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RAISINA FILES

Debating Disruption
in the World Order

EDITED BY RITIKA PASSI & HARSH V. PANT



Raisina Files, an annual ORF publication, is a collection of essays published and disseminated at the time of the Raisina Dialogue. It strives to engage and provoke readers on key contemporary questions and situations that will implicate the world and India in the coming years. Arguments and analyses presented in this collection will be useful in taking discussions forward and enunciating policy suggestions for an evolving Asian and world order.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors.

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WE are witness today to particularly dramatic upheavals and sweeping trends – also called “megachanges”ⁱ – in political, economic, social, environmental, and technological spaces. The magnitude of change – whether due to individual factors, or an interaction among new and existing conditions – is such that ‘disruption’ is now the new normal: interruptions and shifts in the status quo that are altering the landscape of reality and patterns of lived experience. Individuals and political parties with decidedly closed agendas have been democratically voted, or are strengthening their bases, in the heretofore accepted bastions of liberal values; the global economic centre is no longer located on either side of the Atlantic, but increasingly east; globalisation is being interrupted by a “negative geopolitical narrative of growing protectionism,”ⁱⁱ but is rapidly picking up pace digitally; for the first time in human history, the majority of the world’s population – 60 percent – lives in countries with fertility rates far below what are required to replace each generation.³

The pace of change is also amplifying the impact of disruption in our lives. The world’s population is increasing faster than ever – from 250,000 years to reach one billion, to over a 100 years to reach two billion, to just 33 years to

reach three billion, to mere dozen to cross seven billion.⁴ The pace and spread of innovation and technology continues to quicken – from 50 years after its invention for half of American homes to have a telephone, to 38 years after its invention for the radio to attract 50 million listeners, to Facebook’s first year seeing six million users and within the next five, over 600.⁵ Data is cementing its status as the new currency of business and governance given its explosive growth – 2013-2015 saw more data being created than in the entire history of the human race, and in the next two years, 1.7 megabytes of new information is expected to be created every second for every human being on the planet.”⁶

That global politics, institutions, and norms are in flux is today taken as a given; what role are these large-scale disruptions playing in this era of transition? Populist and authoritarian ‘social contracts’ diffusing across the world are helping sound the death knell on the post-Second World War liberal international order; Asia, in becoming the world’s largest trading region, and introducing alternative economic institutions and visions, is upending the Western-led economic order. China’s rise, and the economic shift east and south, is vitalising certain geographic spaces as geopolitical theatres. The increasing pervasiveness of

technology is transforming technology giants into global actors with an increasing stake in the world order, encouraging a shift undeniably multipolar in nature.

Disruption contextualised against the concurrent conversation on a changing global order serves two key objectives. First, it allows a tempered construct in which to define and analyse sentiments and instances of ‘uncertainty’ and ‘disorder’ in today’s times. For example, discussion on American retreat from global commitments has admittedly introduced a measure of uncertainty into the global environment. If debated against the backdrop of political, economic, and social changes America is seeing domestically, potential pathways of US external engagement can be better materialised.

Second, it opens the door to understanding the strength and scope of potential transformations in the international system in the coming decades. As a country with significant immediate and longer-term investment in evolving regional and global equations and architecture – given its geography, demography, developmental challenges and opportunities, growing economic and military power, historic and aspirational role in Asia and global politics, and the increasing normative weight it carries – such an exercise may prove fruitful for policy navigation.

Towards this end, we brought together some of the finest minds across the world to unpack a few identified disruptive forces and their interaction with global politics in this edition of the *Raisina Files*. These have been grouped along the lines of actors, processes, and theatres: three major nation-states whose external engagements are seeing shifts; three processes that are re-organising political, economic, and social spaces; and two old and new arenas where geopolitics are having local, regional, and global repercussions.

While individual essays debate the disruptive quality of their respective subjects, it is pertinent to qualify the conversation with the following question: to what extent is change really occurring in the international order? Are meaningful changes we are witnessing – rearrangement of actors and power politics; processes seeing unprecedented pace and wide-scale impact; new theatres, geographic or otherwise, emerging – representative of a qualitative shift of our existing global system or a paradigmatic shift?

Understood as not only a distribution of power among political actors, but a system with organising rules, principles, practices, and institutions of world politics, the American-led “old order” established at the end of the Second World War is indeed under pressure.

Cases in point: as Asia expands its economic presence to account for a greater share of the world economy – more than what it ever was historically – the centre of gravity of global politics and economics is rapidly shifting eastward. The organising political principle of the liberal order is facing a crisis: Francis Fukuyama, who famously declared the end of history and the triumph of liberal democracy and neo-liberal capitalism as the modus operandi of the international system, himself now acknowledges that democracy is being threatened. Between 2007 and 2017, the share of global GDP that autocratically governed countries accounted for increased from just over 13 percent to almost 22 percent.⁷ Multinationals are continuing to edge out nation-states as economic entities. “[N]early 58 percent of the world’s largest 150 entities in 2012 were corporations, sprawled across various sectors like oil, natural gas, mining majors, banks, insurance firms, telecommunication giants, supermarket behemoths, car manufacturers, and pharma companies.”⁸

Challenging traditional power structures, however, may not be as easy as recognising changes.

Even as China’s four economic centres – Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, Tianjin – join the ranks of the top 10 cities in terms of urban economic power by 2035, already developed market cities – New York, Tokyo, London – retain lead rankings. Moreover, representation from other parts of the developing world will remain weak (Mumbai ekes into the top 50 with little margin to spare).⁹ Even as nationalistic rhetoric serves as the backdrop against which global dialogues are occurring, it is being subsumed in a larger narrative of “norm-fare” that is happening among emerging and regional powers, with India seemingly willing to lead the charge on openness and multilateralism. The fact of multinationals gaining ground is representative of a longer-term evolution of sovereignty. Even as increasingly, private companies are providing public goods – tech companies are in particular penetrating the governance space – the battle is far from won. Prognostications of “the global Corporate State”¹⁰ or Farhad Manjoo’s “Frightful Five” of the tech industry taking over the world¹¹ can be tempered with a more recent narrative of the return of the nation-state.

Clearly, the current global order is offering up resistance.

The concepts of critical junctures and path dependency offer an inter-related framework through which to help explain opposition to real, transformative change, as G. John Ikenberry has explored.¹² Critical moments, triggered by external or endogenous factors in an existing internation-



al system, present “powerful states the opportunity to lay down the ‘tracks’ along which inter-state relations run.”¹³ The ‘tracks’ are effectively a durable system of new rules and principles that entrench an environment of interaction favourable to those in power positions and which “command allegiance of other states.” Ikenberry identifies the end of wars, when an old international system is destroyed, as these major turning points: 1648, 1713, 1815, 1919, 1945, 1989. Rules and institutions are eventually “locked” into broader economic and social structures that reinforce and reproduce the established international order through eventual co-option by weaker and secondary states.¹⁴

The international system, in its perpetuation, may well see shifts in distribution of power and social forces, but these are likely to be episodic in nature instead of continuous and incremental. International architecture put in place is likely to persist – critically, “even after the interests of those that created [global] institutions have gone or changed.”¹⁵ Two key reasons help explain this. First, the cost of maintaining existing institutions will be less than the cost of creating, and then maintaining, new ones. Second, continued gains through perpetuation of an existing order may discourage new or emerging contenders for power to change the overarching international system. As Ikenberry writes, “The institutional logic of increasing returns is useful in explaining the remarkable stability of the post-1945 order among the industrial democracies – an order that has persisted despite the end of the Cold War and the huge asymmetries of power.”¹⁶ Economically, data backs up this proposition – the world’s economy has continued to grow every year since 1945 (save 2009, following the impact of the global financial crisis). In terms of stability, too, one can apply the same argument. The destabilising effect of China’s rise puts into sharp relief the longstanding credible US extended deterrence that, until supposed US retrenchment shifted the discourse, maintained peace in a free and open Indo-Pacific. The subsequent normative and strategic conversations engaging both emerging powers and US allies is thus an understandable consequence.

Ruptures in an existing order thus require sufficient critical mass for quantum change. Absent a great power war, are today’s disruptions building enough momentum?

Indeed, the essays in this collection reflect this point: analysis is largely in terms of changes to the current international order and not any potentially emerging one.

In exploring the US as a disruptor in the global order, Robert J. Lieber nixes a US retreat, instead bringing to the

fore revisionist powers as the immediate and real disruptors of the rules and longtime precedents of the current world order. Yun Sun presents a Chinese view of whether the rising power is a disruptive actor, acknowledging that its desire for reform is abated by political capital and economic gains accrued from the existing international system.

The conversation on Russia as a disruptive actor throws into light revisionist agendas within the construct of the liberal order around built around US exceptionalism. Even as Dmitri Trenin presents Russian ambition as a preference for a multipolar world, the modus operandi practically involves a pushback on the contours set by the US, for example in the Middle East.

And it is because of such a pushback in Asia – due to the rise of China in this case – that Abhijnan Rej posits three key factors of disruption in the emerging Indo-Pacific theatre. Interestingly, Rej also invokes the Indo-Pacific as a normative ‘anti-disruption,’ a response to disruptive Chinese behaviour in this geographic maritime space.

Samir Saran and Akhil Deo, in their essay, discuss how the interaction between the processes of globalisation, demographic change, and technology is resulting in a disruptive political outcome: an inclination towards identity-based politics. The broader narrative is one of how nationalist politics are interfacing with the liberal international order.

Pranjal Sharma, author of the recently released *Kranti Nation: India and the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, writes on the topic (as a disruptive process) but with a global perspective: the claim of technology as an “equaliser” potentially portends a correction of power asymmetry – technology as a level-playing field that can recreate equations and rules in international society. But the essay quickly re-establishes the remit of the existing world order by referencing existing systemic inequalities that technology can effectively reinforce, thereby strengthening existing power differentials.

The conversation on climate change governance as a theatre progresses in much the same manner. Karina Barquet routes the conversation away from the traditional developed-developing binary, and instead asks what geopolitical consequences climate change adaptation will have. The ensuing discussion reflects on largely traditional conflict and security preoccupations: for instance, countries in possession of rare earth mineral – needed in renewable energy projects – may become the petro-states of tomorrow.

Manu Bhagavan, engaging on the question of illiberal

“ To what extent is change really occurring in the international order? Are meaningful changes we are witnessing representative of a qualitative shift of our existing world system or a paradigmatic shift?

politics as an ongoing disruptive process, switches between what once was and what now is to advance a picture of ‘past is prologue’ – occurring in the same faulty international liberal order. The takeaway? Brexit and Trump’s election, cited as poster examples of disruption in the liberal order, are no surprise if the longer arc of minority rights is understood.

Tally Helfont likewise highlights conflict in the Middle East theatre as a “permanent” feature – with immediate regional and global repercussions in terms of security concerns and flows that characterise the current globalised world.

India as a disruptor

Against the backdrop of wider disruptions in the international system, India’s growing capabilities and rising ambitions are putting its own global role – and potential disruptive value – into sharper relief.

India has long been seeking accommodation into the global order as a major power, but it is only recently that its growing capabilities have given it an ability to articulate its desire in any meaningful way. As its partial acceptance into the global nuclear order has underlined, India is now part of the high table. Yet, it is equally evident that New Delhi will remain dissatisfied of the current global order until and unless it is recognised as a great power and is bestowed with similar privileges benefiting other great powers. The post-Second World War international system will thus continue to be challenged by Indian decision-makers. The India of today is articulating its desire to be a leading power in the international system without inhibitions, a power that is a rule-maker, not a rule-taker.

The manner in which New Delhi pursues this agenda offers scope to debate India as a force of disruption in the world order. Two layers of external engagement, where

firmer contours of India’s approach are emerging, are discussed here: strategic and normative.

Amidst the re-ordering of global balance of power due to simultaneous developments – the rise of China on the global stage, the uncertainty of American decline and retreat, Russia’s resurgence and its emerging equations with China and Pakistan – India’s traditional strategic outlook is undergoing substantial change. Flexibility is a defining characteristic.

India is shrugging off its ‘historical hesitation’ and inching closer to major powers, like the US, to collectively build a security architecture that attempts to share responsibility of governing common spaces. India’s deepening relationships with countries like Japan, Vietnam, and Australia, and the revival of the quadrilateral security dialogue among the US, Japan, Australia, and India, are illustrative examples of a convergence of interest with the bulwarks and supporters of the liberal international and economic order in the Indo-Pacific space.

At the same time, India is advancing and institutionalising platforms like the BRICS grouping that sees New Delhi converge with other emerging economies on the lack of representation and voice in the embedded power structures within the Western hemisphere. Even as ideological incoherence increasingly reaches fever pitch, the ambit of such an alternative platform is not to build consensus around values, but around issues of mutually beneficial interest and institutions that give these increasingly key countries agency to decide priorities.¹⁷


Given the wider unpredictability in the international environment, this is a strategy to find a middle way between two extremes – not sitting on the fence, or pursuing non-alignment, but mediating a pragmatic path that is as wide as possible for its rise. This could be India’s unique contribution to the idea of an emerging multipolar world order, an order where ideas, institutions, and idioms remain in flux.

At the normative level, too, the same approach seems to be taking shape. As a responsible stakeholder in an order from which it has benefited, India recognises the value of the underlying normative order. This recognition is currently manifesting itself most prominently in the maritime space that is seeing freedom of trade and navigation being challenged. At the same time, the differences that it has had with the Western-led normative order – due to its non-inclusion in the norm-making process that marginalised Indian priorities – continue to contextualise its engagement with the extant order. For instance, India's discomfort and continued opposition to certain elements in global trade architecture remains a persisting impediment in India's unreserved and unequivocal support for the liberal economic order.

Yet, for a country that was often considered a 'sovereignty hawk,' India is now more ready than ever before to pool sovereignty for the provision of global public goods. For instance, India recognises the benefits that cooperation on

shared challenges will yield; and thus the transformation readily visible in India's response to addressing climate change.

This conversation is being shaped by the structural rise of China, which is also challenging the material and normative basis of Indian sovereign claims. And this has pushed India into articulating an alternative normative framework in its bilateral and multilateral engagements. The articulation is particular in that it is attempting to avoid the unilateral tendencies in both Western and Chinese "donor-recipient" relationships and instead create a more equitable, demand-led, participative framework for global politics.

As the world undergoes dramatic disruptions, India's role is still being crafted by both external push and internal pull factors. As various actors re-evaluate their postures, processes of managing political, economic, and social spheres become more complicated, new theatres emerge, India will be a central stakeholder in most regional and global shifts. 

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- 1 As Darrell M. West defines: "Megachange refers to dramatic shifts in social, economic, or political phenomena" that are occurring on a regular basis. Megachange (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2016). As per the *The Economist*, megachange is "change on a grand scale, happening at remarkable speed." Daniel Franklin, "Introduction: meet megachange" in *Megachange: The World in 2050*, eds. Daniel Franklin and John Andrews (London: Profile Books, 2012), 9.
- 2 Arindam Bhattacharya, "Digital globalisation vs geopolitical globalisation: A tale of two worlds," *The Economic Times*, June 18, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/digital-globalisation-vs-geopolitical-globalisation-a-tale-of-two-worlds/articleshow/59173111.cms>.
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- 5 Richard Dobbs, James Manyika, Jonathan Woetzel, *No Ordinary Disruption: The Four Global Forces Breaking All The Trends* (US: PublicAffairs, 2015).
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- 9 Kentaro Iwamoto, "China's cities to rise to the top ranks by 2035," *Nikkei Asian Review*, January 11, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20180111/Politics-Economy/China-s-cities-to-rise-to-the-top-ranks-by-2035>.
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- 11 "Tech's Frightful Five: They've Got Us," *The New York Times*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/10/technology/techs-frightful-five-theyve-got-us.html>.
- 12 "Chapter 32: The Rise, Character, and Evolution of International Order" in *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism*, eds. Orfeo Fioretos, Tulia G. Falletti and Adam Sheingate (New York: OUP, 2016).
- 13 Ibid, 541.
- 14 Ibid, 540-2.
- 15 Ibid, 543.
- 16 Ibid, 546.
- 17 For a discussion on the relevance of BRICs, see Samir Saran, ed., *A Decade of BRICs: Indian Perspectives for the Future* (Delhi: GP-ORF Series, 2017), http://cf.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GP-ORF_BRICs.pdf.

IS THE US A DISRUPTOR OF WORLD ORDER?

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HAS the United States become a disruptor of world order? At first glance, it might seem so. During the past year, President Donald J. Trump has announced his intention to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Accord, renounced the effort to negotiate a Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, forced renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, called into question the opening of diplomatic relations with Cuba, demanded renegotiation of the Iran nuclear agreement, withdrawn the US from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), expressed skepticism about the European Union and America's commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, sharply criticised the UN as irrelevant, threatened to rain "fire and fury" on North Korea in retaliation for its illegal nuclear and missile programmes and the threats Pyongyang has made against its neighbours, and suggested it might not be a bad idea for Japan and South Korea to acquire nuclear weapons. In all, President Trump's "America First" language seemed to suggest that his administration might turn its back on America's indispensable role in sustaining the international economic and security order that it did so much to create in the years after 1945.

Two previous US presidents also have taken actions that drew criticism as departures from support for world order. President Barack Obama (January 2009-January 2017),

reacting against what he saw as the excessive interventionism of the George W. Bush administration, was inclined to pull back from seven decades of US "deep engagement" and international leadership. As I have argued in my recent book, *Retreat and Its Consequences*, that retrenchment was evident in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Examples included lack of a firm response to Russia's invasions of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, precipitous troop withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, abandonment of his previously proclaimed "red line" over Syria's use of chemical weapons, "strategic patience" (i.e., inaction) toward the North Korean nuclear programme, de-emphasis of international human rights issues, a "pivot to Asia" that was largely rhetorical, and allowing military readiness to decline. These and other examples of inaction alarmed allies and emboldened adversaries.¹

Moreover, prior to Obama, President George W. Bush (January 2001-January 2009) was denounced by his critics for pursuing foreign policies they deemed excessively unilateralist. Among the actions most often cited were the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 without formal authorisation by the UN Security Council, withdrawal of the US signature on the Kyoto Climate agreement, and continued refusal to join the International Criminal Court.

Before offering judgment on whether the US has become a disruptor of world order, it is essential to ask about the sources of disorder and, indeed, what is meant by "world



“ Fundamental to world order are sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the rule of law, traditions and long-established practices that have developed over the millennia. Seen from this perspective, the actual sources of world disorder are the revisionist powers.

order.” All too often, the term “disorder” is applied not to the most urgent and dangerous problems of regional and international security, but to more narrow issues involving the prerogatives of international institutions or the conventional wisdom about multilateralism and globalisation. A few choice examples may provide clarity about this distinction.

Limits of world order: the UN, Paris Agreement, and Iran nuclear deal

First, consider the UN itself. The world body was established in 1945 with four principal objectives: prevention of future wars, reaffirmation of human rights, respect for justice and international law, and promotion of social progress and improved living standards in larger freedom. Among the most crucial of these objectives was preventing the scourge of war. Since its creation, and especially since the end of the Cold War, the UN has sometimes functioned effectively, and at times admirably, in its peacekeeping missions (for which the US pays 28 percent of costs). But war prevention and peacemaking have proved far more difficult. The UN’s ability to function is frequently blocked by the opposition of two increasingly authoritarian – and themselves rule-breaking – regimes, Russia and China, through their opposition or outright vetoes on the Security Council. As for humanitarian intervention, the “responsibility to protect” has been enshrined in UN Security Council Resolutions since 2006.² Yet, more often than not, mass atrocities as in Syria since 2011, Iraq 2014, and Myanmar 2017, have unfolded without effective UN intervention to protect civilians.

In addition, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) makes a mockery of human rights, with current members such as China, Cuba, Egypt, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, who are themselves conspicuous violators of those rights.³ In practice, the UNHRC’s grossly disproportionate emphasis on condemning Israel for its real or imagined sins while ignoring or minimising far worse abuses elsewhere seriously harms the credibility of this body. And to round out the picture, those who know it best understand that the UN itself is grossly inefficient, overstuffed, and subject to corruption. In light of these deficiencies, the Trump administration has reacted by withdrawing from UNESCO and gaining agreement to a five percent cut in the overall UN budget for 2018-19. In any case, America continues to provide 22 percent of that budget, plus 28 percent of peacekeeping costs, and its periodic disagreements with the UN and criticisms of its agencies hardly merit the label of “disruption.”

A second example can be found in the December 2015 Paris Climate Accord. The problem of climate change is real, but the Paris agreement, even in the unlikely event that its 195 member countries ultimately achieve all of their promised targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, would still fall far short of their proclaimed objective, holding the increase in global average temperature to well below 2.0 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Moreover, the widely heralded commitment of China to the agreement often proclaimed as evidence of China’s embrace of world order in contrast to America’s defection amounts to far less than it seems. China, which already produces more than twice the CO₂ emissions of the US, has committed itself to halt the increase of its global emissions by the year 2030. In contrast, the US, which has been vilified for President Trump’s pending withdrawal, has achieved significant *reductions* in recent years as a con-

sequence of its own regulations concerning automobiles as well as incentives and subsidies for wind and solar power. Especially important in this regard is the use of hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) to produce copious quantities of natural gas, which has replaced coal as the leading source for domestic electricity generation.

