

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 4 | Issue 5

2021

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Change in the International Order in the post COVID-19 world

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ABSTRACT

Only a few months took the novel coronavirus to turn into a pandemic and impact the whole world. The virus has not been discriminatory to rich or poor or have respected any physical boundaries. The impact of COVID-19 has been in abundance. The pandemic has slowed down the world and made us look at everything from a different perspective. It has affected all segments of human lives- politics, economies, technology, strategy and development. It is the international order that has been affected the most due to the pandemic. There were tensions between the USA and China due to technological advancements for some time. However, the novel coronavirus has further resulted in the difference between the USA and China, with countries being torn apart between their power tussle. The pandemic has changed as to how one perceives international politics. It is essential to analyse and understand the aspects that will change possibly change in the post-COVID-19 world. This change mainly involves China leading the global hegemony or where the whole world moves away from China after the pandemic has moved away from the global stage. to comprehend what lies ahead, it is essential to understand the significant impact of the pandemic. The following paper scrutinises the significant sectors that will pave the way for the world in the post-COVID-19 era. The paper analyses effects on the geopolitics, multilateralism, geoeconomics and technological aspect and their consequences on the international order. Academic literature, articles, opinion pieces and various other sources are used as secondary sources.

Keywords - USA, China, COVID-19, world order.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 has been able to establish itself as the biggest pandemic ever experienced by humanity since the 1918 Spanish flu. So far, the impact of the pandemic has affected all segments of an individual. Consequentially, the post-pandemic era will surely witness the change in the world order. The world order for long had been evolving with each passing event at the international level.

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The rise of the right-wing governments and forces against globalisation were some of the critical sentiments that were a departure from the existing international norms. The growing rivalry between USA-China further escalated it. The rivalry hurt several countries that looked up to either to the ideologies of American exceptionalism or the Chinese revisionism. It remains to be seen whether these rivalries and the prevalent notions before the pandemic will lead to the countries relying on each other or creating new dimensions to the world altogether.

However, one thing is sure- COVID-19 will have serve repercussions on humanity that is similar to that of the several events such as WWI, WWII, Great Depression, Cold War, and many of the events that took place in the 20th century. With all the principles and norms of the international system going for a toss, two theories are surrounding the balance of power equation – either China becomes the supreme leader in the new unipolar world, or China is disdained for its misadventure regarding the reporting of pandemic and withholding of information which leads to a new chapter in the world order.

Nonetheless, it is perhaps too early to forecast how the post-COVID-19 global order may look like once the pandemic has moved ahead of its worst stage. With the current scenario prevailing in both the USA and China, it is hard to say which countries would emerge as winners in the changing equation of balance of power. Nonetheless, as the future is "a path yet travelled," there are a few criteria that can provide a better perspective to the whole picture about the future. Effects on geopolitics, multilateralism, geo-economics, and geo-technology are some of the criteria that would be helpful in the analysis of the journey to a post-COVID-19 world.

II. GEOPOLITICS

The pandemic has created a significant shift in the geopolitical arena. It is the first global test that has experienced a lack of American leadership. European countries are also facing the same issue. Instead of extending a helping hand to each other, they are busy fighting the virus within their borders. These actions have forced several countries to look out to China, which is indeed shocking.

These complications have increased with political involvement. A debate has been stirring up regarding the role of democracies and authoritarian governments in handling the crisis. Politicians are busy using this ground to further their political arguments concerning the ideologies they follow. The former US Deputy National Security Adviser, Ben Rhodes was quite evident with the recent tweets. It stated, "It is no coincidence that countries run by right-wing nationalists handle COVID-19 the worst (see: US, Russia, UK, Brazil)." [1]

However, he did not realise that several examples contradict his tweet. According to data, Italy

and Sweden have centre-left coalition governments. Ecuador is a country that has leftist leadership. Even so, they have higher reports of cases than Hungary and several Eastern European countries that observe far-right European politics. It goes on to show that even if political analysts want to feed the world with their world views, nonetheless, sometimes a pandemic remains a pandemic.

The form of government or the handling of the situation is not the point of concern. However, what matters the most in the existing situation is the future of the liberal international institutions and the international system. With these systems getting weak, it would be essential to understand the future course of leadership.

Apart from the USA, China is also a contender for the leadership position. However, it has been under the spotlight for all the wrong reasons that begin from containing the virus. [2] However, it tried to use the World Health Organization (WHO) to clear its image and made provision for the public health good to countries in the European Union (EU) its efforts have so far not borne fruit. [3]

Along with the COVID-19 pandemic misadventure, it has been busy buying showing its muscular power in issues related to Hong Kong, [4] Taiwan, [5] and the South China Sea fiasco. [6] These measures have drawn outrage from the international community. To add to all these interrelated causes is racism against the African diaspora. [7] It has forced the countries to review their policies on China. So far, China has been isolated by most of the countries.

