V Shringla said that "India values a multipolar international order, underpinned by international law, premised upon respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, resolution of international disputes through a peaceful negotiation and free and open access to all the global commons."

The post-COVID world order along with the Russia-Ukraine conflict has accelerated the process of global realignment. India has been seen to be hustling its way amidst the rapidly changing world order. From BRICS and SCO to QUAD, India astutely tries to manoeuvre its relationship with opposing nations. As the world order is being reshaped, India continues to take part in the meeting of BRICS and SCO so that the existing channel of engagement remains open especially with China and Russia. India has also made efforts to be a part of emerging alignments such as QUAD and I2U2, as this will help India in tackling the dual challenge of state sponsored terrorism by Pakistan and the aggressive behaviour of China in the Indian Ocean and along its land borders. India has actively tried to engage with different countries in a number of trilateral arrangements.

As the landscape looks different, so do India's partners. The relevance of the US and China is far more than anytime earlier. Japan has become an important factor in our calculations. The rediscovery of Europe is again under way, with France now as a critical partner. The Gulf has been bridged in an effective manner. ASEAN has grown closer, and Australia's relevance is more apparent. Africa is the focus of both developmental assistance and opening of new embassies. India's

outreach extends from South America and Caribbean to South Pacific and Baltics. Closer home there is an unprecedented investment in the neighbourhood whose consequences are becoming apparent

To tackle the forces of "deglobalization", if one may say so, India is trying to reduce its dependence on the outside world and gradually becmoing self-reliant. And this is evident from the government's focus initiative of "Make in India''. India has also renewed its focus to gain technological leverage by harnessing the potential of its rich IT professionals in all important sectors such as space, defence, telecom, agriculture, transport, finance and others. The Indian government has been very successful in digitalisation of its economy to a large extent, and it is willing to cooperate with technologically advanced nations of the world. And it has already begun this journey. Japan, US, France and Israel are its major partners on this front. Recently India has become the fifth largest economy of the world. And this has furthered the herald of the "Asian century", at least in economic terms, however this is yet to be replicated in the military realms. The ongoing geopolitical tussle is going to be fateful in deciding the future course for the entire world and Asia in particular. India's role and position is of growing significance in this context.

While on the issue of man and nature, New Delhi is probably better prepared now than in the past when India was widely seen as a part of the problem on climate change issues. Today India is no longer defensive on climate change and is actively engaged in shaping the international debate. India has also renewed its focus on renewable energy, and it is taking important steps in this direction. International Solar Alliance is one important initiative that is spearheaded by India and France along with other partners. Similarly in all important institutions, India has been constantly engaged in harmonizing the relation between man and nature by trying to bring out a consolidated voice of both "South" as well as "North".

Conclusion :

Even at the risk of oversimplification or at the cost of getting it completely wrong, what is important is to try and make sense of the changes that are observed at a large scale in the world today. This helps in not just comprehending or understanding the changes but also to come up with new perspectives.

Traditional international relations theories have not been very successful in explaining the present scenario of world politics. However, these theories are also not entirely redundant as many observers are still using their concepts to explain the changes that are happening in the world at present times. Constant debates are happening in order to make sense of these changes. While it may not be easy to come to decisive conclusions, but it can easily be concluded that tremendous geopolitical shifts are taking place and that India and China are the dominant factors in this shift. Further the system and institutions that came up in the twentieth century and formed the basis of the "liberal institutional order" led by the West is now facing challenges both from its within and outside forces. But that order has not yet subsided to the extent that it may be said to have collapsed or disintegrated. Neither the opposing forces have seen any substantial success at creating an alternate world order. Also, as the technology is getting advanced and human society is progressing through leaps and bounds, the challenges are also becoming complex. And no one country is equipped enough to deal with these challenges on their own.

At a time when coordinated global action is becoming more and more important, it seems that the forces of changing world order have been unleashed on many fronts. How these forces are going to align and to what extent India and China are going to shape the world order remains to be seen.

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