A third example is the Iran nuclear agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), negotiated in July 2015, widely heralded as freezing the Iran nuclear programme, and sometimes falsely depicted as preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Illustratively, the then Vice-President Joseph Biden claimed that the agreement had “removed . . . the specter of Iran gaining a nuclear weapon.”⁴ Yet, the JCPOA provides at most an interlude, currently eight to 13 years, after which Teheran will emerge with modern centrifuge capacity for enriching weapons grade uranium, an advanced nuclear infrastructure, and the ability to produce nuclear weapons at a moment of its own choosing.

In essence, the agreement provides a legal glide path for Iran to become a full-fledged nuclear power. Prior to the JCPOA, Iran had been subject to serious UN, European, and US sanctions over its approximately two-decade pattern of systematic cheating on its nuclear nonproliferation obligations. Unfortunately, key UN and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) restrictions on Iran, imposing sanctions and forbidding development of uranium enrichment capacity and missile delivery, were largely abandoned in the effort to secure the JCPOA. In effect, the agreement provides a lax inspection regime, while making it extremely difficult for the IAEA to gain access to military areas while accepting Iran’s self-inspection, for example of the Parchin military site from which soil samples were provided to IAEA by the Iranians themselves. This procedure allows Teheran to claim it is in compliance with

the agreement.⁵ The remaining limits on Iran’s missile programmes expire within six years, and Iran is already testing reentry vehicles. These have no real purpose other than to carry nuclear warheads at some future date.

In view of these shortcomings, it is hardly surprising that in October 2017 President Trump opted not to recertify Iran’s compliance, and instead urged the Congress and foreign leaders to tighten sanctions on Iran and to amend the JCPOA in order to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons or intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Sources of disorder and the real disruptors

Fundamental to world order are sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the rule of law. Outright aggression, territorial conquest, crimes against humanity, and threats to commit mass murder or even genocide deserve to be regarded as the most serious actual or potential “disorders.” This is a matter not only of what the countries of the world have agreed to in signing the UN Charter, but of traditions and long-established practices that have developed over the millennia. Notably among these are the seminal contributions to international law in the works of the Dutch scholar Hugo Grotius, especially *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625), as well as the precedents established since the Peace of Westphalia (1648).

Seen from this perspective, the actual sources of world disorder are the revisionist powers, especially Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, as well as non-state actors such as Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State. In contrast, the bluster, rude tweets, and “Make America Great” rhetoric of Donald Trump pale by comparison. Consider each of the real disruptors in turn:

Russia. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia's post-Soviet efforts at democracy have been perverted and a corrupt authoritarian regime has emerged. Simultaneously, Russia has blatantly violated international law, the UN Charter, and multiple formal treaties and agreements. The seizure of Crimea in 2014, through the use of hybrid warfare and a barrage of disinformation, represents the first forced change of a European border since the end of World War II. In addition Russia has, with its proxies and its own troops, waged war in Eastern Ukraine, and Putin has threatened countries in Eastern Europe, especially the former Soviet Republics of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. In addition, Russia has intervened in the Syrian civil war with military advisers, air power, and weaponry, and in doing so has played a critical role in rescuing the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad.

The Russia/Ukraine case is especially revealing for what it suggests about the weakness of international order and the consequences of American inaction. In 1994, Ukraine relinquished a powerful arsenal of nuclear weapons it had inherited from the former Soviet Union. In agreeing to do so, in December 1994 it signed the Budapest Memorandum, a document guaranteeing its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The other signatories were Russia, the US, and Britain. Subsequently France and China signed as well, thus lending the imprimatur of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to the agreement. Yet in 2014, as the victim of Russia's aggression, Ukraine's appeal to the signers of the Budapest agreement fell on deaf ears. President Barack Obama called for the international community to respond and supported modest sanctions against Moscow, but he would not send defensive weapons to the beleaguered Ukrainians, instead providing 300,000 battlefield food rations.

China. Under Deng Xiaoping and his successors, China underwent extraordinary development and bided its time as an emerging power. But in reaction to the great financial crisis of 2007-09, China's leaders shifted away from their proclaimed objective of "peaceful rise." Benefitting from massive economic expansion and huge annual increases in the defense budget, Beijing under its current leader, President Xi Jinping, has seized disputed outcroppings, islets, and territorial waters in the South China Sea, built airbases there, and threatened neighbouring countries who sought to reassert their rights under the Law of the Sea Treaty. For example, the Philippines brought their case to an international tribunal in The Hague, which subsequently ruled in its favour and found invalid all of China's claims

in the South China Sea. Yet, in the face of China's disproportionate size and power, and its willingness to deploy both economic rewards and punishments, the Philippines, along with most of its neighbours, has opted to acquiesce to China's maritime expansion.

Iran. The Islamic Republic has made itself the leading source of disorder in the Middle East. By itself or through proxies, it exerts major influence or even dominates in neighbouring countries and threatens Sunni states and Israel. In Iraq, it plays a key role through closely allied political parties and it influences or controls powerful Shi'ite militias. In Syria, in deploying the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah, it played a major role in saving the Assad regime and turning the tide of battle against rebel groups. In Lebanon, via its Hezbollah proxy – arguably the world's most capable terrorist organisation – it possesses a military force more powerful than the Lebanese army and exerts a veto power over the elected Lebanese government. Moreover, with a massive missile arsenal supplied by Iran, Hezbollah has the capacity to hit Israeli cities and civilian targets in the event of another war, comparable to the one it triggered by its cross-border guerilla attacks in 2006. It has also been responsible for lethal terrorist operations not only in Lebanon, but as far afield as Argentina. In Yemen, Iran and Hezbollah support and arm the Shi'ite Houthis, at war with the ousted government that is supported by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The resultant fighting has precipitated a massive humanitarian disaster with no end in sight. As for the Islamic Republic itself, its leaders publicly reiterate their aim to destroy Israel – a state with which they have neither common border nor territorial claims – in effect proclaiming their intent to commit genocide.

North Korea. The regime of Kim Jong-un, as that of his father and grandfather before him, operates one of the most oppressive systems in the world, responsible for a vast system of prison camps and the deaths of untold numbers of its own people. It continues to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, threatens South Korea and Japan, as well as US forces in the Pacific, and has avidly sold nuclear and missile technology and components to would-be proliferators.

These revisionist states, though often benefitting from the existing open liberal international order, nonetheless make it a practice to violate the rules and longtime precedents of that order and seek to supplant or replace it, especially at the regional level or even globally. They are indeed

disruptors of world order. But they are not alone. Violent radical jihadist groups, most prominently the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, have also been lethal disruptors. In addition, failed states serve as sources of disruption not only for their own populations, but frequently for their neighbours as well.

The US role and the problem of collective action

Though he was much admired abroad, President Barack Obama's calls for the international community to "stand up" were often ineffective in achieving results. These and other efforts failed due to the problem of collective action. America has the unique ability to provide deterrence, defence, and reassurance. No other country or alliance or regional grouping possesses that capacity or the will to do so, especially when it comes to sustaining the liberal international order. Exhortations for others to "step up" do not elicit meaningful response unless the US is credibly engaged. Yet, in a world with rising revisionist powers, the issue of US leadership remains critical. Despite Trump's rhetoric often implying a go-it-alone approach, the US simply cannot be a free rider. Others can do so, but without Washington's indispensable role in extended deterrence and in leading with its alliance partners, the security, economic interests, and values of the US itself would be at risk.⁶

With the stunning surprise of Donald Trump's election as president of the US, foreign observers and Americans themselves have sought to comprehend the implications of the Trump presidency and what it means for the domestic and foreign policies of what still remains the most powerful country on earth. Critics in the US and abroad have expressed alarm at the Trump presidency. These views are held across much of the political spectrum, not only among liberals and Democrats, but among traditional conservatives as well. A prominent liberal internationalist scholar, John Ikenberry, has written with alarm that "the world's most powerful state has begun to sabotage the order it created. *A hostile revisionist power has arrived on the scene, but it sits in the White House*" (emphasis added). He goes on to describe Trump's instincts as counter to the ideas that have underpinned the postwar international system, including trade, alliances, international law, multilateralism, environmental protection, torture, and human rights.⁷

These criticisms seem harsh, but they are mild in contrast to some voices on the American left and in Europe. The columnist and former New Republic editor, Michael Kinsley, shortly after the election, wrote in *Vanity Fair* that "Donald Trump is a fascist... [he] sincerely believes that the toxic combination of strong government and strong corporations should run the nation and the world."⁸ European reaction has been even more negative and critics there have even drawn far-fetched comparisons with Mussolini's Italy of the 1920s or Germany in the 1930s.⁹

Alarms about Trump and his foreign policy are due in part to his own rhetoric during the presidential campaign, as well to his many unscripted "tweets" since the election and periodic statements that contradict his own administration's declared policies. Based on those signals, there is reason for concern. At their worst, these traits include abusive language, lack of interest or outright disrespect for allies, disregard for America's longstanding economic and security commitments, a shaky grasp of details, lack of consistency, and a tendency to make statements based more on belief than fact. Were a Trump administration actually to behave in that manner, it would mean continuing or even intensifying a pattern of retrenchment that had taken place during the Obama administration, which had tended to retreat from seven decades of US "deep engagement" and international leadership.

Nonetheless, after almost one year of the Trump presidency, it remains premature to draw definitive conclusions about foreign policy or overall strategy. Indeed, a pattern has begun to emerge that indicates Trump foreign policy is more likely to follow a traditional approach than involve a radical departure. As a former senior Republican foreign policy official, Elliott Abrams, has written, the Trump administration is pursuing many of the policies that would have been expected of a more traditional Republican president.¹⁰ Rather than implement the policies suggested by his presidential campaign statements, Trump's subsequent statements and actions as President have minimised or reversed many of these positions. Moreover, the administration's December 2017 publication of its National Security Strategy, while giving ample attention to American national interests, nonetheless is in many ways a reassertion of traditional US foreign policy themes.¹¹

Why? There are two broad causes: the realities of America's world role, which weigh heavily on any president, and a number of experienced and widely respected individuals whom Trump has appointed to foreign policy leadership positions. The effect is evident in policy

decisions. The President has moderated or even reversed some of the most controversial positions taken during the election campaign: he has embraced NATO, backed away from a rapprochement with Russia, reasserted a US presence in the Middle East, espoused friendships with Japan and other allies, warned North Korea, and sought to encourage China to apply pressure on Pyongyang.

With exceptions, much of Trump's foreign policy remains roughly consistent with America's post-1945 world role. On the whole, the weight of reality has proved more decisive than Trump's earlier rhetoric. All the same, there are good reasons to avoid complacency. Unresolved policy struggles among advisers, disarray in policymaking, and reckless improvisation in rhetoric and tweets have alienated allies, and confused friends and adversaries. Trump's own personal traits do cause unease and can affect America's credibility with friends as well as adversaries.

To be sure, President Trump's America is not without fault. But it is not the disruptor of world order that domestic and foreign critics have asserted. Instead, the principal deficiency, including under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama, has been insufficient engagement in sustaining the international order that the US itself did so much to create in the six decades after World War II. Its sins are primarily those of omission rather than commission.

The real disruptors, palpably evident from their actions as well as their words, are the revisionist states, most crucially Putin's Russia, Xi Jinping's China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and North Korea.

India in the US worldview

For India, the Trump foreign policy offers a real opportunity, though one that is not without problems. The December 2017 US National Security Strategy (NSS) explicitly pledges to "increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia and India." These words arrive at a time when there has already been movement to closer and more supportive mutual relations, as in the latter years of the Obama administration with its "pivot to Asia" and in growing cooperation between the American and Indian militaries. The NSS, with its expressed concerns about China's growing power and identification of the threat from radical Islamist violence, identifies shared interests. Nor are these merely rhetorical. It is commonplace but no less true to point to the US and India as the world's two largest democracies with mutual beliefs in the rule of law,


market capitalism, and open trade, as well as in avoiding China's disruption of international order in the Indo-Pacific region. Moreover, shared language reinforces these affinities. India's elites and more than 125 million of its people speak fluent English, and the Indian diaspora in America, more than three million strong, has become an increasingly assimilated, well regarded, and relatively successful part of the population.

Closer political, economic, and strategic cooperation thus presents an opportunity for both Delhi and Washington, yet achievement of these goals is not inevitable. On both sides, domestic considerations and other priorities can affect the relationship. For India, and specially the government of Prime Minister Modi, these include economic reform, infrastructure development, Kashmir, and the conflict with Pakistan. Personalities, too, can impact relationships. Both Modi and Trump have been controversial leaders who have appealed to populism and nationalism within their countries. Modi, owing to his role as chief minister of Gujarat at the time of religious violence in 2002, was even barred from entry to the US by the State Department in 2005.

For the Trump administration, economic nationalism, immigration, and infrastructure remain priorities. For example, H-1B visas facilitating the entry of foreign technical workers are being reduced. These measures could disproportionality affect individuals and businesses from India, including those involved in outsourcing. Then, too, unanimity on foreign policy issues, even with allies, cannot be assumed. The US has had a long, albeit uneasy relationship with Pakistan, to whom it has provided \$38 billion in foreign and military assistance since 9/11. On another sensitive issue, the UN General Assembly vote criticising America for recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital was symbolically important to President Trump, his supporters, and many other Americans as well, who saw recognition as acknowledging a fact – that West Jerusalem had been Israel's capital since its creation in 1948, as well as sacred to the Jewish people for some 3,000 years, and that Trump's declaration did not foreclose future negotiations concerning the status of East Jerusalem. While 65 countries either abstained, were absent, or voted against the measure, India voted with 128 others, including the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the old Non-Aligned Movement, and India's adversaries, China and Pakistan, opposing both the US and Israel, with whom it has been developing strategic partnerships.

Notwithstanding these issues, there is much that inclines

India and the US toward closer relations and few of the problems between them are likely to prove unsolvable. For example, in the case of Pakistan, angered by a persistent pattern of insufficient cooperation on terrorism, the Trump administration has withheld \$255 million in military assistance.¹² In doing so, the US might finally be

making good on warnings it had long given to Islamabad. In any case, the opportunities for closer strategic partnership between India and the United States are compelling. Shared concerns, strategic and economic interests, and real affinities for a democratic and stable world order make the two countries highly desirable partners for each other. 

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- 2 "Responsibility to Protect" resolutions passed by the UN Security Council include especially UNSCR 1674, passed in April 2006; 1706 in August 2006; 1970 in February 2011; and 1973 in March 2011.
- 3 Those countries are among UNHRC members for the period January 1-December 31, 2017. See <http://www.lan.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/CurrentMembers.aspx>.
- 4 Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Building on Success: Opportunities for the Next Administration," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 5 (September/October 2016): 46-57, at 51.
- 5 For a detailed treatment of the JCPOA's shortcomings, the limits of IAEA inspections, and specific violations of the agreement by Iran, see Yigal Carmon and A. Savyon, "Is the JCPOA Working?," Middle East Media Research Institute, October 30, 2017, <https://www.memri.org/reports/jcpoa-working>.
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RUSSIA AS A DISRUPTOR OF THE POST-COLD WAR ORDER: TO WHAT EFFECT?

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IN Russia's foreign policy, the notion of the national interest and the yearning for a particular global regime of the world order, including Russia's own status within it, are closely intertwined. Modern Russia has always had to work its way up the international rungs, seeking recognition by the high and mighty and admission to exclusive 'clubs' – as a great power in early 18th century Europe; as a member of the short-lived G8. Bolshevik Russia, with its universal mission of bringing the world to some sort of a socialist paradise, was a historic aberration. Traditionally, from the 19th century Concert of Europe to the 21st century "multipolarity," Russia has been coming out in favor of a pluralistic international regime of several major players, with itself necessarily part of that concert. Today, Moscow militates against the global order dominated by a single power – the United States of America.

Challenging US hegemony

After the end of the Cold War and the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation tried to fit into the emerging Western system on special conditions of some ill-defined co-equality with the US, which would have effectively meant Russia's participation in real decision-making. (Russia, since its constitution as a centralised state in the 15th century, has historically found it impossi-

ble to accept anyone's leadership over it.) When it became clear to Moscow that such a relationship was not on offer, and that Washington instead expected Russia to accept the reality of US global dominance and its own much-diminished status, Russian-American relations began to sour.

The process took several years, which saw Russia first distancing itself from US policies, as in the Balkans and in Iraq, and then challenging them head-on. In his 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference, President Vladimir Putin lashed out at US hegemony.¹ In 2008, Russia responded with force when Georgia, a former Soviet republic-turned-US ally, sought to take over a separatist territory protected by Russian peacekeepers. The "reset" in US-Russian relations initiated by US President Barack Obama did not last long and left few lasting results. Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012 and his policy of "sovereignisation" – i.e., eliminating foreign, chiefly Western, influence in Russian politics – strained relations, as did growing US-Russian differences over the NATO-assisted regime change in Libya and the war in Syria, where the US and its allies supported the rebels. Western leaders led by Obama boycotted the Sochi Olympics, in which Putin had deeply invested, but it took the crisis in Ukraine, which culminated in early 2014, to finally put an end to the strained Russia-West partnership and usher in a new period of adversity between them.

In Putin's eyes, the toppling of the government in Kiev



“ It is not clear whether recent Russian activism, which comes at a cost, will continue to be pursued. What is certain: Russia is back on the global scene, and will stay there.

and the arrival in power of a coalition of anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalists and pro-Western oligarchs constituted an intolerable threat to Russia's national security interests. As with Georgia in 2008, the looming threat to Moscow was a possible NATO enlargement all the way to the Russian border, with Ukraine a frontline anti-Russian country. Putin and his colleagues read the “coup” in Kiev as the West's political aggression in an area of vital importance to Russia.

No Russian leader worth his salt would have ignored such a sudden and massive change. By responding to this with the use of military force to secure Crimea, incorporating the strategically valuable peninsula with its naval bases into Russia, and giving military assistance to anti-Kiev rebels in eastern Ukraine, Putin essentially took Russia out of the post-Cold War system. Russia used force to take over a piece of territory; redrew borders to annex it; and supported an armed insurgency in a neighbouring country – all of this in a Europe that had come to consider itself as a truly pacifist community.

Russian protestations that it had done no more – actually, far less – than the US and other NATO countries had done in the Balkans over Kosovo; or in the Middle East in Iraq and Libya, failed to impress the West. Russia was expelled from the G8, branded aggressor and unlawful occupier of foreign lands, as well as a threat to NATO countries and other neighbours. Obama set out to isolate it politically. Russia was placed under a set of Western sanctions designed to hurt its economy, put pressure on the elites and the population at large, and make the leadership change course.

In the confrontation that followed, and which is still ongoing, Russia, the underdog vis-à-vis the West, has had to employ tactics designed to compensate for its relative weakness. It sought to keep its opponents off balance by holding snap military drills, taking higher risks while trying to keep NATO aircrafts as far as possible from the Russian airspace, and making decisions swiftly and secretly. This gave Moscow a tactical edge, but also caused

Russia's public image in the West to become exclusively negative, in some ways indistinguishable from that of the Soviet Union.

Rather than yielding under collective Western pressure, however, the Russian leadership dug its heels, the population rallied around the flag, and the elites faced the choice between staying in Russia and following the Kremlin's lead – or at least keeping their heads down – and leaving the country. Most preferred to stay. Building on its earlier “sovereignisation” drive, the Kremlin used the situation for a patriotic nation-building exercise. Putin's own approval rating climbed to over 80 percent, and has remained there ever since.² Having defended Russian interests in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, Moscow was now prepared to go on the offensive against the US-led order.

Russia's 2015 military intervention in Syria was a war of choice. President Putin may have decided against direct involvement and, while Russia's security would probably have suffered as a result of an Islamic State takeover of Damascus and the total collapse of the Syrian state, Russia would not have been disproportionately affected compared to other countries.

Yet, Putin decided in favour of Russia's first military operation outside the former Soviet Union since the unfortunate expedition into Afghanistan, and its first fighting engagement in a country with which it did not share a border.

The main objective of the Syria campaign was to make the point that Russia was capable of both thwarting outside attempts at regime change in friendly countries, and of stopping and reversing the tide of domestic or regional radicalism. By intervening in force in Syria, Moscow not only successfully countered Washington's policy that supported anti-Assad rebels, but also broke the de facto monopoly of the US and its allies on military interventions. In fact, Putin made Obama stop being dismissive of Russian military actions and accept Moscow's return to the Middle East as a fact.

Moreover, Russia was meanwhile also marching from

defensive to offensive to behind-the-lines operations. Prior to 2016, Russian officials mostly complained about US interference in Russian domestic affairs, such as funding Russian non-governmental organisations involved in politics. In 2016, Russian government-sponsored media outlets began to take an interest in the US presidential campaign.³

US accusations of Russia secretly hacking the Democratic National Committee's and the party officials' accounts miss the point. The most important part of the campaign was in plain view – Russian outlets, for the first time since the Cold War, began speaking out on domestic political issues in a foreign country, and broadcasting its coverage to that country's audience.

