

Reforming global watchdogs for a democratic world order

The existing world order, whose political and economic structures date back to 1945 when India was still colonized, remains West-dominated. The non-western world seeks a more democratic and equitable new world order that adequately reflects contemporary realities.

To revive multilateralism the UN needs urgent reform, especially the Security Council which has become dysfunctional because of great power rivalries and the veto provision emanating from the World War 2/Cold War era. The World Bank and the IMF as vehicles for imposing the Washington Consensus globally also need restructuring. The prospects of reform, however, are not too promising because of entrenched interests and differences amongst those seeking it.

A substantial shift of economic and political power from the West to Asia has nonetheless occurred. China has become an economic giant and India is rising. China, as the second biggest donor to the UN budget, is now challenging the West within the UN system, including on human rights issues. The heads of several UN agencies are Chinese. Its grip on the WHO has prevented a proper investigation of Covid-19's origins. Its Asian Infrastructure Investment Fund competes with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for sourcing development funds. China's Belt and Road Initiative (extending to Europe) for infrastructure development, its grip over critical technologies, raw materials and supply chains underlines its ambition to create a G2 (with US) to govern the international system.

A new democratic world order will not emerge if an existing UNSC permanent member accumulates even more power within the UN system, particularly one opposed to India's permanent membership. China as the world's foremost authoritarian state that opposes democracy, suppresses human freedoms, is territorially expansionist and hegemonic in spirit can hardly promote a new, more equitable and humane world order.

A looming US-China Cold War will be a major obstacle. The US now sees China as an adversary and accuses it of human rights violations in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, theft of technology, cyber warfare, unfair trade practices, aggressive activities in the East and South China Seas, threats to Taiwan et al. The US is reinvigorating its alliances in Europe and the Pacific, has signed the AU-KUS defence pact, and is bolstering its Indo-Pacific strategy. The tenor of the recent Biden-Xi meeting suggests more global tensions ahead, pitting the western democracies in varying degrees against China's predatory policies, with many nations in resurgent Asia with strong economic ties with China loth to choose between the two powers.

The Chinese version (2770 words to control the narrative against 426 words of the US version) of Xi's talk with Biden rejects every single US charge against China, shifts the entire blame on America's misguided policies and demands unilateral US redress without China needing to do any course correction. Xi's claim that "aggression or hegemony is not in the blood of the Chinese nation" and that since the founding of the People's Republic "China has never started a single war or conflict, and has never take an inch of land from other countries" shows a stupefying scale of self-deception and chicanery, of concern especially to India and other countries facing China's expansionism. It is Emperor Xi of the Middle Kingdom patronizing the world's foremost power. A stable and peaceful new world order cannot emerge from such self-righteousness and hubris.

The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist ideology in its wake, the initial westward lurch of Russia, along with China knitted into a globalized economy with full western support opened up the possibility of a less fractious world order. But NATO's expansion eastwards, the alienation of Russia, US unilateralism, the destruction of the West Asian order spawning terrorism, Islamic radicalism and refugee flows dashed that prospect. Russia spurned by US and Europe westwards has forged close strategic ties with China eastwards at the cost of its own Eurasian

stakes. The new Cold War pitting the US not against one but two adversaries is a geopolitical aberration. America's Afghanistan debacle and transferring that country to the Taliban-Pakistan duo threatens regional stability. Turkey's Ottoman-era ambitions in West and Central Asia and in the Mediterranean presage more regional disruption. With Israel's ties with the Arab world being transformed, the Palestinian cause has lost salience in West Asian politics. The conservative Gulf monarchies becoming more open religiously augurs well for re-shaping Islamist politics.

Non-proliferation issues relating to Iran and North Korea remain sources of instabilities. Accommodating Iran's regional role will test any new global order. Maritime security issues in the Indo-Pacific region have emerged portentously. The structures of world trade are being eroded with questions about WTO's functioning, anti-globalization and protectionist sentiments and regional trading arrangements. European unity, weakened by Brexit, is under stress. Europe's search for strategic autonomy to become an independent pole in global affairs faces internal resistance. Multipolarity as such has not materialized but with dispersal of political and economic power the "middle powers" have increasing strategic space. Effective multilateralism will await a reformed UN. Space based new military technologies, how North-South differences on vital Climate Change issues get resolved, emerging challenges to the hegemony of the US dollar will shape global equations ahead. Advances in digitalization and social media are shaking old sovereignty based global structures.

The birth of a new world order will have delivery complications.

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