Even though this practice was not new, the means and methods employed were – and the target country's elite was ill-prepared to deflect the attack on the integrity of its institutions and values. What Russia did to the US in 2016 was comparable in kind, although not in scale, to what US and other Western broadcasters were doing to the Soviet Union in the times of the Cold War. By reacting painfully to Russian meddling, even as far as suggesting that Russian propaganda might have affected the result of the Presidential election, American elites betrayed their lack of confidence in themselves, their institutions, and their fellow citizens.

There, the Russian propagandists and their masters clearly overreached themselves. They have succeeded far beyond the original plan of sowing distrust in the US political system and its workings. Allegations of possible collusion between the Kremlin and some members of the Trump team have destroyed whatever chance there might have been of stabilising, even at a lower levels, US-Russian relations.

Instead, ties have further nosedived. As a result, the US, in August 2017, imposed fresh and even more intrusive sanctions on Russia. The US National Security Strategy, approved in December 2017, formally branded Russia, alongside China, a major power rival of the US.⁴

Back in the backyard

Russia's relations with Europe have also suffered.⁵ Moscow has made an ill-fated attempt to begin playing on European domestic political battlefields. Supporting France's far-right Front National, and even inviting its leader, Marine Le Pen, to the Kremlin for a meeting with Putin during the 2017 election campaign, did not increase Le Pen's chances of being elected, and did not boost Russian influence in France. Accusations of meddling were reported from a number of other European Union countries, including Germany. True or false – in the end Berlin was satisfied that there was no Russian interference with the Bundestag election of 2017 – Russia-EU relations were further poisoned, and destroyed any remaining trust between the two sides.

In principle, there is nothing wrong with maintaining contacts with opposition parties and groups in various countries: Americans and Europeans have always made a point of very publicly reaching out to liberal opposition individuals and groups in Russia, or for that matter in many places around the world. Russia's interest in playing a bigger role in Europe, swaying the Europeans closer to Moscow's position, and helping them to empathise with Russia is clear. The problem was not so much Russia doing this, but doing this awkwardly, without a general concept or a plan of action.

Although, like in many other cases, direct proof of Russian wrongdoing is still missing, Russian nationals are also suspected of having plotted to overthrow the government of Montenegro, a Balkan country which was at that time in the final stages of acceding to NATO. If true, and it is a big if, these moves would rather represent a degree of laxity over foreign operations than some strategic design. These suspicions of undercover activities to boost Russian influence are some times magnified to include the entire Balkan region, once an apple of discord in Europe, where Russia historically wielded significant presence, particular-

ly in such places as Serbia, Bosnia's Republika Srpska, and Bulgaria.

Moscow, for its part, used its symbolic ties to Belgrade – such as exchanges of top-level visits when the rest of Europe shunned Putin and joint military exercises – to demonstrate that it still had friends in Europe and was in no way isolated from it, despite Washington's efforts. There, Russia's actions were aimed less at creating a regional order advantageous to Moscow than at hindering US and EU policies of applying pressure on the Kremlin so that it changes its course.

Russia, however, did not shy away from pragmatic and perfectly legitimate outreach to those members of the EU which were looking for opportunities to trade with Russia, as Hungary; seeking financial assistance, as Greece; or were host to a number of Russian-owned companies, such as Cyprus. The EU has always been wary of Moscow's wedge-driving between its member states, given their variable attitudes towards Russia. In this time of US-Russia confrontation and deep alienation between Russia and the EU, mutual opportunism of some Europeans and the pragmatism of their Russian partners has come to be seen as a disruptive element of the European political landscape.

An expanded presence

Outside of Europe, Russia has proceeded with a more active policy in the Middle East,⁶ building upon its Syrian success. It managed to build a seemingly unlikely quasi-alliance with NATO member Turkey and Iran, which the US considers one of its main enemies, to support Syria; it offered its advanced S-400 air defence systems to US allies Turkey and Saudi Arabia, both of which are considering the purchase; it strengthened ties with Egypt, one of the principal recipients of US military aid; it allied with Egypt and the United Arab Emirates to support a Libyan military figure, challenging the Western-backed government in Tripoli and thus paving the way for Russia's comeback to Libya from where it had been eased out following Qaddafi's fall. For years, Moscow has been coming back to Iraq, where its positions were destroyed following the US invasion in 2003 and subsequent occupation. Seen from the US, Russia is both a spoiler and a beneficiary of the US partial pullback from the region; from Russia's perspective, Washington and its allies did not even understand the mess they had created in the region through their military interventions and support for the Arab Spring.

In Afghanistan, Russia has concluded that the residual US military presence in the country cannot prevent Islamic State-affiliated extremists from establishing a stronghold there. Russians also take a skeptical view on the ability of the government in Kabul, which they recognise and modestly assist, to establish effective control over the country. From the Russian perspective, the Taliban, who continue fighting against the US-backed Afghan forces, is an indignant movement that has no ambitions outside Afghanistan, and thus, despite its brutality, is far less dangerous than the Islamic State, which recognises no state borders. In a true *realpolitik* fashion, the Russians are seeking to solicit the help of the Taliban against the Islamic State, which means engaging with Pakistan, which has influence over the Talibs. Such a strategy undermines the US policy in the region, and leads to loud American protests, which Moscow essentially ignores as hypocritical in light of America's own dealings with the Taliban in the past.

In Latin America, Russia has stood by the leftist government of Venezuela, which is facing strong opposition inside the country and pressure from the US. Rosneft, Russia's state-owned oil company, has been seeking economic opportunities in the country most view as too risky to do business in. Russians have also been reaching out to other leftist regimes in the region, particularly in Cuba and Nicaragua. Gaining a presence in US's backyard was seen as an important objective during the Cold War; elements of this are certainly present in the current Russian foreign policy. The US is not yet unnerved by Russia's so far modest re-entry into the region, but this may change if Russia were to, for example, pursue a permanent military presence in the area.

Russia redefined

Having been confined largely to its post-Soviet neighbourhood since 1991, Russia is now redefining itself as a global actor,⁷ although a very different one from the Soviet Union. It has no universal ideology to promote, but a set of fairly traditional values to defend; it does not want to impose a global or regional order, but wants to be a player with a decisive voice; it does not go around the world spending money, but is looking for opportunities to earn money abroad. Russia's global activism comes as a surprise to many in the West, as it comes from a defeated and supposedly still declining country, and is not backed by sufficient economic strength, technological prowess,

or demographic potential. During Obama's second term, Russia was seen more as a nuisance rather than a serious threat to the world order, still largely dominated by the US. Under Donald Trump, Russia has been "promoted" to a global threat, and paired off with China as an adversary to the US.

Russia's and China's views of the global order are close. Both countries oppose US hegemony, although their approaches and policies are very different – Russia being more direct, in-your-face and non-strategic, while China is patient, incremental, and driven by a long-term strategy. Moscow and Beijing coordinate their policies on a range of world-order issues, from nuclear proliferation to cyber security, but they have not yet formed an alliance. Their current relationship can be best described as an *entente*: a combination of mutual reassurance (Russia and China will never work against each other), flexibility (they do not always have to be on the same page), and policy coordination.

It is not clear whether the recent Russian activism, which comes at a cost, will be pursued by Vladimir Putin's successors, even if the handover may be many years away. What is certain however is this: Russia is back on the global scene, and will stay there. It will also be an independent actor, affecting developments in various regions around Greater Eurasia and the wider world. Moscow will act primarily out of self-interest as defined by its leaders, and will be guided by a set of values markedly different from those of the West. It will align itself with various powers on the basis of national interests, but will shy away from too-close alignments, including with China. Having done its bit to shake up US hegemony, Moscow's next test will be how it will manage ties with others players, such as China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and the countries of Central Asia, to create a modicum of order where the US is largely absent: i.e. Continental Asia. It will only be then that disruptions caused by Russia in the last few years will have longer-lasting effects on regional equations and the global order.

India-Russia ties in a changing world

Russia sees India as a friend, and considers itself a friend of India's. However, the current relationship between Moscow and Delhi is very different from what it was during the Cold War. The "soft alliance" that saw the US and China as threats is no more. Both countries' policies are driven by national interests as defined by their respective leaderships. The exclusivity that marked the relationship in the second half of the 20th century is gone. As India is expanding and deepening its ties with the US, Russia is strengthening its *entente* with China, and reaching out to Pakistan.

However, current Russian activism that is directed against US global dominance does not affect India very much. Nor does the Russo-Chinese *entente* threaten India's interests: Moscow values its relationship with Delhi enough not to side with China against India. It is only when and if Russia grows more strategic in its foreign policy and starts engaging other major players, including India, in building a regional order in Greater Eurasia, organised around the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and a global community of major non-Western nations based on BRICS, that India may face a choice in its regional and global orientation.

Meanwhile, preserving the foundation of friendly relations with Moscow makes a lot of sense for Delhi. In the current international environment, India can and should keep a careful balance in its relations with both Russia and the US, without undermining its standing in Washington and Moscow respectively. While America is important to India for economic, financial, and technological reasons, Russia is a major geopolitical player in Greater Eurasia, which is becoming more closely integrated, and a crucial defence partner for India. The India-Russia relationship needs an update, not a downgrade. 🌐

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CHINA AS A DISRUPTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER: A CHINESE VIEW

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AS China's power continues to rise and Beijing flexes its muscle assertively, the question of China's view of and relations with the existing international order has become an acutely pressing one. The common perception is that China as the rising power will inevitably and instinctively seek to disrupt and replace the current international order. In fact, such a view is not necessarily unpopular in China. While China claims that it is a strong supporter of the current international order, the support is partial and primarily motivated by the privileges and benefits China enjoys from the system. And they do not prevent China's vigorous pursuit to revise and reform the existing order to reflect justice and fairness as defined by China. China envisions a "community of common destiny" as the future of the international order, which is above all based on the traditional Chinese worldview and moral codes. However, the materialisation of such a community will face many critical challenges both in theory and in reality.

China and the liberal international order

To discuss whether China is challenging or disrupting the current international order, we must begin with how such an order is defined. The "liberal international order," using

the definition of a 2017 RAND report, is termed as "the body or rules, norms, and institutions that govern relations among key players in the international environment" and "includes a complex mix of formal global institutions, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization; bilateral and regional security organizations; and liberal political norms."¹ Most popularly, the order is referred to as open, rule-based, and founded upon political and economic liberalism.

China selectively identifies with a portion of the liberal international order – the part associated with formal global institutions, especially the UN. Beijing publicly emphasises that "the current international order is centred on the United Nations, based on the mission and principles of the UN Charter and jointly established by the international community."² It is safe to say that China's enshrinement of the UN system as the foundation of the current international order is at least partially due to the privilege China enjoys at the UN as a permanent member of the Security Council with veto power. (The power politics embedded in the setup, however, are rarely mentioned in Chinese policy deliberations.) But China's endorsement of global institutions is less enthusiastic when it comes to the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other international organisations where China's influence is more qualified and balanced.

Beyond the UN, China's view of many other key com-

ponents of the liberal international order is far less positive. As a non-democratic country, political liberalism by itself is not a Chinese value. As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, China has a strong aversion to bilateral security alliances, such as those the United States has with Japan and South Korea, as well as to regional security organisations, such as NATO. For China, these security arrangements are the "legacy of the Cold War" and are targeted at the rise of China.³ China's reception of economic liberalism is at best mixed. While China enjoys the market access and benefits offered by the liberal international economic order, in many cases, China is reluctant to reciprocate the same to protect its own economy. China has adeptly used its "developing country" status to justify this reluctance and sought to attribute its non-compliance to unfair rules of the system. Indeed, in all these aspects, when China is preached about the "rule-based" international order, it cannot help but re-buff that such rules were made long before China's rise, and without China's full and fair participation. The implied message is that the rules should be revised to both reflect China's view and its new power status.

China's desire to reform the international order

On the question of whether China should change the international order, ostensibly there is a so-called debate in China among three schools. The Revolutionaries argue that China has to lead a revolution to replace the current international order with a new one dominated by the Chinese Communist Party; the Reformists argue against a complete overhaul but propose the revision/reform of the current order; and the Traditionalists believe that the Chinese traditional culture could integrate the Western culture to form a new type of world order through a "Second Reconnaissance."⁴ While the first school is obviously overly ambitious and extreme, a combination of the other two schools seems to reflect where China stands.

In the Chinese official language, China does not seek to revolutionise the current international order, but does aim at reforming the current system.⁵ Several factors contribute to China's lingering and partial attachment to the existing international order. Most importantly, as noted above, China still sees the value of and appreciates benefits conferred by certain key components of the current system, especially the UN. In a world where global institu-

tions headed by the UN still enjoy the broadest legitimacy for collective actions, China will not abandon the strategic leverage offered by its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The current international order also offers China levers to undermine its competitors. In the case of Japan, China enshrines the post-WWII international order as having permanently deprived Japan of the right to be a "normal country" and of its claims over the disputed Diaoyu Islands.⁶ If China abandons that international order, it will undermine China's own positions and cause undesired consequences, such as legitimising Japan's efforts to be a normal country.

Secondly, China privately regards the current international order, including US hegemony and the global trading system, as beneficial to itself in many ways. China has enjoyed abundant global public goods provided by the US at the America's expense, and there is little confidence that China has become either capable or willing to replace the US as that provider at the current stage. Similarly, China has benefited tremendously from its accession into the World Trade Organization, which led to the rapid expansion of the Chinese economy since 2001 through the required domestic economic reform and China's integration into the world economic system. In this sense, there are at least two conditions for China to seek to completely replace the current international order: 1. China determines that it has exhausted the benefits conferred by the current international order, or that its costs outweigh the benefits; and 2. China develops the capacity to be the provider of global public goods.

As these two conditions are unlikely to mature in the near future, what China has sought instead is a gradual reform, or a "peaceful evolution," of the current international order.⁷ China justifies this reform by citing deficiencies of the current international system, such as its inability to tackle the rampant non-traditional security threats globally, such as terrorism, and to bridge the gap between existing norms and the new reality, such as the one between the old international system and the new power equilibrium given emerging powers' (especially China's) rise.⁸ But such a calling is evidently not altruistic. Deeply embedded in China's desire for reform lies the aspiration to enhance China's role and authority in redefining the priorities, rules, norms, and approaches of the international order and, as such, to undermine the dominance of the West, especially the US.⁹

The Western countries and China might differ fundamentally over whether the international order should be



statutory and static. The challenge, and thus the disruption to the international order posed by China, is manifested through the Chinese position that no international order is perfect or permanent, and its adjustments to accommodate shifts in the global power equilibrium are not only necessary but also mandatory. As the Chinese official Xinhua News pointed out, China sees the primary injustice and unfairness of the current international order as lying in the disproportionately small voice and influence of the developing countries, especially the emerging powers, comparing to their sizes and contributions.¹⁰ The benevolent interpretation, which the Chinese President Xi Jinping has assiduously promoted at various global forums, is that China will support the enhanced representativeness and voices by developing countries in the global governance system.¹¹ However, an equally plausible but more cynical interpretation is that China is using the developing country slogan to disguise the expansion of its own influence and agenda. Such a realist view is particularly persuasive considering China's effective campaign to influence other developing countries' decisions through its economic and diplomatic leverage.

China's vision for the international order

In January 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping gave a most clear and definitive answer on the type of international order that China is pursuing: "a community of common destiny for all mankind."¹² The concept was promptly included in the report of the 19th Party Congress, formally establishing its status as the priority of Chinese foreign policy. China also applauds the inclusion of the concept in four resolutions at the UN, equating it to the anointment as consensus of the international community.¹³ The concept is founded on the assumption that the international society has evolved into a community of common destiny due to the collective challenges it faces, and the community will transcend all differences and maximise benefits for all.¹⁴ It calls for equal partnerships based on equality among all sovereign states, inclusive development through collective policy coordination, universal security through joint actions against global security challenges, and the prospect of all countries being "harmonious but different."¹⁵

While the concept of "a community of common destiny" appears to be pure propaganda to create theoretical

justification for China's behaviour, a careful examination of the cultural, historical, and philosophical origins of the concept reveals, in truth, an alternative vision of the international order to which China aspires. China's traditional cultural and philosophical conviction, as manifested in Confucianism in the past two thousand years, envisages a common world "under the heaven," or Tianxia-ism, formed not by ethnicity but a shared civilisation, especially moral codes and common values.¹⁶ The concept is different from the current international order based on nation states, which in the Chinese perception inevitably creates competition and conflict. According to Confucianism, the best way to influence other countries is not through force and coercion, but through moralistic absorption and integration.¹⁷

In this sense, China's proposal to build a community of common destiny is not necessarily pure propaganda to whitewash the Chinese approach. Instead, it does represent China's alternative vision for what the world order should and could look like based on the traditional Chinese culture. The Chinese make a distinction here between the "international order," where "international" emphasises the order among nations, and the "world/global order," which focuses on the order of the world as one organism.¹⁸ This new proposal reflects China's efforts to create an alternative set of universal values beyond the current international order and approaches to promote them. In terms of normative formulation, the concept is the biggest challenge China poses against the existing international order. Although China opts for reform rather than a revolution as the means, the eventual ends China envisions is fundamentally and philosophically different.

Will it work?

Although China's vision for a community of common destiny is widely applauded in China and Chinese leaders seem to have perfected its theoretical justification, the feasibility, and more importantly, the acceptance of the Chinese vision by the rest of the world remains a question. The norm of nation states on which the current international order is founded has been the prevailing concept of international politics for almost four centuries. For China to pursue a "community of common destiny," it will be torn between following the ideal of a moralistic world order and surviving the reality of competition and power politics among nation states. Beijing might genuinely har-

“ Deeply embedded in China's desire for reform lies the aspiration to enhance its role and authority in the international order and, as such, to undermine the dominance of the West, especially the US.

bour the compassion for a world of common destiny of all mankind, but it will be hard to convince other countries, especially its competitors, to adopt the same perspective. China will try to enhance the appeal of its vision through the provision of public goods – the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, for instance, is often characterised as such by Chinese officials. However, that strategy runs the old risk of rejection by the recipient countries due to debt traps created, as well as the risk of imperial overstretch for China (which is indeed a conversation occurring around the Belt and Road).

The Chinese vision of a "community of common destiny" also fails to address the issue of hierarchy in the international system. In other words, if there is to be a community, who sets and enforces the rules and according to whose moral codes? Although China would like to portray the world order it envisions as one where all countries are equal, that description is fundamentally inconsistent with the Chinese traditional worldview. In traditional Chinese culture, the world is hierarchical, manifested as concentric circles, with the kernel of civilisation – the middle kingdom – occupying geographical and moral superiority. Moral codes developed by the middle kingdom, therefore, would ensure world harmony once all countries abide by this hierarchy. But in the Chinese vision of a "community of common destiny," the conflict between embedded hierarchy and the principle of equality is left unaddressed. In particular, the matter of enforcing moral codes, or the proper balance between moral authority and coercive power, is entirely missing mention and discussion. China's own history is not short of wars against countries defying its authority. If China essentially still has to employ superior coercive power, even just to defend against non-believers in the process of building this community, it will be exceedingly difficult to justify China's pursuit as not just another form of hegemonic stability.

Last but not least, China also has to resolve the tension

between China's domestic authoritarianism and the current prevalent liberal democratic values discourse. If other countries do not approve of China's domestic political values, they are unlikely to embrace China's world vision, since foreign strategies are the derivatives of domestic politics. China has attempted to preempt this question by emphasising the moral principle of being "harmonious but different," meaning that countries should accommodate each other's differences in order to maintain world harmony. However, the implied imposition on other countries to accept China's authoritarian system almost borders on wishful thinking.

Where does India fit?

Most likely, India will be one such country to reject China's imposition and vision as it currently stands. China's policy toward India is a combination of an imaginary moral coalition against developed countries, and a realpolitik view of India being in structural competition/conflict with China in South Asia. On the global level, China seeks to strengthen cooperation with India on global governance issues to fight for a larger share for emerging powers. Examples can be identified in the cases of the New Development Bank, the BRICS grouping, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. However, on regional security issues, China still has major disagreements with India. In Chinese perception, India sees South Asia as its traditional sphere of influence. While China recognises India as the largest power in South Asia, Beijing by no means concedes to its exclusivity in that region.


As such, China's policy toward India has at least three layers of considerations, which are at times in tension with each other. Within the South Asia region, China maintains close ties with Pakistan and is developing relations with other smaller countries, such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, and

Bangladesh, to counterbalance India. In the broader Indo-Pacific region, China sees India as a competitor, and its alignment with Japan and the US as alarmingly aimed at China. But on the global level, China sees the need to cooperate with India as partners to counterbalance priorities of developed countries, especially on global economic and development agendas.

What forms a striking contrast to China's seemingly sophisticated policy design is a surprising sense of superiority toward India at the bilateral level. China fundamentally does not consider India as its peer, and sees the 1962 Sino-India war as a defining event that has permanently resolved any further contest for dominance between the two countries. Many Chinese see India as a backward and ineffective country with crippling internal problems and capacity deficiencies. After the recent Doklam standoff

and India's rejection of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese are gradually adjusting its perception, although a total change is unlikely in the short term.

Given China's strategic assessment and Indian frustration with China, China's desired Sino-India partnership to counterbalance developed countries in a reformed international order is a castle in the sky. China would like to believe and portray a Sino-India coalition and solicit India's cooperation vis-à-vis the global North, yet within bilateral and regional frameworks, China does not always see India as an equal partner.

Indeed, as manifest through its relationship with India, China still has a long way to go in reconciling its instincts for power politics and its ideal of reforming the international order. 

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PROCESSES

GLOBALISATION, DEMOGRAPHY, TECHNOLOGY, AND NEW POLITICAL ANXIETIES

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POPULATIONS are ageing globally, albeit at an uneven rate. Estimates suggest that by 2050, the share of the elderly (60 years and older) in the global population will double from 12.3 percent to 21.5 percent.¹ This demographic trend will be most noticeable in developed economies, such as Japan, the United Kingdom, and to a lesser extent, the United States. Meanwhile, other regions, such as Asia, are projected to host a relatively younger populace. In India, for example, the median age will hover around 29 by 2020.² At the same time, people across the world are on the move – whether voluntarily, in search of economic opportunities, or to escape vagaries such as political instability and hostile environments resulting from climate change. Some of the biggest movements have been from the global south to the global north – with statistics showing that over the past 40 years, some 82 million individuals have migrated to developed economies.³

Even as migration and ageing have different implications for various geographies, it is also true that the world at large has become the most unequal in modern history: just eight men own as much wealth as 3.6 billion people.⁴ The consequences of inequality are only further aggravated by a radically changing global economy. The first three waves of globalisation, driven by Britain, America, and China, relied primarily on manufacturing and industrial goods. Today, the certainty and predictability of the manufactur-

ing sector is fast unravelling. In its place, the uncertainty of digital technologies and a data economy will define the 21st century and globalisation 4.0. As a result, the traditional unit of political and economic organisation – the factory – is rapidly losing relevance, with complex social consequences in every part of the world.

Across the world, the interaction between demographic change, inequality, and technology are producing disruptive political outcomes: an increasing affiliation for identity-based sub-nationalist politics.

We find that in the most developed parts of the world – Europe and America – the economic and cultural anxiety of an ageing population is adding momentum to the rejection of 20th century liberal politics, and its ideals and covenants. Meanwhile, Asia, which is expected to emerge as the next locus of economic growth, may find itself hard-pressed to fulfill its potential, as demographic factors fuel social discontent and dangerous nationalist rhetoric. For its part, India's diverse and rapidly growing population, despite facing similar challenges of economic inequality and technology, has so far not agitated against globalisation. Perhaps the incremental liberalisation of its economy through the 1990s provided a safety valve that has allowed citizens to adjust to a rapidly globalising economy. It would be naive, though, to assume that India will remain immune to these developments in the future.

The subsequent discussion reveals three broad conclu-

sions. First, nationalist politics are making a comeback, sometimes accompanied by the election of strong leaders who promise certainty in a fluid world. Second, to varying degrees, Western states are exhibiting a reduced commitment to globalisation, multilateralism and indeed, to preserving the liberal international order. Third, it is unclear if developing economies in Asia, like India and China, have the capacity to maintain this global order or replace it with a new one.

The liberal retreat

Following the Second World War, the success of western liberalism was predicated, at least in part, on the rise of blue-collar work for a young and prosperous middle class that coalesced to “form a group whose power and size were unprecedented in history.”⁵ The 21st century has seen a disruption of this status quo. A study by the McKinsey Global Institute reveals that between 2005 and 2014, real incomes in developed countries fell for about 540 million individuals.⁶ Those who were most affected by this loss in economic security were middle class, older, white, and heavily dependent upon the manufacturing industry – the very same constituency that voted for Trump and Brexit.⁷

The anger felt by this populace can partially be attributed to the outsourcing of large-scale manufacturing to developing countries, especially China, which saw its own middle-class boom in the late 1990s. The global distribution of labour; outsourcing of industrial supply chains; and technological change made the relocation of manufacturing processes from industrialised nations to developing economies with low labour costs relatively easy. Today, the fourth industrial revolution – characterised by advances in robotics, artificial intelligence, and 3D printing – threatens to exacerbate the challenge. Economists Eric Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee argue, for example, that it is the substitution of labour by capital resources and automation, rather than increased global trade, which will be responsible for a loss in economic prosperity.⁸

The collapse of the manufacturing industry – around which communities traditionally coalesced – has led to anxiety about social identity. For example, research reveals that men marry less frequently as their economic prospects decline;⁹ fears about downward mobility amongst the older white middle-class correlates to premature mortality;¹⁰ and millennials in the West are far more likely to identify themselves as poor or working class as opposed to middle

class.¹¹ Additionally, in this new era of globalisation defined by technology, the older generations – likely to have strong ties to a factory identity – have found themselves bereft of the skills and education needed to cope with this change.

The loss of social identity amongst the working-class white in the West has also provided fertile ground for a cultural backlash. The offshoring of well-paying manufacturing jobs coincided with issues pertaining to immigration and race – real or perceived – in both the US and the UK. It is estimated that by 2050, more than 50 percent of the US population will comprise of minority groups.¹² Adding to this, it was the American ‘rust belt’ – the Mid-western states with the highest concentration of manufacturing jobs – that saw the biggest influx of non-white immigrants.¹³ Similarly, in the UK, the non-white population is expected to rise from 14 percent in 2011 to almost one-third of the population by 2050.¹⁴

Cultural and economic anxiety, caused by unequal income distribution and shifting race dynamics, has effectively disrupted notions of identity. As economists Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris note, older, white, and less-skilled men were more likely to feel that “they have become strangers from the predominant values in their own country, left behind by progressive tides of cultural change which they do not share.”¹⁵ The numbers bear out Norris and Inglehart's conclusions: 69 percent of Trump supporters feel that immigrants are a burden on society while 57 percent believe Muslims living in the US should be subject to more scrutiny.¹⁶

Access to digital technologies, and its abetting effect on the transformation of the public sphere into echo chambers, are only exacerbating the political trendlines towards populism and, indeed, polarisation. A study by the Pew Research Centre in 2014 found that social-media discourse on political issues was heavily polarised – often between liberal and conservative camps – which largely interacted separately.¹⁷ Research reveals that populist messages often get more traction online because of their anti-establishment messages.¹⁸

As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, the traditional guarantors of the liberal world order find themselves at a crossroads. For one thing, there is rising fear about the loss of jobs. Economic growth predicated on new technology will only intensify this fear. Second, instead of blue-collar work or specialised white-collar work, the coming decade will see the rise of “chrome collar” work, centred on digital skills and an informal economy.



“ India’s demographic dividend may well become what some call its ‘demographic disaster.’ Young, urban, tech-savvy, and mostly male, India’s burgeoning population threatens to unsettle social stability in the absence of high economic prospects and upward mobility.

As factory jobs disappear rapidly because of this change, individuals without the skills to cope with this transition will lose their sense of identity. Finally, this economic and cultural anxiety will often manifest itself as arbitrary rage against the imagined “Other,” perceived to have robbed them of already-constricted economic opportunities.

As things stand, countries have been unable to enact an effective policy response to the challenges outlined above. Around the world, a “Universal Basic Income” (UBI) is often considered the most viable option, given that generating manufacturing jobs will increasingly be difficult during globalisation 4.0. (That both the capitalists in Silicon Valley and the socialists in India are considering the same policy response, only underscores the gravity of the situation.)

However, the UBI only addresses economic anxiety. In the previous era, an individual’s sense of purpose and communal affiliation was heavily dependent on factory jobs and geographical proximity. Without addressing these concerns, purely economic strategies run the risk of subsidising an angry and culturally anxious population, who are likely to find purpose in identity-based mobilisations.

Whither the ‘Asian Century’

Western industrialised nations are not the only states affected by globalisation and technology. Asian countries, which were the primary beneficiaries of economic integration, have still been unable to achieve parity with the West in terms of per-capita incomes. The region’s complex demographic shifts will only make this task more difficult.

While Asia is predicted to host almost 60 percent of the world’s ageing population by 2030, many states will also struggle to provide employment to their young labour

force.¹⁹ China’s median age, for example, will have reached 46 by 2050, while other states such as the Philippines and Indonesia will continue to enjoy a demographic dividend well into that period.²⁰ Simultaneously, they will find themselves struggling with the same phenomena disrupting the established political framework in the West – rising domestic inequality, automation of industrial processes, and nationalist rhetoric.

Of all the Asian states, China has most successfully leveraged its cheap, young, and un-educated labour force to benefit from the processes of globalisation and become the world’s largest economy in real terms. Having reaped its demographic dividend, China is now intent on reshaping the liberal international order, predominantly through economic statecraft. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly declared his commitment to a new era of globalisation, albeit with Chinese characteristics. Scholars and academics in the country are triumphantly celebrating a rejection of Western leadership, selling in its place a notoriously vague “Beijing consensus.”²¹ The most visible demonstrations of this intent are the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative and the China-led Regional Economic Comprehensive Partnership (RCEP) that together seek to create a new Asian trade and economic architecture.

Just like the West, however, demographic shifts will complicate China’s interaction with the new era of globalisation that is increasingly predicated on digital technology. China’s export-reliant manufacturing boom resulted in over 200 million individuals migrating from the hinterlands to more affluent coastal cities. A potential downturn in these manufacturing sectors is likely to aggravate social unrest amongst this demographic.²² Many of these individuals are also young men, a result of China’s skewed sex ratio of 118 males to 100 females, and are more susceptible to violence and instability.²³ Moreover, as China

continues to move up the value chain and emerges as a digital powerhouse, most of the gains will accrue to the prosperous and skilled urban class at the expense of China’s rural ageing population, which is estimated to rise to about 125 million by 2030.²⁴

These demographic pressures will not only stymie China’s ability to capitalise on the gains it made under the last phase of globalisation, but will also limit Beijing’s ability to offer a viable alternative to a Western-led economic architecture under globalisation 4.0. This challenge portends both domestic and international consequences: scholars believe that Xi is likely to engage in diversionary nationalism and geopolitical posturing to “compensate for the political harm of a slower economy, to distract the public, to halt rivals who might use nationalist criticisms against him, and to burnish his own image.”²⁵

While China has risen to global prominence on the back of its young population, Japan now finds itself in a situation where it must generate economic growth and productivity from a population that is rapidly ageing. This reality exacerbates Tokyo’s anxiety about China’s economic rise and regional dominance, resulting in hawkish and nationalist attitudes towards its larger neighbour, and an attempt to create alternative institutions in the Asian space. Thus Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s continued march forge a new Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), even without American support, as an alternative to the China-led RCEP. It bears noting that the TPP, by Tokyo’s calculation, is also better suited towards supporting investments abroad – a strategy which benefits Japan’s capital-intensive and ageing economy – as opposed to the RCEP, which prioritises export-led growth premised on cheap labour.²⁶

In other parts of Asia, a young polity embittered by years of corrupt dynastic politics, inequality, and poor governance has provoked resentment against political establish-

ments that have taken on their own unique characteristics. The rise of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and Joko Widodo in Indonesia is a testament to this political disenchantment.²⁷ That these two leaders from relatively humble backgrounds came to power in democratic governments, carrying with them a populist appeal and displaying disregard for conventional political rhetoric, is the true indicator of disruption in the political landscape.

In the Philippines, for example, the combined wealth of 10 percent of the population is over twice that of the poorest 40 percent.²⁸ Strongman Duterte’s sharp rhetoric camouflaged a savvy campaign that relied heavily on social media and focused almost exclusively on remedying this inequality. That Manila’s young population responded enthusiastically to Duterte’s violent anti-narcotics campaign reflects that they are discontent with a corrupt and ineffective judiciary and an inept law enforcement, who were perceived as agents of the elite establishment peddling inequality. Similarly, in Indonesia, Joko Widodo is tasked with creating new economic opportunities, and building social and physical infrastructure to address its burgeoning demographics. However, Indonesia’s large Muslim population has become increasingly radicalised, and communal rhetoric has taken on a viral and virulent anti-China strain. Again, inequality is a trigger: almost all of Indonesia’s wealthy are the minority ethnic Chinese, and are widely perceived to be corrupt.²⁹

The interactions between demographic change, income inequality as a fruit of past waves of economic globalisation, and technology seem to be producing an Asia that is hostile towards economic and cultural elites, mainstream politics, and established institutions. If in the West, an anxious, ageing, and predominantly white population elected leaders who expressed discontent with globalisation and multiculturalism, in the East, in Philippines and

Indonesia, an aspirational young population is responding in a similar manner – signaling a global return to nationalism. This hypothesis is buoyed by a recent survey by the Pew Research Centre which suggested that approximately 50 percent of the respondents in the Philippines and Indonesia supported authoritarian rule.³⁰ And China, too, may see an increase in nationalistic rhetoric even if only as a diversionary tactic.

The consequences of these dynamics on the potential of the ‘Asian century’ are far-reaching. First, Asian states must contend with the fact that the era of manufacturing-led growth has run its course. A new phase of economic growth defined by digital technology will challenge their ability to create new jobs, aggravating the possibility that Asian countries will get old before they get rich. Second, demographic pressures – on both sides of the age spectrum – will strain countries that, to begin with, exhibit weak stake capacity. Coupled with the rise of nationalist rhetoric across the region, their ability to play a role in global politics becomes more questionable. Third, to the extent that Asian states will engage with international politics, it will often be self-serving and defined by national imperatives.

The Indian exception?

India is no stranger to these developments. In the 21st century, India is primed to have the largest working-age population in the world, an estimated 485 million by 2030.³¹ This large number presents an enduring challenge for India’s polity, as currently more than 30 percent of India’s youth are unemployed, uneducated, and unskilled.³² Even as India attempts to expand its industrial capabilities, this endeavour will be challenged by automation, robotics, and widespread digitisation. Perhaps China was the last economy to use labour arbitrage to enable its economic transformation, driven by manufacturing. India will have to undertake its quest for jobs in a tumultuous global economy disrupted by the fourth industrial revolution.

Adding to the structural challenge that employment will pose, India is witnessing significant internal migration from agrarian states, like Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, to urban centres, such as New Delhi and Tamil Nadu.³³ Between 2011 and 2016, estimates indicate that at least nine million individuals migrated within India annually.³⁴

According to the United Nations, this will result in India having an urban population of over 800 million by

2050.³⁵ It is clear that India’s cities will be ground zero for social, cultural, and economic changes. This will happen even as they are primed to emerge as key economic units – already, 60 percent of India’s GDP is tied to cities, a figure that is likely to rise to 70 percent by 2030.³⁶ As a result, a young and aspirational populace is also eschewing rural spaces for the imagined economic opportunity of cities. Figures suggest that India’s young urban population has almost doubled over the past 20 years.³⁷ However, the country is unable to invest in urban infrastructure and generate economic opportunities, resulting in urban sprawl, rising slum populations, and a considerable number of people living below the poverty line – as high as 25 percent by some estimates.³⁸

These characteristics – dense populations, substantial migratory flows, and interaction amongst a multitude of regional identities – make the social consequences of inequality even more pronounced. While the top 10 percent of citizens control the majority of India’s wealth, its so-called “middle class” – an estimated two percent of the population – has been left struggling. The disproportionate wealth gap is largely a result of skewed economic development, lax regulatory measures, and a large informal sector. The top one percent of Indians have seen their share of national income grow by 17 percent since 1982, while the bottom 50 percent’s share has dropped by nine percent.³⁹ Research by Piketty further suggests that India’s young today are less likely to capture a high share of economic growth when compared to their forebears, highlighting that only between 1951-1980 did the middle 40 percent of India’s population capture a majority of its wealth.⁴⁰

The wealth disparity is even more drastic due to underreporting,⁴¹ with tax avoidance exacerbating inequality and stroking further resentment amongst the underprivileged classes. Tax evasion has also hampered the government’s ability to enact economic reforms. India’s tax-to-GDP ratio, which currently stands at 16.6 percent, is 17 percent lower than the country’s counterparts in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Without a sufficient revenue base, India has largely found itself unable to meet the human development demands of what is soon to be the largest population in the world.

Hamstrung by this economic condition, political parties in India have struggled to respond to these complex socio-economic realities. The Congress Party, for example, chose to create an economic safety net and guarantee wage earning to India’s rural population under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for his part, has decided to highlight the importance of employment generation, entrepreneurship, and a healthy business environment.

It is not clear if either of these responses has been truly effective. Politicians will thus often resort to identity-based mobilisation for electoral gain. A young population disillusioned with the lack of economic opportunity and social mobility has shown itself especially vulnerable to such appeals. This has further fractured India’s multiple fault lines – whether it is on the basis of caste, religion, language or ethnicity.

Evidence of such identity-based mobilisation has manifested itself across the nation. In India’s financial hub, Mumbai, for example, the Shiv Sena, a regional political party, has gained notoriety for its ethnocentric politics. Communal violence in India is on the rise as well, having increased by 20 percent in the past three years, with many incidents occurring in Uttar Pradesh, home to both the largest state population in the country and emerging urban centres.⁴² In the past few years, agitation for employment and education has often originated from caste groups, such as the Patels in Gujarat and the Jats in Haryana. Further, this discontent also almost entirely has a male face, with 17 million more men than women among the younger age brackets.⁴³ This surplus of young men, combined with a dearth of employment opportunities and the rise of identity politics, has created a dangerous cocktail, which can lead to sustained social unrest.

Technology has only served to amplify this anger. Ostensibly, the internet and social media were meant to connect communities. In reality, they have served to make divisions more apparent as individuals gravitate towards others that share their biases. Further, the two-way architecture of social media generates an often-unfilled expectation of a responsive government, creating a communication paradox. While social media might act as outlet for youth discontent, it is not always clear if anyone is listening. The voices that aggregate over digital networks see their ambitions thwarted by restrictive social hierarchies and an incompetent government, often compelling them to mobilise in physical spaces to demand cognisance of their grievance. One of the earliest recognisable instances of digitally networked protests in India was the 2011 anti-corruption movement.⁴⁴ Young Indians have taken to the internet to

voice their disapproval of, and angst over, the government on almost every major public debate since.

India’s demographic dividend may well become what some call its ‘demographic disaster.’ Young, urban, tech-savvy, and mostly male, India’s burgeoning population threatens to unsettle social stability in the absence of high economic prospects and upward mobility.

India’s story, then, is similar to developments in the rest of the world. It is also surprisingly different in one instant. First, just like in other parts of the world, India will struggle to generate economic opportunity for its young populace in a new era of globalisation. As a result, strong leadership will thrive by generating heat and noise through nationalist and sub-nationalist rhetoric in the coming decades. Second, the loss of manufacturing jobs and its implications on the social order due to the attendant anxieties discussed earlier will increasingly result in individuals seeking refuge within their primal identities. Demographic divisions such as religion, caste, language, and ethnicity will trump economic moorings.

What is unique about the Indian experience is that, in many instances, it has expended political capital to further the cause of plural internationalism. In 2015, New Delhi championed the cause of mitigating climate change at the Paris Conference and continues to support a global renewable energy agenda. Even at the most recent WTO trade talks in Argentina, it was the US that opposed taking forward the agenda of trade liberalisation, while India was keen on salvaging it.⁴⁵ Modi has repeatedly cautioned that the “gains of globalisation” must not be risked.⁴⁶

Indeed, India realises it has limited room to manoeuvre. It can only navigate today’s hyper-anxious global mood by investing political capital and resources to sustain multilateralism, free and open trading regimes, and strive to seek new economic opportunities that can be derived from global integration. However, it will have to also craft a new governance framework for doing this in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution. No one else needs this more than India, and this will benefit India the most. It cannot afford to be isolationist or parochial. As Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar aptly summed up at Raisina Dialogue 2017, the poser for India is the following: “Can India make a difference – by being different?”⁴⁷

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MINORITY REPORT: ILLIBERALISM, INTOLERANCE, AND THE THREAT TO INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

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IN August 2017, an array of groups attempted to “Unite the Right” in a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, ostensibly to protest the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, the famous Civil War general and symbol of the Old South and its heritage of white supremacy. On the night of the 11th, a large group of mostly young, visibly angry, white men marched through the town carrying tiki torches and shouting “you will not replace us” and “white lives matter,” chants clearly meant to assert their racial superiority and hyper-masculinity, ideas consistent with the neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan sympathies of march organisers. The rally ended with a bout of violence near the Lee statue.¹ The next day, the group held a second, larger rally, only this time, they were met by anti-fascist counter-protestors who sang songs and demonstrated to show their opposition to the “alt-right’s” message of hate. James Alex Fields, an Ohio man apparently in town to participate in the right’s rally, allegedly drove his car into the opposition crowd, throwing people into the air, and killing one, a young woman named Heather Heyer.²

The Charlottesville march was a brazen effort to “put minorities in their place,” by asserting raw, majoritarian power. White nationalists, dressed in khaki pants and white polo shirts, were eerily reminiscent of Nazi demonstrators from an earlier time: convinced that they represented the ideal, Aryan man, Hitler’s acolytes were often seen literally shoveling aside those they considered inferior.³

The events in Virginia, which received widespread coverage, were shocking in their savagery. But they were hardly isolated incidents. As a candidate, Donald Trump began his campaign for President of the United States by declaring that Mexican immigrants to the country were “rapists” who “have lots of problems...they’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime.” Continuing his diatribe, he exclaimed, “It’s coming from all over South and Latin America, and it’s coming – from the Middle East. But we don’t know.”⁴ His solution was both simplistic and horrific: to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico, to ban Muslims from entering the country, and to restrict legal immigration. But Trump’s depredations had just begun. He challenged a judge based on his ethnic heritage, he mocked a disabled reporter, and he repeatedly denigrated women. He directed a particular venom at African Americans. Together with a much longer history of race-baiting comments, and a bizarre silence in the face of the Charlottesville tragedy, Trump has created an atmosphere in which white nationalists have become emboldened. Indeed, they now believe they have the support of the American president.⁵

The results have been at once distressing and predictable. According to the US Federal Bureau of Investigation’s annual report, hate crimes within the country rose dramatically over the course of 2016, and spiked right around the time of Trump’s election. Jewish and black people



were subjected to the most attacks, while incidents of anti-Muslim violence saw the largest increase.⁶ These trends have continued to worsen over the course of 2017. Killings of transgender people have hit a record high, according to the Human Rights Campaign.⁷ Anti-Semitic events are up 70 percent in New York State alone, according to the Anti-Defamation League, while anti-Muslim activities rose 91 percent nationally in the first half of the year, according to the Council on American-Islamic Relations, both when compared against the same period in 2016.⁸

But the US is just one corner of the world witnessing increasing instances of violence against minorities. Coinciding with the Brexit campaign and its aftermath, Britain, too, saw a 30 percent increase in hate crimes from March 2016 to March 2017, the “largest year-to-year increase in the five years that data has been collected” by the Home Office.⁹ Regional police forces paint an even more dire picture: a 100 percent increase in racially and religiously motivated attacks following the vote to leave the European Union.¹⁰ In Germany, according to Amnesty International, violence based on race is at its highest levels since the end of the Second World War.¹¹

In India, the news is much the same. Since 2014, the number of crimes against Muslims and Dalits, and religious minorities more broadly, has climbed steeply upwards, according to a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.¹² Open Doors, an organisation that tracks the persecution of Christians worldwide, ranked the country fifteenth on its 2017 World Watch List.¹³

In what is surely one of the most alarming facets of our illiberal moment, distinct, diabolical, and deeply dangerous divisions are emerging in nation-states across the world. Authoritarian populists have tacitly supported a brutal majoritarianism in some cases, and actively fostered it in others, stirring resentments and animosities. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, illustrating this point, recently declared that “mixing cultures will not lead to a higher quality of life but to a lower one. This should be forestalled.... In the end, the majority will follow our views.”¹⁴ US Congressman Steve King, a supporter of Trump and an admirer of the Dutch Party of Freedom Leader Geert Wilders, cited this and announced: “diversity is not our strength.”¹⁵

We have been here before, when in the interwar period of the twentieth century malicious actors stoked fears and resentments to turn latent hostilities into visceral ones. Then, as now, an imperfect tapestry of international agree-

ments loosely stitched together by idealists gradually came apart at the seams. The ensuing carnage remains the worst the world has ever seen.

Now, once again, we stand watching as the fragile post-war order unravels around us. Can we learn from our past mistakes in time to address the weaknesses of the liberal international order, and to create more sustainable and just systems to manage global relations for the future?

AFTER World War I, the victorious Entente powers, guided by the liberal internationalism of US President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, opted to create a new League of Nations to ensure the future peace. Along with the idea of safeguarding against future war, what was central to the new international organisation were a series of minority rights treaties. The victors wished to impose harsh penalties upon the Central Powers as a cost for aggression and as compensation for all that they had endured.

The old, multi-national Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian – as well as the German and even the Russian – empires all dissolved at the end of the war. A number of smaller successor states and mandates emerged in their place.¹⁶ These territories were very diverse, and the treaties were put into place as a protective measure to ensure that new state citizens would be treated fairly and justly. As French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau wrote to Poland concerning its specific arrangement:

This Treaty does not constitute any fresh departure. It has long been the established procedure of the public law of Europe that when a State is created, or even when large accessions of territory are made to an established State, the joint and formal recognition of the Great Powers should be accompanied by the requirement that such States should, in the form of a binding international Convention, undertake to comply with certain principles of Government.... It is on the support which the resources of these Powers will afford the League of Nations that the future Poland will to a large extent depend for the possession of these territories. There rests, therefore, upon these Powers an obligation, which they cannot evade, to secure in the most permanent and solemn form guarantees for certain essential rights which will afford to the inhabitants the necessary protection, whatever changes may take place in the internal constitution of the Polish State.¹⁷

“Ultimately, we must grapple with what *citizenship* means in the twenty-first century. Where do stateless peoples fit into the equation?”

Wilson himself framed things less idealistically, doing so within the context of competing interests and compulsory “collective security”: “Nothing, I venture to say, is more likely to disturb the peace of the world than the treatment which might in certain circumstances be meted out to minorities. And therefore, if the great powers are to guarantee the peace of the world in any sense, is it unjust that they should be satisfied that the proper and necessary guarantees have been given?”¹⁸

Despite such assertions, the Paris Peace rested on a shaky foundation. Its most critical weakness stemmed from the US itself, where the president had been unable to sell his foreign policy plans to his own people. The American Senate failed to ratify the necessary treaty, thus rejecting membership in the League of Nations. Moreover, all of the Great Powers exempted themselves from the Minority Treaties on the grounds that they were already “civilised,” a term which, of course, they themselves defined howsoever they wished. In practice, the US would brook no interference with how it treated African Americans, while Britain and France wanted to shield their imperial policies.¹⁹ As a result, Japan got nowhere when it tried to insert racial equality language into the League’s covenant.²⁰

The Minority Rights regime of the interwar period was therefore hobbled by hypocrisy from the outset. Within the confines of how they were conceived – select application only to new states and European peoples – the treaties did get several things right. Historical precedent was taken into account. Advocates provided clear and compelling rationales. And, most significantly, the treaties took monitoring and enforcement seriously. But advocates and policymakers failed spectacularly in one crucial respect: they did nothing to cultivate the consent of the governed. Most states, especially those with substantial, local minority populations (as opposed to migrant outsiders or “external minorities”), resisted complying with the treaties fully. Poland, for instance, allowed anti-Semitic activities to proceed even as they made some effort to incorporate Jews into the democratic process.²¹ Since the Great Powers

were themselves guilty of discriminatory practices, there was simply no authority that could make a larger, moral case, or a political one, to put meat on the legal bones and to make minority rights a living, breathing idea.

Germany, perhaps in a twist of irony, made the greatest effort to make the minority rights system work, arguing that loopholes and exemptions had to be eliminated, and that all countries, Germany included, needed to opt in. Gustav Stresemann, a Foreign Minister of the Weimar Republic, warned in 1929: “It is precisely with regard to the protection of minorities that many countries have set their hopes on the League and have believed that the League would bring support to all whose religious and other sensibilities are not those of the State in which they live. The League must protect minorities and respect their rights. If it does not do so, these Powers may well ask themselves whether the League still represents the ideal which induced them to join.”²²

While he would be proven right, he could not have foreseen that the dagger to the heart of the system would be wielded by his own country. By the 1930s, Adolf Hitler had come to power on a platform of ethno-nationalism, talking of German racial pride. Hitler made much of the fact that Germans were in fact the largest ethnic minority in Eastern Europe at the time. Crucially, as the historian Mark Mazower has explained, the Nazis retheorised the idea of the minority to fit their warped worldview. Rather than conceiving of different ethnic groups as citizens of whatever country they made their home in, the Germans would now claim that the “members of a nation or an ethnic group living in a foreign environment constitute, not a total number of individuals calculated mechanically but on the contrary the members of an organic community.... The very fact that they belong to a nation means that the nation in question has a natural and moral right to consider that all its members – even those separated from the mother country by state frontiers – constitute a moral and cultural whole.”²³

With this strategic shift in understanding, the Germans

proceeded to use the altered language of minority rights opportunistically to press their claims not only on “their” people in other states, but also on the land in those states where Germans lived. Germans everywhere were part of one, larger community; thus all those places that they called home were part of one, larger ethno-state.

The minority rights treaties effectively died around this time. The weak and ineffective League was incapable of halting Nazi aggression. Germans picked off territory at whim, and began implementing procedures to target Jews and other minority groups in what would become the largest mass atrocity of the twentieth century.²⁴

THERE is no such thing as Rohingya,” stated U Kyaw San Law, a Burmese state security officer operating in the country’s Rakhine state. “It is fake news,” he added.²⁵

In just the last few months, the world is once again witness to a massive, forced migration, as wave after wave of people displaced from their homes in Rakhine have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh, their number now swelling to 620,000, or roughly 75 percent of the total Rohingya population of Burma in 2016. News accounts reveal that the ongoing repression of this Muslim minority has included internment camps with no schools, jobs, or healthcare.²⁶ Since August, according to a report issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations, the Rohingya community has been targeted in a “well-organized, coordinated, and systemic manner” by the Burmese military and vigilante groups. The state purposefully “targeted teachers, the cultural and religious leadership, and other people of influence...in an effort to diminish Rohingya history, culture, and knowledge,” effectively to wipe the record of the people’s existence.²⁷

The US Holocaust Museum undertook a year-long investigation and issued its own report in November 2017, concluding that there was “mounting evidence of genocide against the Rohingya,” and that the community has suffered crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing at the hands of the government and its military.²⁸ Anti-Muslim hate speech has accompanied this overall campaign of elimination, which has included “mass gang rape, killings – including of children and babies – and disappearances...”²⁹ According to Mohammed Rafiq from Maungdaw Town-ship: “They tried to kill us all.” “There was nothing left,” he declared.³⁰

With talk in India and Bangladesh of sending refugees back to Burma under such conditions, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a presentation be-

fore the UN Human Rights Council, asked: “Considering Rohingyas’ self-identity as a distinct ethnic group with their own language and culture – and [that they] are also deemed by the perpetrators themselves as belonging to a different ethnic, national, racial, or religious group – given all of this, can anyone rule out that the elements of genocide may be present?”³¹ Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire, who commanded UN peacekeeping forces in Rwanda, told Sky News: “You’re into the mist of a very slow moving and deliberate genocide, there is no doubt in my military mind that the way they’re operating, the way they’re conducting, the way they’re using their forces. The way the government is camouflaging it. They’re all very significant indicators of genocide in operation. They want to wipe them out and they’ve said that’s what they operating [sic] to do.”³²

THE protection of minorities has been a key goal of the world order that emerged from World War II, though it has been subsumed within the language of human rights and the international instruments meant to guarantee them.³³ From the outset, India played an outsize role in expanding human rights norms, seeking to bridge a divide between Western notions of civil and political liberties centred on the individual, and economic, social, and cultural rights more often focused on groups and favoured by the countries of the East and South. Combining the two, India believed, provided a holistic approach to protecting individuals and groups, and to providing a better way of life for all.

Above all, India was sensitive to globally dispersed populations, with many people from the sub-continent spread throughout the world as a result of employment from edicts by the British Empire. Moreover, the country had provided sanctuary to many refugees during the war, and was looking to formulate an enduring solution to prevent such tragedies from reoccurring. India’s views are perhaps best demonstrated by its actions in 1946 to protect diasporic Indians living in South Africa, who were facing harsh discrimination as a result of a domestic law known as the Ghetto Act. The Indian government, knowing what had just transpired in the interwar period, contended that Indians living in South Africa were South Africans, and should be protected as citizens of that country. It was South Africa that was responsible for the correct treatment of any people living there, not India or anyone else. But since South Africa had passed discriminatory laws, it was incumbent upon the nascent international community to

take action and thus compel South Africa to live up to a higher standard. India made its case in the UN and eventually won a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly condemning South Africa for its actions. This victory – and the precedent for intervention that it set – established the standard for the UN’s human rights documents: the Universal Declaration and the International Covenants that followed.

But India’s victory did not produce transformative, positive results. Instead, the Ghetto Act morphed into apartheid, and South Africa would resist change over many decades. More broadly, the Great Powers moved subtly to reorganise the UN during the 1960s, just as waves of decolonisation were resulting in the emergence of new countries that would become member states. The Security Council took on greater importance and the General Assembly much less, thereby keeping power in the hands of a select few states.

As a result, the Cold War came to skew all matters at the UN even more heavily. And the form of human rights that subsequently gained ascendancy over the 1970s was largely driven by Western views, and so primarily concerned the political rights of the individual. Human rights as a result did not maintain the universality with which they were conceived, and for which India had fought. Rather, they became a convenient cudgel for Western powers to use against their communist opponents, and to justify a variety of “humanitarian interventions.”

Since then, just as in the interwar period, the Great Powers themselves have kept themselves exempt from any investigation of their own human rights abuses. As before, illiberal forces have taken advantage of such inconsistencies to gain a foothold, and thus to advance their own fiendish objectives.³⁴

AND so we find ourselves, unfortunately but unsurprisingly, in familiar territory, facing a catastrophe of an unimaginable scale, even when compared to the twentieth-century’s own appallingly distinctive benchmarks. The writing is on the wall. A moral imperative is before us: we must shore up minority protections with all deliberate haste.

All of the efforts to define the mass violence in Rakhine with terms like “genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity,” are made to trigger the Genocide Convention and the Responsibility to Protect, UN mechanisms to allow for foreign intervention and stiff penalties for perpetrators. These are meant to put an end to the worst bar-

barisms, but their threshold is high, and they do nothing about simmering cauldrons and overheating passions. In this way, existing international anti-atrocity measures miss all the indicators of the boiling pot until it is simply too late. And that is why new action is now called for.

The slaying in February 2017 of Srinivas Kuchibhotla in the US, as well as other incidents, underscores why it is in India’s national interest to make minority rights a priority.³⁵ The young software engineer and his friend Alok Madasani were enjoying after-work drinks in local bar in Olathe, Kansas, when a white stranger approached, hurled racial epithets, and screamed for them to leave the country. He then opened fire and shot both of them, killing Kuchibhotla.³⁶ A mere two weeks later, another incident occurred – strikingly similar – which saw someone approach Deep Rai, a Sikh man standing in his own driveway in Seattle, Washington. After shouting for him go back to his own country, the assailant shot him.³⁷ Not surprisingly, Indian immigrants, who already felt targeted post-9/11, have since more forcefully questioned whether they and their families remain safe in the US. Closer to home, Hindus and other minorities have been attacked in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and Muslim citizens who have spoken out against radical forces responsible for such violence and for secularism have been murdered.³⁸ India simply can no longer afford to not make clear precisely what principles and values it stands for, especially as its role on the global stage increases.


The assault on minorities is an international problem. Now ablaze, the fire of anti-minority hatred can spread quickly, and few will then escape its fury.

Authoritarian regimes fostering jingoistic nationalism have grown in strength and number around the world, contributing to the weakening of rules and the erasure of norms, leaving us particularly vulnerable now.³⁹ But liberal societies had never fully come to terms with minority rights beforehand either, failing to fully and honestly reckon with the interlaced legacies of racism, patriarchy, inequality, and colonialism.

The postwar consensus created a system easily manipulated and selectively applied, and far too detached from local needs and concerns. This eventually undermined faith in our institutions, and laid the foundation for the successful assault on globalism we are witness to today. And so international efforts like the 1992 UN Declaration on Minorities and the byzantine patchwork of protections and mechanisms created by human rights treaties are unable to douse the flames of rising hatred.⁴⁰ We lack a mass

movement to confront the past and denounce extremism, to build sufficient popular and political will to make any legal regime work.⁴¹

Ultimately, we must grapple with what *citizenship* means in the twenty-first century. Where do stateless peoples fit

into the equation? Only when we can defend the universal equality of citizens both within and without states can we truly say that all people, whether as individuals or as groups, are safe. 

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FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: EVOLVING IMPACT

Pranjal Sharma

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THEY walk awkwardly, in an ungainly fashion. Their head bobs, their arms flay a bit. A big backpack-like box on their backs. Legs that seem shaky but strong. They step up on a white table. Crouch, and then they do a back flip. They take a second to correct balance, and then straighten out to stand tall and raise their hands in triumph. Much like kids or trainee gymnasts would. But they are neither – these are Atlas robots designed by Boston Dynamics, an American engineering and robotics design company now owned by the Japanese Softbank Group.

Funded by the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, Atlas is a bipedal humanoid robot. As its developer notes, “Atlas’ control system coordinates motions of the arms, torso and legs to achieve whole-body mobile manipulation, greatly expanding its reach and workspace. Atlas’ ability to balance while performing tasks allows it to work in a large volume while occupying only a small footprint... Stereo vision, range sensing and other sensors give Atlas the ability to manipulate objects in its environment and to travel on rough terrain. Atlas keeps its balance when jostled or pushed and can get up if it tips over.”¹

Atlas has the potential to replace humans in several tasks that require agility, balance, and strength. With a smarter “brain,” driven by artificial intelligence, Atlas may soon become an indispensable part of our lives.

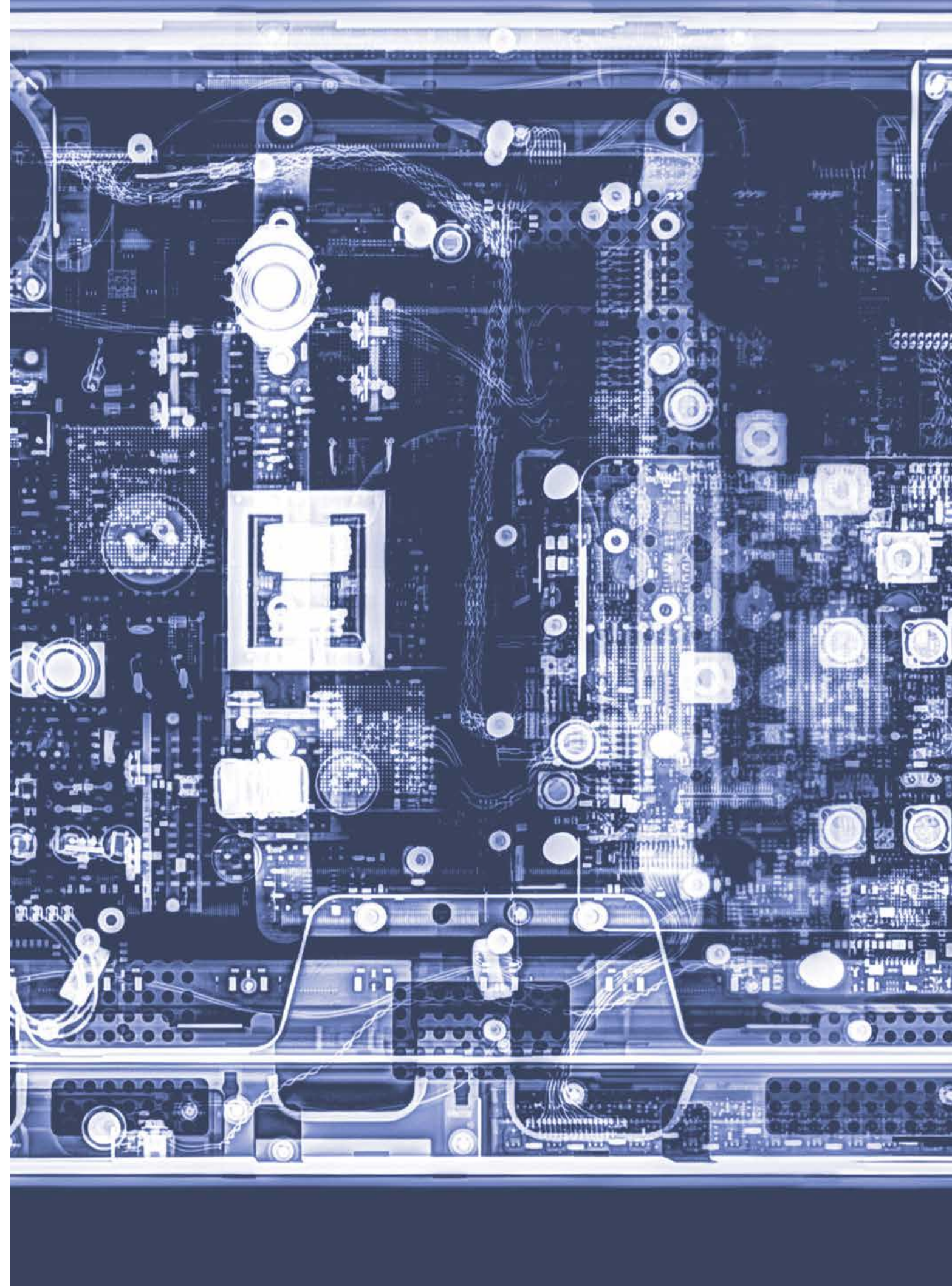
In many ways Atlas is a symbol of how the fourth indus-

trial revolution is transforming the environment around us: from robotics to artificial intelligence, 3D printing to blockchains, neuroscience to bionic body parts, edgy new technologies are leaving no aspect of our personal and work life untouched.

Clever and transformative technologies are not new. However, their current speed of evolution and impact is unprecedented in human history.

The first industrial revolution that began with the steam engine occurred over a couple of centuries. The second revolution that allowed harnessing of electricity and mass production took another century to mature. The third revolution that began with the development of the internet spread across the world in just a few decades. The fourth, piggybacking on the digital revolution, is happening as we breathe, and has evolved speedily in less than a decade. What was fiction is reality today. Case in point: Second Sight, the maker of the world’s first commercial artificial retina, is now running clinical trials to test whether a brain implant – an array of electrodes – can help restore partial eyesight to the blind.²

As advances in robotics continue to stun us, our current scale and pace of digital activity is likewise impressive. For instance, Facebook currently hosts two billion monthly active users.³ As for pace, this is what happens in an internet minute⁴ in our digital world: 16 million texts are sent; 4.1 million YouTube videos watched; 3.5 million Google



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searches; almost a million Tinder swipes; three-quarters of a million dollars spent online; and almost half a million Tweets sent.

Employment, interrupted

Be it robots or information technology, the fourth industrial revolution is causing disruptions in unpredictable ways. Digital processes are transforming age-old institutions like media and broadcasting, retail, and advertising. Soon they will cause a metamorphosis in urban planning, architecture, and the very ways in which we live our lives. Our speed of developing these technologies seems to be much faster than our ability to absorb and adapt to them. Our business models, policy frameworks, and social structures are not prepared to deal with the effects – current and future.

The area where the effects of technological transformation and the fourth industrial revolution are likely to be most pronounced is in manufacturing. Unsurprisingly, automation and the possibility of human labour being replaced by robots are great sources of insecurity of economies worldwide.

The International Federation of Robotics recorded the highest volume of sales for robots in 2015.⁵ Sales increased 15 percent to more than quarter of a million units. The automotive, electronics, and metal sectors are the biggest users of robots, with companies increasing the level of automation mostly because of cost advantages. For instance, Honda Motorcycle and Scooters Company in India is proud of its automation: from 65 automated processes in its first plant, it now boasts of 241 automated processes in its fourth plant. Productivity has improved 36 percent. Another example is that of Maruti Suzuki, an automobile manufacturer in India, which is using robots on its shop floor in its plant in Manesar, Haryana. More than 2,000 robots work on welding, 160 in the body paint shop, and 65 in the bumper paint shop. The company says that be-

tween its plants in Manesar and Gurgaon, it has more than 5,000 robots; level of automation is expected to increase with time. This trend will only intensify in the years to come across the world. “In 2017 robot installations are estimated to increase by 21 percent in the Asia-Australia region. Robot supplies in the Americas will surge by 16 percent and in Europe by 8 percent... By 2020 more than 1.7 million new industrial robots will be installed in factories worldwide.”⁶

This means lower employment for blue-collar workers across the world. This will have a bigger impact in emerging markets and labour-intensive economies like India. With 11-12 million citizens ready to join the workforce every year, India is not currently creating enough jobs; with automation set to increase across industries, it will only get worse. Ironically, despite the fourth industrial revolution being technologically driven, the situation is already worsening in the information technology (IT) sector. The growth for the Indian IT sector is now on a downward curve. In spite of the rapid adoption of technology across every sector, Indian IT companies are not in a position to offer solutions on the scale that the market demands, relying instead on service provision and business process outsourcing. Industry body NASSCOM has the figures to confirm this decline. It had projected export growth of 10-12 percent in 2016-17, but exports grew only 8.3 percent, to \$117 billion. For 2017-18, NASSCOM has projected a flat growth of 7-8 percent in exports and 10-11 percent in domestic business. Compare this with an exports growth of about 17 percent and domestic market growth of 20 percent in 2010-11, and one gets the complete picture.

Unsurprisingly, employment in Indian IT is slowing sharply. From new job creation of 230,000 annually, the figure has dropped to 150,000.⁷ With companies introducing automation in coding processes, we are seeing further reductions in employee numbers. In 2017, about 400,000 were employed in IT and IT-enabled services sector by Indian companies. But these largely mid-level techies are likely to become redundant, since their jobs

involve activities that can be easily automated (planning, scheduling, allocation, forecasting, etc.).

At present, the industry is still a net hirer, as loss of employment in some sectors is likely to be offset by hiring in sectors such as machine learning and fintech. As per one study, fintech software market will be worth \$45 billion globally by 2020.⁸ Positive disruption in this space, in the form of micro-entrepreneurship and increasingly accessible services in the next few years, will come from startups, while big firms may try to capitalise on the developments through acquisition, integration, and expansion.

The data revolution

The technology that built a product in a factory had little or no connection to the transportation technology that shipped it to the markets. A service offering was perishable, with no trace left behind except the experience of the people who delivered. Today, every service experience is captured by data. Every action leaves a data footprint. In the cyber-physical manufacturing system, each component of a product being built carries its own information and communicates with the entire production system. So, the many thousands of components that make up a vehicle will be connected through sensors that generate data in real time.

This data, characterised as ‘big data,’ is run through analytics: the patterns and trends that the data reveals will be studied, assessed, and interpreted by artificial intelligence to improve performance. The application of big data is increasing not just in industrial processes but highly advanced scientific undertakings. In the case of precision medicines, for instance, a patient can swallow a medicine that includes nano-robots. These bots while healing the body also send information about the ailment and recovery for data analysis. This data is then assessed through a self-driven machine learning programme that can resolve complex problems.

A digitally globalised world

When John Donne wrote, “No man is an island” in 1624, little did he know that his words would come to represent the connected nature of disparate technologies in the 21st century.

As drones, autonomous vehicles, precision medicines, automated processes become commonplace, they will also become interoperable, with data as the shared unit. Previously unconnected and independent, individual technologies are no longer islands. For instance, there now exists increasing interoperability between different technologies, as well as linkages between different technology creators and users that are today not limited inside territorial boundaries. The digital economy is a ready example of an increasingly digitally globalised world, a result of the fourth industrial revolution.

As the world sees evermore interconnections because of and through technology, technology effectively promises to be an equaliser for both developed and emerging nations. In an ideal world, this would mean that emerging nations like India have the potential to leapfrog more advanced nations by embracing the fourth industrial revolution.

But existing systemic inequity between countries means that, as the world becomes increasingly interdependent with technology platforms and in order not to be left behind or be ill-equipped to handle the disruptive impact of the fourth industrial revolution, emerging economies will need to both encourage an active domestic debate and implement pertinent policy, as well as be at the forefront of global conversations on technology.

What protocols are needed for the use of new technologies? How can jobs be encouraged in the chrome age? What rules are needed to safeguard data flows across countries without interrupting collaboration or commerce? How can adverse impacts of the fourth industrial revolution be mitigated?

Policy matters: skilling and innovation

Policymakers have no time to lose. For India, the way forward is clear. Technology needs talent, and India needs both.

Firstly, coping with technology-led disruption will require a tremendous investment in talent and competencies – corporates, government departments, and professionals are currently not agile enough to cope with the changes being brought about by technology. Smart learning is essential to mitigate the negative impact of redundant skill sets and keep pace with rapid transformations.

Some changes are underway already. Companies are today more sensitive to on-the-job skilling than ever before. Indeed, several industries have recognised the need to focus on new technology platforms: as the IT industry sees its ‘software as service’ business plateau as described above, the focus is shifting to artificial intelligence and internet of things-based solutions and the promotion of skills involved therein.

Individuals, too, are reassessing their skills. Like many global professionals, Indians are flocking to learn new capabilities on various online platforms and at educational institutions. In an interesting trend, the market for online education is growing in strength. A recent study⁹ indicates that India’s online education market will jump to \$1.96 billion by 2021 from just \$247 million in 2016. The number of users will grow from 1.6 million to 9.6 million over the same period.

Within this, the biggest category is reskilling and online certifications. Experts say that there is a rising demand for new subjects, like machine learning, understanding artificial intelligence, data science, and innovation. Both professionals who have recently begun their careers and those who have spent more than two decades are equally concerned about their futures.

While heartening, the scale of ongoing change needs a bigger push.

India currently ranks very low on the IMD World Talent Ranking.¹⁰ Ranks are derived by assessing education, training, apprenticeships, and methods used to attract and retain talent by companies, as well as two decades of historical data. Asia generally lags behind Europe in talent rankings; moreover, existing exceptional talent tends to leave countries like India for better options in Europe and the United States. In 2016, India stood at rank 54 among

63 countries. It has improved marginally to 51 for 2017, but the rank it still places India at a non-competitive level globally. This should be a matter for concern for the policymakers and industry leaders in India: increasing individual effort in improving skills aside, the education ecosystem has not been agile enough to focus on new technologies. The system for training focuses on degrees and skills, but not necessarily competencies. Most large corporations have to spend resources and effort on fresh graduates: the infotech sector is well known for running its own training programmes.

This is of course linked to the fact that while India may have millions of young and educated professionals, but their quality as human resources has not improved – India continues to rank low on higher education. Even if we ignore global comparisons, no Indian university is among the top 25 Asian universities.¹¹ China, South Korea, and Japan dominate this ranking. The level of unemployment is therefore high and likely to worsen with the spread of fourth industrial revolution technologies. The Ministry of Human Resource Development should assess the problem and mobilise to improve the situation.

Without a focus on improving skills and capacities to use new technologies, India will struggle to survive the onslaught of the fourth industrial revolution. This has implications for India’s aspirations, and standing in the region and the world.

Secondly, to leverage the current industrial revolution, countries need to invest in research and development (R&D), and encourage innovation.¹²

A recent study conducted by UBS¹³ notes that Asia is doing well on both R&D and innovation fronts. Combined R&D spending by Asian countries is expected to exceed the combined value of spending by both the US and Europe in just two years time. However there is a clear divide between North and South Asia:

On our measures, north Asia is competitive and rising fast on innovation metrics. Korea is a standout. But China has rocketed up our metrics since the mid-2000s...The picture for South Asia is less rosy. There is one pocket of real strength – Singapore. Malaysia and India score well on some metrics, particularly education. But the region overall is in danger of missing out on an innovation dividend. On some of our metrics, south Asia has actually regressed since the mid-2000s.¹⁴

Indeed, the study notes that despite a vibrant and grow-

ing startup ecosystem, and despite the presence of Indian multinational companies, India’s spending on R&D remains poor. India spends a miserly 0.6% of its GDP on R&D. For every thousand workers, India has only one active researcher. For comparison, Israel spends 4.27% of its GDP on R&D with over 23 researchers per thousand workers.

In terms of innovation – measured in terms of inputs, such as R&D, education, availability of capital, and the key output measure of patents – India is “a mixed bag.” It lags behind others in the broader Asian region when the innovation variables are contextualised against the size of its economy, or compared on per capita basis. If India does not improve its status rapidly, its economic growth will be built on borrowed expertise.

Another recent study, conducted by UBS and Pricewaterhouse Coopers,¹⁵ reports that there are today more Asian billionaires than US ones. “If the current trend continues, the total wealth of Asian billionaires will overtake that of their counterparts in the US [by 2020]. Asia’s economic expansion saw, on average, a new billionaire every other day.”

Critically, three-fourths of the new billionaires in 2016 were from China and India. India’s billionaire population grew more than fivefold. By itself, there is nothing troubling over the rise of billionaires in India. There have been positive changes at the bottom of the socio-economic structure, too. More than 300 million Indians have joined the financial mainstream with new banks accounts in the last couple of years, which is no small achievement.

The concern however is on another front. Taken together, the two reports point to the fact that, while wealth and capital is by no means scarce, its deployment is poor. In short, while more billionaires are welcome, India desperately needs a million more innovators.

Large Indian institutions – corporate and academic – must step up efforts and investments in science and technology. The need to reform the higher education system to encourage research, and align it to commercial and social outcomes, has been emphasised for long; the need has only become amplified against the backdrop of a fourth industrial revolution.

Implications are rife for a fast-emerging Asia as a centre of economic gravity, but also what role individual emerging nations will play, and what place they will have, in the fourth industrial revolution that will be driving economic growth and development.

International engagement

How well a country respond to the disruptions of the fourth industrial revolution will inevitably have a domestic impact that will have repercussions for global trends, such as Asia’s emergence as the center of economic gravity and the rise of emerging powers.

But instead of seeing countries as individual units that are either successfully able to adapt to the fourth industrial revolution or not, or understanding technology in the context of existing or emerging camps, could the fourth industrial revolution influence global politics in the other direction?

Innovation will not happen in isolation. Nor can we depend on the private sector or a government to innovate by itself. A collaborative approach is essential. A good example is Ertico – ITS Europe, a consortium of over 100 companies and institutions to develop and deploy intelligent transport systems. Funded by the European Union, the platform explores ways to bring intelligence into transportation for safer, smarter, and cleaner mobility.

The 100 companies and institutions that are collaborating in a unique model include companies, like Siemens, Vodafone, Fujitsu, Volkswagen; public authorities, like the city of Hamburg, Swiss Confederation, Norwegian Public Road Administration; and an assortment of global research bodies. The collaboration between so many kinds of bodies will ensure harmonisation of practices and standardisation of technical specifications. Typically, individual companies run their own projects; under Ertico ITS, the EU wants a network of collaborators so that technology sharing and innovation happen simultaneously between developers, users, service providers, and regulators. Furthermore, a substantial budget of 20 million euros allows the consortium to work without worrying about short-term costs, and focus on sustainable results.


The exciting part is EU’s inclusive approach. It has reached out to stakeholders in non-EU countries, such as USA, Japan, China, Brazil, India, Russia, and South Africa, to contribute to research and innovation in various areas related to transport and traffic management. Technology cooperation is clearly emerging as a key pillar of cooperation among countries, across a range of sectors – smart cities, cyberspace, data, energy.

A similar approach has been taken in the US when in 2014, a AT&T, Cisco, General Electric, Intel, and IBM founded the Industrial Internet Consortium, which brings

together industry players, like multinationals, smaller entrepreneurs, technology innovators, academics, and government organisations, to accelerate the digitisation of industrial operations. It has over 240 members listed from around the world, and headquarters in 26 countries.¹⁶

Large-scale industrial and manufacturing projects will be managed through cloud computing. From concept to design to manufacture, assembly and delivery, every step of industrial and manufacturing processes will use plat-

forms created on cloud computing.

Such collaborative models may prove to be the solution to harnessing the technologies in the most sustainable and equitable way possible. Flipped around, this means that the disruptions being caused by technologies in our work and in our lives may just be a prime motivation to come together and respond collectively, further strengthening the globalising nature of technology. 

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THEATRES

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD: INDO-PACIFIC IN TRANSITION

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THE Indo-Pacific. Rarely has any geographical term that burst into collective imagination carried as much political import as this one. Notwithstanding the lack of a common definition of the ‘Indo-Pacific,’ it has shaped strategic discourse over the past year unlike any other notion in the recent past. The new United States National Security Strategy (NSS) spoke of its importance, followed by the US national defence strategy that formally enlisted the term in Pentagon-speak. When Canberra published a new foreign policy white paper after many years, it too spoke of the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific for Australian grand strategy. Closer to home, too, the term is agitating the strategic space.

Disruption, the Oxford English Dictionary tells us, is the act of interrupting flow and continuity or – somewhat differently – bringing disorder. This definition naturally begets questions. Interrupting or bringing disorder to what? How? Why? And, by who? If the Indo-Pacific is, as this essay argues, a theatre of disruption, the onus is on the claimants to answer these questions with some clarity. Of these, the ‘who’ question is perhaps the simplest to answer.

It is concern around a potential power transition in Asia due to the (re)emergence of China as a great power that motivates much (though not all) of the debate

about the need to view the Indian and Pacific Oceans as an integrated geostrategic entity.

The latest US NSS labelled the People’s Republic – along with Russia – “revisionist.” It also spoke of “great power rivalry” as the principal national security challenge to the US. It therefore comes as no surprise that the birth of a new geopolitical term is coincident with a re-emergence of great power politics. If geopolitics, the interplay of space and power, is back it is because Chinese power stands to upend the US-policed open order from the Horn of Africa to the western Pacific – i.e., across the entire Indo-Pacific region.

But when one talks of the Indo-Pacific as a normative strategic construct, it is also a reflection of an anti-disruption in the region: to bring together what had been ‘separated forcibly’ (the third dictionary definition of disruption). In other words, the normative construct of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ can be viewed in itself as a response to disruptive Chinese actions in the geographical Indo-Pacific. The principal challenge for open societies in the region will be to give concrete form to the former to manage the latter.

Taking a long view, this essay argues that disruptions in the Indo-Pacific can be traced to three deeply inter-related factors: the assertion of history, the realisation of geography, and the weaponisation of economics.



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The assertion of history

The first source of disruption in the Indo-Pacific is growing and noisy historical consciousness among rising powers in the region. Narratives based on history – both real as well as mythical – fuel nationalism, enforce existing territorial claims, and form the basis for newer ones. These, in turn, have put considerable strain on the existing order in the region. But assertion of privileged history is not unique to rising powers alone. Indeed, traditional powers in the region have, in the recent past, also asserted their historical positions. In their case, they have done so by adopting a longer view, albeit one that remains relatively circumscribed by more recent memory and outreach, that substantiates their hegemonic positions and historical aspirations and, inter alia, attempts to counter the historical narratives of the challengers. Three Indo-Pacific countries best exemplify this complicated relationship with history and the dynamic of assertion and counter-assertion: China, India, and the US.

When Xi Jinping assumed office as the head of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on November 29, 2012, he accompanied the new Politburo Standing Committee to the national museum in Beijing and, once there, to the prominent permanent display titled ‘The Road to Rejuvenation.’ This display sharply contrasts the tribulations of the Chinese ‘Century of Humiliation’ (roughly 1840 to 1949) with the prosperity of the People’s Republic since its founding.¹ At the end of Xi’s museum visit, he spoke of the “China Dream” for the first time, of “the great renewal of the Chinese nation.”²

Xi’s call was far from being ceremonial tokenism. Under Xi, nationalism in China is on an upsurge, carefully

stage-managed by the CPC through officially approved social media and driven by a cultural campaign that seeks to bridge the great legacies of imperial China with that of the 21st century People’s Republic into one seamless whole. And, as Howard French notes in his recent book, under Xi China’s past shapes its pursuit of a global role which, in the minds of Chinese nationalists, is simply restoring China’s historical place in the imperial scheme of things – in “everything under the heavens.”³

This assertion of China’s rightful place in *tian xia* – which French interprets to mean “nearby Central Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia”⁴ – has had practical consequences for the regional order. They have included China advancing territorial claims in the South and East China Seas, a muscular approach towards Japan and Vietnam, as well as promoting and financing a mega-connectivity initiative that seeks to restore the old land and maritime Silk Roads. When China decided to set aside the UNCLOS arbitration verdict against it in July 2016 – which in effect questioned the legality of China’s “nine-dash line” in the South China Sea⁵ – it was a demonstration to the extent to which Beijing is willing to go to preserve its “historical rights.” It is the legitimising narrative of these rights that has allowed China to build artificial islands and features in the South China Sea. Militarisation of these islands consolidates China’s anti-access/area denial strategy. It has also used historical claims to justify the imposition of an air-defence identification zone over the Japan-controlled Senkakus in 2013. Finally, historical narrative-building forms a key component of China’s “Three Warfares Strategy”⁶ in that it buttresses Chinese law-fare campaigns. (Later sections will discuss China’s Belt-Road Initiative, which is again framed around imperial Chinese history.)

But China is hardly the only country that is beginning to assert its historical place in the world. Since indepen-

dence, Indian political elite too have pursued the quest for restoring India’s place in the world. Notably, India’s first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru – acutely conscious of the exceedingly limited base of the young republic’s material strength – pursued a strategy of moral-politik to lift India’s global profile and punch above its weight in the international system. As India has become stronger, so has its collective historical consciousness. Nothing illustrates this better than the public mood following the election of Narendra Modi as prime minister in 2014.

Modi’s foreign policy – more often than not – has explicitly furthered India’s soft power through tropes around Indian legacy. The much-celebrated International Day of Yoga is a case in point. In order to compete with China’s proposal to revive the Silk Route, the Modi government has resuscitated the idea of a Spice Route through the Indian Ocean.⁷ Books written by thinkers close to the current Indian dispensation have drawn attention to India’s vast maritime heritage,⁸ while prominent Indian strategists remind foreign audiences in closed-door meetings that the war memorial of India Gate in New Delhi also commemorates colonial Indian participation in the Afghan Wars of the 19th century – a sign that, historically, India has been far from being aloof in great power politics. But it is important to note that contemporary India’s historical assertions have been, at once, benign and reactive. This may be a function of India’s still-limited power: China can put its money where its mouth is; India still has a long way to go before it can do so.

The US historically had a complicated relationship with Asia during the Cold War. When it was indeed forced to spend blood and treasure in the continent, it was with the desire to preserve the global balance of power by keeping communism at bay. The prevalent

doctrine of ‘linkages’ meant that Cold War America concerned itself with Asia, both East and West, with the objective of maintaining status quo in continental Europe. (As Bruno Maçães writes in his new book, “The Cold War can be understood as a conflict between Europe and Asia, subtly covered up by the ideologies of capitalism and communism.”⁹) For example, the US policy towards Japan was as much about preventing it from re-militarising as it was about preventing Japan from falling into the communist orbit.¹⁰ The two great – and dismal – American Cold War adventures in Asia, the Korean War and the intervention in Vietnam, were again contests between American and communist powers.

East Asia – specifically and in its own right – once again came to the fore in American official consciousness when then-president Barack Obama, speaking at the Australian parliament in 2011, reaffirmed the US as a Pacific power, noting “we are here to stay.”¹¹ Marking the beginning of a “pivot to Asia,” this was the recognition of the importance of Asia divorced from the vagaries of trans-Atlantic politics, the Cold War being long over and the economic centre of gravity continuing to shift eastward. Obama’s pivot was post-ideological. It was indifferent to the fact that China was – and remains – communist. For American strategists a rebalance became necessary not because of the regime type in Beijing, but because China and the US increasingly found themselves in a zero-sum game in Asia, exacerbated by the apparently positive-sum logic of trade. In Obama’s pivot there was more than a hint of the historical legacy of Theodore Roosevelt, who oversaw a massive consolidation of US power in the Pacific (including acquisition of Hawaii in 1898) – and who once noted “I wish to see the United States the dominant power on the shores of the Pacific.”¹²

The realisation of geography

As former NATO commander James Stavridis notes in his new book, *Roosevelt*, in his vision for the US as a Pacific power, was significantly influenced by American navalist Alfred Thayer Mahan.¹³ Mahan's influence – and his theory of why countries become naval powers – also looms large over contemporary Chinese and Indian strategists. As an example: an *Economist* story on the 2009 Shangri-La Dialogue, pseudonymously filed by 'Banyan,' noted that "whenever Banyan prodded a military man from India or China, out leapt a Mahanite."¹⁴ However, this is not to say that Chinese or Indian naval strategists take Mahan's theories on the mechanics of naval power literally. Rather they – as contemporary American navalist James Holmes puts it – ascribe to the Mahanian logic of seapower that would make navies put premium on "commercial, political, and military access to important theaters."¹⁵

Nothing illustrates this better than China's dogged pursuit to control the South China Sea (SCS), arguably the most dangerous flashpoint in the entire Indo-Pacific region. The SCS is to China, American strategist Robert Kaplan argues, what the Greater Caribbean – the region stretching from Florida to Venezuela along with the Gulf of Mexico – is to the US.¹⁶ The implication here, of course, is that just as the US sought to veto the influence of external powers in the Greater Caribbean through the Monroe Doctrine, China too will adopt a similar doctrine for the SCS. Kaplan pursues the analogy by noting: "The key geographical fact about the Caribbean is that it is close to America but was far from the great European powers of the age, just as the South China Sea is close to China but far from America and other western powers."¹⁷ For the Chinese, the SCS is of obvious importance. Analyst Mingjiang Li notes how the SCS is a "natural shield" for China's densely populated and most-developed southern parts.¹⁸ Having a "strong foothold" in the SCS – which essentially connects western Indian Ocean to Northeast Asia – would, Li argues, act as a "restraining factor" for the US navy.¹⁹

The problem with this idea is that the SCS is similarly important for other regional powers, such as India, Japan, and the US, who would not let the People's Republic pursue a naval strategy remotely close to resembling the one the US pursued in the 19th century to enforce the Monroe Doctrine. Herein lies the tragedy of great

power politics which is, at its core, a "battle of space and power" (to juxtapose a phrase of Kaplan's with the title of John Mearsheimer's magnum opus). To wit, natural geographical compulsions led the US to pursue hegemonic control over the Greater Caribbean; similar compulsions will also drive the Chinese to exert themselves in the SCS. As Mearsheimer – comparing Chinese behaviour to that of the US – once asked: "Why should we expect the Chinese to act any differently than the US did? Are they more principled than we are? More ethical? Less nationalistic?"²⁰ Pushing this argument further: as Indian naval capabilities grow, what stands in the way of India to also seek exclusivist control in the Indian Ocean in a similar fashion, especially given that India has never quite warmed up to the presence of what it calls "extra-regional powers" in that maritime space? This raises the possibility of an extremely high-stakes maritime competition in the Indo-Pacific as regional naval capabilities there increase.²¹

But it not just heightened awareness of maritime geography by Indo-Pacific states that stand to act as a disruptor. Intra-state geography as well as land borders play equally important roles. Kaplan's recent travelogue is as much a meditation on how geographical differences within the continental US have largely shaped that country's schizophrenic relationship with globalisation – the denouement of which was the election of Donald Trump in 2016 – as it is about how American geography shaped US foreign policy. As he writes: "Alas, geopolitics – the battle of space and power – now occurs within states as well as between them. Cultural and religious differences are particularly inflamed, for as group differences melt in the crucible of globalization, they have to be reinvented in more blunt and ideological form by, as it turns out, the communications revolution."²² If the US is a counter-example to the claim that globalisation homogenises – "flattens," to use a Thomas Friedman image – an entire continent, then so is the India-China dynamic in the Eurasian rimland. Until about 2016, when serious fissures started to show up in that relationship, a large section of Indian strategists had assumed that as trade and investment flows between the two countries deepen, the issue of the unsettled India-China 4,057 kilometre border can be set aside and eventually made irrelevant to the relationship. The Doklam standoff last year – the worse such showdown between the Indian and Chinese military in over three decades – has made it clear that borders matter, disputed ones more so. It

illustrates that no amount of economic intercourse between any two countries can paper over the hard push-and-pull of geopolitics.

Widely seen as a major disruption to the rules-of-the-game for trade, finance, and connectivity initiatives, the Belt-Road Initiative (BRI) also illustrates how uneven economic development within a country – itself a function of that country's geography – can lead it to connect with the wider world in specific ways. Like the US, China as a continental power too has seen uneven economic development – exacerbated by hyper-globalisation – across its breadth. While coastal China has grown to become extraordinarily prosperous, living standards in the hinterlands continue to be poor. No other Chinese province illustrates this better than Xinjiang, a restive land-locked part of the mainland that has all the attributes of West Asian badlands. Improving the socio-economic reality of Xinjiang remains a key priority of the Chinese leadership given the latent potential of an Islamist insurgency there. The BRI, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is one way through which the CPC seeks to integrate Xinjiang with the rest of the Chinese economy. Indeed, one of the stated goals of the BRI is for it to contribute to China's national development objectives, which include "Develop the West" (presumably referring to Xinjiang and other western Chinese provinces).²³

The weaponisation of economics

BRI also serves as an example of the third key disruptor to the extant Indo-Pacific order: China's increasing use of economics as an instrument of geopolitical statecraft. Even without the BRI in Beijing's toolkit, Chinese geoeconomics has targeted Southeast Asian states through directed aid to achieve political objectives and/or "register maximum geopolitical returns for Beijing."²⁴ Blackwill and Harris note that China has targeted Indonesia and Malaysia the most with its economic statecraft given that "[n]either is among Beijing's outspoken skeptics in the region, nor its most reliable supporters."²⁵ Xi Jinping also unveiled the BRI in a visit to Indonesia in 2013, an illustration of the importance of that country for the initiative. One of the goals of the BRI, skeptics suspect, is inducing economic dependency on the target state to the point that China shapes its foreign policy choices. Indian strategist Brahma Chellaney has termed

this Chinese modus operandi as "debt-trap diplomacy." Through the BRI, Chellaney writes, "countries are becoming ensnared in a debt trap that leaves them vulnerable to China's influence."²⁶

BRI – modelled after the millennia-old Silk Roads, according to its evangelists – is also a good example of how China moulds history to fit its purposes. For example, some economic historians have argued that the economic importance of the ancient Silk Roads has been overstated. Instead, the real value of these routes was in "cultural and religious exchanges."²⁷ The BRI as a geostrategic project is also significant given that it strives to unify two hyphenated geopolitical theatres: the Mackinderian Eurasia (as part of the land 'Belt') and the Mahanian Indo-Pacific (as part of the maritime 'Road'). By selectively inducing dependencies in both theatres, BRI gives form to the nascent Chinese grand strategy of achieving global political parity with the US. Parenthetically, the very fact that BRI integrates the Eurasian and Indo-Pacific battlespaces is why the Gwadar port in Pakistan (as part of CPEC) is important. It is – as former Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran has noted – one of the places where the Belt meets the Road.²⁸

Whatever be the grand strategic design of the BRI, the fact that it is a potent tool of Chinese economic statecraft is already becoming visible in small Indo-Pacific countries. Sri Lanka is a case in point. By loaning it money to develop the commercially unviable port at Hambantota, Beijing ensured that the control of that strategically important facility would eventually fall in Chinese hands. This is precisely what happened in December last year, when Sri Lanka officially handed over control of the port to China on a 99-year lease.²⁹ Even in Pakistan – a country which considers China its closest ally and its "all-weather friend" – pointed questions are being asked about the long-term implications of Chinese infrastructure loans, and their commercial sustainability and socio-economic desirability.³⁰ Furthermore, China is more than happy to enter into commercial agreements with countries, even as details of these deals remain opaque to concerned citizens. The recent China-Maldives free-trade agreement (FTA) – that was apparently passed through Maldives' parliament after an hour's discussion – is a case in point. There is a glaring disconnect between public Chinese position on the BRI, which states that the initiative shall be based on the "five principles of mutual coexistence" and how BRI projects, such as the development of the Hambantota

port, are unfolding on the ground,³¹ fuelling suspicion about the larger (political) intent behind the initiative.

When India formally refused to send any official delegation for the BRI summit in Beijing in May 2017, the implicit reason behind such a stance was that BRI is fundamentally an instrument of statecraft.³² While such a stance is welcome – and as such has been echoed by others, including the US secretary of state Rex Tillerson – the deeper issue is that the investment and trade demand and volume in the Indo-Pacific region have not been matched by commensurate regimes that ensure that commerce is carried out *qua* commerce, with a high degree of transparency and economic rationale. Indeed, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was supposed to have been the economic leg of Obama's Asia pivot. He had claimed that the TPP “makes sure we [the United States] write the rules of the road for trade in the 21st century.”³³ Unfortunately it became clear even before Trump's election that the TPP would have been stillborn. Absent an alternative framework for sustainable, transparent trade and investment acceptable to all in the region, Chinese economic statecraft will continue to be a major disruptor of the regional order.

Coda: Putting India in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region has been disrupted, this essay has argued, in three different yet related ways: large states in the region have rediscovered history – or, in certain cases, imagined it – to consolidate their geographical, and therefore geopolitical positions. In China's case, this in turn has given way to a grand strategy that sees economics and statecraft as two sides of the same coin. India cannot – and indeed, should not – remain unaffected by these fundamental shifts. If these disruptions lead to the emergence of a Sino-centric order in Asia, India's strategic space will be vastly diminished. Along with China, and often side-by-side, India has argued for a multipolar world. Now that political multipolarity is a reality, it must champion the cause of a multipolar Asia. Making concrete the normative ‘Indo-Pacific,’ the anti-disruption, ought to be the key Indian tool to do so.

There are essentially four different ways through which that happen.

First, along with developed economies in the region, such as Japan, India should provide connectivity alterna-


tives to smaller Indo-Pacific states. The fructification of the India-Japan Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) must be a key priority. Triangular development cooperation – where India and a developed economy partner together for development efforts in a third country – will also go a long way in assuaging smaller states across the Indo-Pacific that there are indeed alternatives to the Chinese model. If Indian participation in co-creating the hardware of connectivity (such as the AAGC) is one facet, the other should be Indian stakeholderism in newer forms of policy connectivity, such as FTAs. Traditionally, India's position in multilateral trading architectures has been obstructionist in its self-assigned role as the leader of the G77. By viewing economic regimes as geostrategic assets, India should also facilitate trade and investment across the region.

Second, India must realise that for the Indo-Pacific construct to have any real teeth, there must be a strong political-military component to it. Whether that is through bilateral defence agreements or flexible plurilateral mechanisms, India must realise that a multipolar Asia can only be sustained if external balancing is a key component of Indian grand strategy. As India strives to complete its nation-building at home, it is improbable that internal balancing of China will be enough to maintain the status quo. A renewed focus on external balancing will also imply shedding the Indian military's ‘lone-ranger’ attitude, often justified as a consequence of India's quest for strategic autonomy. A further corollary is the need for India to have a more expansive view of the Indo-Pacific, and flexibility to accommodate the interests of partners, such as the US and Japan, in the western Pacific, including in the South China Sea. An India in the Indo-Pacific also ought to mean an India in the Pacific.

Third, defence and economic efforts must also be matched by narrative-building around openness and inclusiveness. India must aggressively continue to highlight cultural, ethnic, and religious strands that tie the modern Indian state with Southeast and East Asia. But rhetoric alone will hardly suffice. Indian defence planners continue to make a distinction between resident and extra-regional powers in the Indian Ocean region. This attitude has to give way to a new *modus vivendi* where India makes no permanent distinction between the two, and instead replaces this binary with one which emphasises a greater role for powers that promote openness versus revisionist powers that have the potential

to undermine it. India-centred networks of the former should develop common and inclusive understanding of freedom of navigation and overflight, and promote norms around them to match the challenges from the latter.

Fourth and final, Indian efforts to convince Indo-Pacific littorals of the need to stand up to Chinese assertiveness, economic or military, will come to naught if India does not do so itself. One of the lessons from the Doklam standoff was that the Indian position to draw a redline – and demonstrate that it was willing to uphold it using all means available – was that smaller Asian states now realise that it is indeed possible for

Asian countries to stand firm in face of Chinese push. But beyond this, the modern Indian model – of a syncretic, liberal, democratic republic – must sustain itself. This necessarily means realising that expedient domestic politics based on old dogma – economic or social – may work at cross-purposes with Indian foreign policy goals. Put differently, India must be open within itself as it seeks to promote openness across the region. For example, India can hardly credibly complain about the Chinese way of doing business – subsidised indirectly or directly by the state – if it does not eschew protectionism. India needs to succeed at home for the normative Indo-Pacific to be credible in the world. 

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MIDDLE EAST: CASCADING CONFLICT

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THE 21st century has not only ushered in dramatic change, but the rate of change in global affairs has also increased rapidly. So much so that even the first decade of the new century hardly resembles the contemporary landscape of the past six or seven years. Nowhere is this truer than in the Middle East – a region so fraught with challenges that each new thunderclap has had the potential to disrupt the international order as we know it. As Robert Kagan put it, albeit in describing the twilight of the liberal world order, we are now in a period characterised by “systemic economic stresses, growing tribalism and nationalism, and a general loss of confidence in established international and national institutions.”¹ For the Middle East, this new state of affairs has manifested in conflict and instability. But the region is not hermetically sealed. What happens there can affect the neighbourhood and the world. This essay will survey the current regional disorder; identify the areas in which Middle Eastern disorder may disrupt the global order; and discuss the implications for India as a key stakeholder.

Drama in the Middle East

Nouriel Roubini aptly assessed that “[a]mong today’s geopolitical risks, none is greater than the long

arc of instability stretching from the Maghreb to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.”² From the turn of the century, when al-Qaeda used the region as a staging ground from which to conduct one of the most spectacular terrorist attacks against the world’s greatest power, to the subsequent invasions, wars, and uprisings that followed, the past 17 years have seen much violence and bloodshed. Throughout those years, we have seen dangerous trends on the rise, including extremism, terrorism, sectarianism; challenges to states, borders, and leaders; and a growing youth bulge amid unemployment and economic stagnation.

Many of these trends were either enabled or exacerbated by new technology, the changing role of the traditional media, and new media platforms. All the while, there are some regional actors who seek to take advantage of the regional disorder and to shift the balance in their favour. Should any of them reach their goal completely, the consequences could be dire.

A sectarian proxy war is well underway between Saudi Arabia and Iran, violently playing out in multiple arenas, such as Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. These actors emerged as dominant players from the post-9/11 theatre of competing axes, which comprised: a status-quo, stability-minded axis that included the United States, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia; and a self-pro-

claimed Resistance Axis (*mihwar al-muqawama*) that included Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas. Now, both Saudi Arabia and Iran are emboldened in their own ways, and it is the region’s weaker actors that bear the brunt of their contest. For its part, Saudi Arabia is no longer content to play second fiddle or to rule by consensus. It has become an aggressive and impatient regional actor. Whether actively or passively – it is not clear to outsiders – King Salman has consolidated power around his son Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MbS). Together, they have made some surprisingly bold moves.

On the foreign diplomacy front, in March 2015 Saudi Arabia launched a military intervention in Yemen aimed at swaying the outcome of the Yemeni civil war in its favour. Unfortunately for the Kingdom, the end of this military quagmire is nowhere in sight, as the costs, both financial and humanitarian, continue to rise. In June 2017, the Saudis touched off a diplomatic crisis between the Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt against Qatar, cutting off diplomatic relations and shutting down travel routes by air and by sea to their erstwhile ally because of the latter’s support for extremism/terrorism at the expense of Gulf security.³ This rift was the second of its kind between the countries in the past four years, and since it was clear that Qatar had been engaging in this kind of support for some time, the move was seen by many in the region as a way for Salman and his son to assert their dominance over Qatar.

On the domestic front, in June 2017 King Salman unceremoniously stripped Mohammad bin Nayyaf of his title of Crown Prince and relieved him of all positions. After Mohammad bin Nayyaf publically offered his oath of loyalty to MbS, he was placed on permanent house arrest. Then, in November 2017 the King carried out a sweeping anti-corruption crackdown, arresting high-placed royals and business magnates en masse, dismissing and appointing dozens of judges, and identifying over \$100 billion of state funds that were embezzled or misused.⁴ The anti-corruption committee was unsurprisingly headed by Crown Prince MbS. Analysts agree that these arrests were simply yet another mechanism to clear the way for MbS and to remove his opponents. What these developments amount to is the replacement of a staid, tradition-bound regional actor with one that is bold, unpredictable, and perhaps unswayable.

For its part, Iran has been acting like an unstoppable

hydra, sowing chaos across the region. In Syria, it has committed itself fully to transforming the country into its fiefdom, even bringing in its proxy Hezbollah to take part in the bloody war – as if this theatre needed another militia or more weapons. The injection of Hezbollah turned the tide in favour of the Assad regime, facilitated close military coordination with the Russians, and provided Hezbollah with tremendous battle experience, which will be used against the Israelis after the culmination of this battle. In Iraq, Iran has completely insinuated itself in Baghdad, further fueling sectarian strife and undermining the Iraqi national fabric by alienating Sunni tribes. In Yemen, Iran has actively supported the Houthis (a Yemeni religio-political movement rooted in Zaidiyyah, a Shi’a sect) – happy to bog down the Saudis for as long as possible. That is all to say nothing of Iran’s nuclear ambitions, which for a time are constrained due to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or “Iran deal,” or its ballistic missile capabilities, which it showcases from time to time to keep regional actors off-kilter. Iran engages in all of these activities because it has one goal: to attain regional hegemony in the Middle East. If Iran were successful in this regard, there would be strategic, economic, and political implications for the entire international order. Many global actors recognise the threat implicit in this ambition and are actively working to keep the Islamic Republic of Iran in check.

Another regional actor, whose actions have imperilled the region and beyond, is the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This militant salafi jihadi organisation, known often by its Arabic acronym Daesh, emerged on the scene in 2014 and shocked the region by conquering and holding vast territory in Iraq and Syria. ISIS has been unbelievably successful, and perhaps lucky, in a very short span of time, given that it has been orchestrating gruesome attacks in various locales across the region, and the world, with very few resources; creating a global communications strategy for promoting attacks, with very little expertise; capturing key swathes of land in Iraq and Syria, with very few weapons or men; and putting leaders, militaries, and intelligence services on high alert from Amman to Riyadh, with very few cells. Its major goal, once it settled on one after various organisational manifestations and ideological tiffs, was to establish a new Islamic caliphate in the Middle East. And for a time, it was somewhat successful. The danger of that success lay both in ISIS’s challenge to the existing state system and all of the leaders, political or reli-



gious, that occupied it, as well as in its self-proclaimed narrative of religious authenticity, which for some reason resonated deeply with so many. Fortunately, a concerted global effort emerged, led by the US, to combat this nascent threat and rob it of much of its territorial and virtual success. Nevertheless, to conflate two fitting idioms, the genie was out of the bottle and the damage was already done. The devastation that ISIS has wrought, as well as the campaigns that have been waged to combat it, can be measured in terms of lives lost, the destruction of cities and infrastructure, lost investment and tourism, unemployment and lack of opportunity, and, simplest of all, in terms of the despair that it inspired among regional inhabitants, from persecuted minorities to those grieving for their loved ones.⁵ What is more, the fragility of the region – through its easy co-optation by a relatively young and unendowed actor – has been revealed: and therein lies the danger for the future.

Regional spillover

From a global perspective, the reign of ISIS and the competing machinations of other jihadi actors in the region, like al-Qaeda, have had a distinctly disruptive impact. This impact can be understood first in terms of security, second in terms of forced displacement and refugees, and third in terms of trade and finance.

SECURITY

From Barcelona, to London and Manchester, to Paris, Europe has been under siege from terror attacks since the early 2000s. Though the organisational affiliation of the attackers has changed over the years, the method and purpose have stayed the same and the number of attacks has only increased. The issue with Europe in particular is that while some attackers came from overseas, or at least were recruited or trained in the region, many came from within – radicalised within Europe's borders and fuelled by domestic issues. The US and Canada, which are both much further away from the conflicts in the Middle East and have done a better job of integrating immigrant populations into the fabric of their societies, have still suffered, albeit more from the lone wolf phenomenon and the threat of online recruitment. Similarly, other countries with sizable Muslim populations have also become susceptible to extremist threats

emanating from the Middle East – India, Indonesia, and Malaysia come to mind in particular. Effectively, the instability of one region is having an outsized impact on the security of many other regions. Repercussions are visible in terms of defense expenditures, legal reforms that strengthen the state's hand when dealing with counterterrorism, the repeal of certain civil liberties in the name of security, and the closure of borders, or at least the limiting of the free flow of peoples from one place to the other.

REFUGEES

As Laurie A. Brand and Marc Lynch suggest, while “episodes of forced migration are not new to the Middle East,” even by “historical standards, the sheer magnitude and simultaneity of today's refugee flows represent something new.”⁶ They cite new data that suggests that from Syria alone, six million people have fled the country, while a total of 10 million inhabitants have been internally displaced. While neighbouring countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon, have been the first to receive consecutive waves of refugees, Turkey and North African states have served as “key transit hubs for refugee flows into Europe.” There are of course security costs associated with this trend, given that refugee populations are often seen as breeding grounds for a “new generation of desperate jihadists who blame the west for their despair.”⁷ However, implications of these refugee movements are primarily human, economic, infrastructural, and governance-related. It is around these factors in particular that we can anticipate systemic change in the global order, as states struggle to house, support, and govern non-citizens. This is to say nothing of second- or third-order needs, such as integration, the granting of status and rights, or questions of identity. And it is these latter factors that have aggravated the nascent trend of “fear of the other,” which in Europe and the US has manifested in populism and the rise of rabid nationalism.

TRADE AND OIL

Global trade and energy prices are tied to the free flow of goods via sea lanes and airspace. Security threats emanating from the Middle East, such as terrorism and piracy, inherently threaten that flow. The disruption of energy production in the region, for example, ex-

“ The conflicts in the Middle East, embodied in civil war, sectarian clashes, and terrorism, have become permanent features of the region, rather than passing storm clouds. The local, regional, and global implications are heavy and manifold.

erts tremendous pressure on energy prices and emerging markets. In turn, elevated oil prices complicate the constant battle against inflation.⁸ Current geopolitical instability threatens nascent economic recovery in the region, while oil prices continue to rise, seeing two-year highs.⁹ This suggests that instability in the world's largest oil producer, Saudi Arabia – which will happen if the King and his son continue to overplay their hand – will greatly impact the global economy. And the problem is cyclical.

As oil revenues, tourism, and trade remain depressed in the region due to the violence percolating within it, rulers struggle to provide the types of perks and financial incentives to elites to support their rule. As a result of their failure to meet popular expectations on this count, these same rulers often resort “to repression to quell discontent – making the region even more combustible today than in 2011.”¹⁰ Once again, therefore, energy production is disrupted, energy prices are affected, and so on and so forth. This persistent disruption has caused many energy-importing countries to seek energy independence and to diversify sources. However, this is often possible only for wealthier countries and still does nothing to address the disruption of trade in an ever-globalised world.

Implications for India

India, as a major global player and a country that lies in close proximity to this volatile region, has much at stake when each new crisis hits the Middle East. There are three major areas that are most sensitive to these shocks: defence spending, trade and investment, and labour and remittances.

DEFENCE SPENDING

When it comes to defence and the acquisition of arms, India relies on the Middle East. Specifically, Israel is a major defense and strategic partner for India.ⁱ According to a recent report, “India's arms trade with Israel has increased 117 percent, from \$276 million in 2015 to \$599 million in 2016. India imports 48 percent of Israel's total arms exports.” And while “Russia is still the largest exporter of arms to India, contributing 62 percent of total imports... Israel has emerged as the second largest at 24 percent.”¹¹ What's more, strategic and military cooperation between New Delhi and Jerusalem extend into the realms of counter terrorism, intelligence sharing, and joint military training and (most recently) an exercise.¹² The fruits of this important bilateral relationship can easily be disrupted when Israel becomes embroiled in one of its mini-wars with Hamas or Hezbollah, as we have seen in the past. And while one could say that India can always rely more heavily on Russia, Moscow, under Putin's reign, is not the most stable and reliable actor itself.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Some of India's leading trade partners are found in the Middle East. Specifically, India relies on the Arab states to import of food and energy. According to data released by the Indian Ministry of Commerce for 2016-2017, “India's volume of trade with Arab countries stands at \$121 billion, which includes \$50 billion in exports and imports of \$71 billion. That constitutes around 18.25 percent of India's total trade.”¹³ In terms of investment, India has inked deals with the Arab states, Israel, and Iran at different levels and in different arenas. While bi-

ⁱ It is worth noting that India has deliberately remained aloof from and agnostic on the Arab-Israeli conflict – a legacy of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that many Indian analysts teach as the wisest course for their country to this day.

lateral investment with Israel is primarily in the realm of high-tech, just this past May, India signed an agreement with Iran to invest close to \$500 million in the southern port of Chabahar to facilitate trade with Afghanistan and the central Asian republics (and to strategically bypass Pakistan).¹⁴ In terms of energy, India's major suppliers are Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, while Qatar provides most of the country's natural gas. Due to India's rapidly growing economy, it is now the world's third largest user of crude oil.¹⁵ These cumulative dependencies render India quite vulnerable to shocks emerging from the region. This is even truer as the countries listed above with which India has cultivated trade, investment, and energy ties are among those that are either experiencing major tumult or causing it.


LABOUR AND REMITTANCES

At the start of 2017, there were approximately nine million non-resident Indians living and working in Arab states. The economic impact of this large external labour force is notable. Aside from simply providing employment, according to the World Bank, Indian remittance inflows from the Middle East amount to \$40 billion per year.

What is more, these remittances account for more than half of the total remittances flowing back into India – 56 percent to be precise.¹⁶ Even though total global remittances constitute less than three percent of India's GDP, the stakes, and the risk of disruption for that matter, are high.¹⁷

It is possible that the inhospitable security climate in the region, combined with rising labour wages back in India, will make working in the Middle East much less attractive over time. Moreover, India has already had to bring home approximately 15,000 of its citizens from war-torn countries of Iraq, Libya, and Yemen since the rise of ISIS in 2014.¹⁸ This trend does not seem to be abating.

And what of future disruptions?

The conflicts in the Middle East, embodied in civil war, sectarian clashes, and terrorism, have become permanent features of the region, rather than passing storm clouds. The toll of these raging conflicts is heavy and manifold. It is local, it is regional, and it is global. It affects stability, security, trade, investment, and most importantly, people. Simply put, the turmoil in Middle East cannot be ignored. And over time, it is likely to cause systemic change to the international order. Already, it was America's folly in the region that led it to recede from its erstwhile role as the global leader. And where the US has receded, others may rise and fill the void. Russia has taken an activist approach in global politics as of late, rising to fill any void left by the US and succeeding heartily. In the Middle East, this can be seen through newly inked arms deals between the Egyptians and the Russians and the Saudis and the Russians, the sharp increase in the number of trips by regional leaders to Moscow (e.g. Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, Saudi Arabia's King Salman), and of course the leading (military and diplomatic) role Russia is playing in Syria. India and China are also actively pursuing agendas in the region that, alongside their non-interventionist stances, could earn them additional influence in the region. Conversely, global actors may be poised in future to look elsewhere to meet their trade and energy needs if the situation in the Middle East continues to deteriorate. Countries around the world are actively looking to rid themselves of their Middle East energy addictions, and boosting their own internal security to mitigate the global threat posed by some of its disgruntled and zealous inhabitants. Rather than acting as a hub for global commerce and movement around the globe, as it has historically, the region may become a danger to avoid and a reason for taking the long way around. 

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CLIMATE CHANGE, TRANSITIONS, AND GEOPOLITICS

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THE Paris Agreement sets out challenging long-term goals to put the world back on track by limiting global warming to well below 2.0 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Such goals demand transformations directed towards climate neutrality this century, while at the same time calling for increasing abilities to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change. Without adaptation, climate-related impacts are likely to “intersect, amplify and ripple across countries,” disrupting international security.¹

This disruption is often considered in terms of how climate change is eroding natural resource bases, or by acting as a threat multiplier. Often, emphasis is placed on how places with more challenging development contexts will also face greater constraints to mitigate and adapt to climate change, thus reinforcing global disparities.

Without diminishing the significance of this argument or denying the economic or institutional drivers of effective climate change adaptation, it is important to move beyond the classic developed/developing discourse and instead explore new global equations that adaptation may bring about. Only then will we be able to grasp the implications for development and security of the kind of transformational changes that are needed to get us closer to the 2.0 degrees Celsius goal.

This essay discusses the geopolitical implications of

climate change adaptation in the context of transitions, and the politics attached to the socio-technical transformations these transitions will require. The section that follows contextualises the conversation in the context of water and implications for India’s development and external relations on the one hand, and broader geopolitics on the other.

Implications of adapting to climate change

Although understanding the implications of adaptation requires more thorough examination, a few thoughts on the matter can be outlined here. “Transitions” – long-term processes where gradual, continuous change transforms the structural character of a society² – are an ideal place from where to start exploring these implications. Urban, energy, development, demographic, and other types of transitions are often advocated as a prerequisite to respond to the challenges posed by climate change. However, transitions require transformations, which are complex, dynamic, political, and involve change at multiple levels (e.g., social, institutional, cultural, political, economic, technological, ecological).³

Transformations refer to “fundamental changes in structural, functional, relational, and cognitive aspects



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of socio-technical-ecological systems that lead to new patterns of interactions and outcomes.”⁴ Technology and infrastructure development in energy, land, water, and waste management are fundamental in supporting these transitions. At the same time, social processes shape the development and use of technology, but technologies in turn trigger new social practices.⁵ This creates new conditions for how society relates to technology. These conditions are likely to be deeply political and contested because of the losses and gains they will generate. Despite this, there is little discussion on the politics attached to the kind of transformations inherent in adaptation, such as the type of policy and institutional reforms necessary to trigger such revolution; the power shifts generated by these reforms; and the social impacts that transformation may both cause and require.⁶ This is across both local and global landscapes. For instance, in emerging economies in general, and in Indian in particular, building cities that cater for a growing middle class while meeting the goals of sustainability and social justice in a landscape with water scarcity and ongoing energy transitions will be a real challenge.

Energy transitions are particularly associated with fundamental social change, like industrialisation, urbanisation, and the emergence and growth of consumerism.⁷ In India, an energy transition implies more secure and non-fossil fuel-based sources of energy that can trigger the move towards clean energy production and consumption.⁸ Outside of a domestic context, such a transition may trigger a new era of energy geopolitics.

Whilst for the last century, energy geopolitics has been synonymous with oil and gas, the growth of renewable energies and their economy is changing this conception. A recent study identifies several mechanisms through which transitions to renewable energy could affect

global geopolitics, such as:⁹

1. The development of new supply chains of critical materials and the cartelisation of rare and precious minerals used in renewable energy projects, such as lithium, cobalt and indium;
2. A resource curse that exacerbates political and social instability, as petro-states lose access to high rents generated from fossil fuels, or a new resource curse in countries rich in rare-earth elements – countries that dominate the export of rare-earth minerals effectively becoming the petrostates of tomorrow;
3. Increased cooperation or rivalry over sources of international finance and capital for investment and technology in the energy sector;
4. Increased transboundary energy trade that could generate interconnections and increase interdependence among neighboring nations; it could also create geopolitical vulnerabilities for electricity importers;
5. Reduced greenhouse gas emissions that should logically reduce the risk of instability that climate change would otherwise generate;
6. Unstable environments, due to effects of climate change and/or transition pathways adopted, that can influence investments in renewable energy by increasing the cost of capital.

The above points are not exhaustive, but rather explorative. But it is safe to state that new energy transitions are likely to have significant social, technological, and geographical impacts that remain only marginally understood. And India is in the midst of the world’s largest renewable energy transition programme that will not only have domestic repercussions, but is likely to

impact its external politics. For instance, a switch to renewables can imply greater energy independence from the Gulf states. As India hopes to become the “renewable capital of the world,” it has for the past two years attracted foreign renewable companies eager to explore business-friendly policies the government has promised.¹⁰ Increased foreign investment and more energy independence can in turn change the nature of India’s relationship with the petrostates, redefine the country’s place in the region’s geopolitical game, especially with regards to China, and this way influence both energy and global politics.

A lack of attention to the effects of transitions runs the risk of creating adverse geopolitical consequences in the form of socio-political instability and depleting water resources, as will be seen in the subsequent section. Further exploration into the dynamics between the water-energy-land nexus, political and economic stability, social equity, and sustainability are needed in order to gain better understanding of the types of policy tools and technological solutions needed to deal with transitions in the context of climate change – to ensure peaceable repercussions, even if they bring changes to relationships.

Key concerns will thus be how to trigger ‘just transitions’ in the context of climate change that attain both socio-economic development and ecological goals; how and who should govern this transformation; and how to enact locally relevant interventions that consider both technological needs, as well as territorial and resource pressures across scales. In sum, a closer look at which transformation?, for whom?, and by whom?, as well as the interactions inherent in these transformations, is still needed in order to understand the kind of sustainability these transformations will bring about locally

and globally, and the potential geopolitical challenges they may trigger.¹¹

India, water, and geopolitics

Climate change adaptation will primarily be about water, as stated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2008.¹² Water is the fundamental link through which climate change will impact humans and the environment, and, as recognised by the Paris Pact on Water and Climate Change Adaptation, water systems are the very foundation of sustainable human development.¹³ This particular area therefore merits discussion – and that too, in the context of India. As the world’s fastest growing country, one of the top CO₂ emitters globally, a large global food producer, and a growing regional power, changes within the country will have great geopolitical and environmental implications beyond its borders.

Water woes in India take multiple facets. For instance, India is expected to be the most populous nation by 2022. Demographic changes will be particularly visible in urban areas, and recent studies show that Indian cities are expected to experience the highest and fastest growth in the world, so that by 2030 the size of the country’s urban population will double.¹⁴ Thus, any changes in Indian cities will have a huge impact upon global efforts to reach the two-degree goal signed in Paris 2015. Globally, urbanisation is considered one of the primary direct drivers of land change, leading to habitat loss and impacting ecosystem services. It has been found that increasing population and economic growth could near triple water demand for agriculture in this century in the absence of climate policy.¹⁵

Changes in rural areas, too, are seeing effects on water supply. Over the past eight years, India has experienced four major droughts; last year accounted for the worst drought in decades, affecting over 330 million people.¹⁶ Water scarcity will likely continue to be a major issue in the rural areas of one of the world's largest food producers – the risk of droughts is only projected to increase in frequency and intensity under changing climatic conditions.¹⁷ Changes in rural India will thus have implications for global food production and thereby for human security at large.

A third instance is that of agriculture, which in India is largely underpinned by groundwater irrigation. However, “groundwater overexploitation has led to drastic declines in groundwater levels, threatening to push this vital resource out of reach for millions of small-scale farmers who are the backbone of India's food security.”¹⁸ Such pressure in the agricultural sector can force thousands of people to migrate to cities in search for better opportunities. Rapid urbanisation caused by migration and internal displacement will in turn put additional pressure on infrastructure, particularly on, critically, existing but inadequate sanitation systems in Indian cities. Lack of adequate sanitation systems with a growing urban population will have huge implications for health and human security.

At present, water security is the single most important concern for the sustainable development of the developing world. Rural and urban India, indeed the whole South Asian region, face the same problem. The paradox is that, although the region is linked together by water co-dependencies, these are very poorly integrated.

In a region where countries depend on the same rivers and their neighboring upper riparian for water supply, transboundary water governance will continue to be crucial for securing water resources. However, longstanding animosities over the Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas rivers of Pakistan and Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers of India; controversy on water sharing of Koshi, Gandak, Tanakpur, and Mahakali between India and Nepal; and disputes between India and Bangladesh for the Ganga and Teesta will remain highly politicised issues in the region. What is at stake here is the risk for water stress that could jeopardise power production and irrigation, and in turn put at stake the livelihoods of millions of people in the region relying on water supplies from these rivers. The effects from climate change upon water availability will have an impact upon the hydro-politics of the

region as well as upon all other sectors, as more energy will be necessary to purify water or to pump water from greater depths. Less freshwater availability will in turn cause competing demands between consumption for agriculture, for the needs of a growing urban population, and for energy generation – yet another area part of the discussion on water, albeit in the context of an opportunity.

India was the third largest energy consumer in 2015 after China and the United States.¹⁹ Increasing industrialisation and urbanisation will require much more energy for an already-underserved country. Even now, the country is the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases²⁰ in the world and the fifth largest power market in electricity generation, a large majority of which is derived from fossil fuels.²¹ Coal, the basis of energy production in India (and in large parts of the developing world), is causing grave air pollution problems and contributing to serious health issues, including heart diseases, asthma, and premature births.²² Furthermore, while electricity generation has grown in the country, it has not been able to keep pace with the rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and population growth. Therefore, the country continues to suffer from energy shortages and today, over 20 percent of the Indian population does not have access to electricity.²³ Electricity demand and generation is only expected to increase in the future.²⁴

Already the past century has witnessed a huge surge in hydropower development to meet the growing energy needs of the people. Hydropower in India is today an important source of renewable energy, making up 15 percent of the total power generated in the country.²⁵ Here, we see the connection between water and energy. As notes the UN, “the choices made in one domain have direct and indirect consequences on the other, positive or negative.”²⁶

For instance, as per a study,

it is a fact that globally, dams, inter-basin transfers and diversion of water for irrigation purposes have resulted in the fragmentation of 60% of the world's rivers. Large dams with reservoirs significantly alter the timing, amount and pattern of river flow. This changes erosion patterns, and the quantity and type of sediments transported by the river. [The] trapping of sediments behind the dam is a major problem,” and with time, “reservoir storage capacity is lost due to sedi-

mentation... [As a result,] less power is generated as the reservoir's capacity shrinks. Trapping of sediments at the dam also has downstream impacts by reducing the flux of sediments downstream which can lead to the gradual loss of soil fertility in floodplain soils” and adversely impact on agricultural production.²⁷


Due to these negative effects from dams and river diversion, some of India's most recent hydropower plans are likely to awaken opposition with neighbouring Pakistan, and to raise questions concerning their environmental viability and social impacts.²⁸

Regional tensions over shared waters and competing demands will thus remain extremely important for India's foreign relations and its ambition to become a regional leader, particularly in relation to China's growth and expansion.

However, water politics or hydro-politics, is not unique for India or the region. Rather, as water is increasingly considered “the new oil,” hydro-politics are expected to shape the 21st century globally. We can thus expect to encounter hydro-politics beyond freshwater deposits in lakes and rivers. So-called “virtual water” – the indirect trade of water through exports of crops and livestock products²⁹ – will be increasingly relevant in shaping producers and their products, food imports and exports, as well as the regulations taxing or incentivising these around the globe. India is a major food producer globally. At the same time, agriculture is one of the largest consumers of water, a major source of water pollution, and highly exposed to water scarcity. India produces and exports some of the world's most water-intensive crops, like rice. As a result, India is the largest global freshwater user and one of the top virtual water exporters, despite being highly water-scarce.³⁰

India's case with water scarcity and inefficient water governance raises several implications that are relevant globally. First, it brings to the fore geopolitics of food and food security. It puts into question the current cartography of food production as well as the “fair” monetary value of food.³¹ If global food producers like India are running dry on water resources, it might be more efficient to focus on less water-intensive products. The problem is that decreasing availability of water resources (both in terms of quantity and quality), and an increasing water demand, are global phenomena. So where will food be produced? How will it be produced? And what socio-technical transformations will these changes in food production demand? If virtual water has been left out of the equation when calculating food prices, who should assume the “right” cost of food while avoiding food insecurity?

Second, hydro-politics, particularly when it comes to transboundary waters, have traditionally focused on the role of states. But when taking into account cross-scale interactions³² (e.g., urban, rural, energy), the number of potential actors exploiting, using, managing, trading, and profiting from water becomes huge. This means that the geopolitics associated with managing transitions – and thereby climate change adaptation – are far more complex than the traditional state-centric focus of international politics. Yet, our policy and decision-making mechanisms struggle to deal with complexity, uncertainty, and diverse multi-actor landscapes.

In order to engage with a potentially changed geopolitical map as a result of not only climate change impact, but climate change adaptation around the world, we will need to understand the political, economic, technical, and social transformations that these transitions will both require and trigger. 

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