However, even after such progress, it is still difficult for countries to evolve and familiarise themselves with the balance of power equation of China with the West. It has become even more difficult for the countries in the Southeast Asian region to operate in international politics because of such happenings. So, it would be fascinating to oversee how the BRICS nations respond to the changing situation.

Nevertheless, such developments at the global forum have given rise to nationalism, electing influential political leaders who tend authoritarianism, and a general desire to strengthen the nation-state. These activities have not gone unnoticed, although such domestic political scenarios were growing before the COVID-19. One of the immediate consequences of such establishments in the post-COVID-19 world would be the move away from globalisation. Countries would look inwards and reduce their reliance on other countries. There is indeed a shift from the "globalised community" to the "gated community" based on the principles of political and economic familiarity. It would be even more evident in those regions where there is political mistrust. One such key example on the move towards this direction is Japan's

decision to diversify its supply chain from China by providing \$2.2 billion stimulus packages to the companies. [8]

Not just Japan, but many companies are moving out of China. [9] These actions affect the geopolitical scenario, which will eventually result in a revamp in the post-COVID-19 world. One of the major reconstructions would be that of countries working on 'self-reliance'. The sole reason is that countries have been cooperating with international institutions like WHO, UNSC, amongst many others.

Unfortunately, these organisations have not responded to the situation with speed and efficiency. Thus, it creates an occasion where G7, BRICS, and G20, amongst many others, become the platform for the global actors to engage in meaningful conversations. Hence, even though the geopolitical scenario is dangling, it opens the door for increasing multilateral cooperation.

III. MULTILATERALISM

In order for smooth manoeuvring of multilateralism, international organisations were created. These organisations provided a platform for international cooperation amongst all the countries. However, it has already been proven that these institutions have performed below par in the present situation. their below-par performance can be further elaborated by taking a note at the World Health Organisation (WHO). It is quite evident by the actions of WHO, that is considered to be the first to the respondent in case of a global outbreak. Unfortunately, it was heavily scrutinised for its sluggish response [10] – delay in declaring COVID-19 as a public health emergency and consequently, not adhering to its definition of 'pandemic'; hesitation in ordering a survey to the situation in China; delay in acknowledgement to the human-to-human transmission; not advising restrictions of trade and travel; [11] speaking on the lines of the Chinese government and the concerns over the independence of the Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director of the WHO.

All such developments point out the influence of Beijing in the organisation. It is not surprising as it was a long time coming. China has been on an assault mode since the time the American leadership was a bit laid back in the 2008 financial crisis. Then also, it had flexed its muscle in the South China Sea region. [12] It had started building artificial islands and taken over several disputed areas with an ulterior motive to keep its neighbours at bay. [13]

However, these geopolitical games are better and effective when played in international organisations like the United Nations (UN). It is because several powerful countries have used the UN to further their political motives, while the same institution is the source of reliance for

several developing nations. China knows this fact for good and has thus used it to spread its wing.

Currently, China is the head of four of the UN's 15 specialised agencies— the International Telecommunication Union, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the UN Industrial Development Organization. On the other hand, France, the US, and the UK contribute about three times more towards the United Nations budget than China. [14] however, they still lead only one specialised agency each in the UN. While the US contributes 22%, China contributes only 12% of the UN budget. [15] In this manner, even though China is not paying much to the international institution, it is still using it for maximum influence. [16]

There is a Consultative Group of the UN Human Rights Council of Geneva, and recently, China was appointed to this Group. This Group comprises of an influential panel that is accountable for choosing experts who investigate and monitor disappearances, detentions, freedom of speech, and the right to health, among many others. [17] It is an utter shock as China is the same country that has been accused of imprisoning millions of Uighurs in "concentration" camps. [18]

Besides that, Chinese nationals have also increasingly taken control of power in various bureaucratic levels in the UN. Although the UN Charter requires the officials to be neutral, it is hardly followed by the Chinese officials. They use their position to promote the country's interests by going after rebels and various Non-Governmental Organisations. They are also responsible for ensuring that Taiwan is excluded from the international system. Therefore, it is not surprising when the UN, in its 75th anniversary, made a press release on the necessity for international collaboration and consensus as it has become more essential when the world is fighting against the COVID-19. It showcases the extent to which the Chinese have penetrated the organisations. Thus, at this point, there must be more involvement by Washington in the international system, and not less. Withdrawing from the international organisation is not the solution as it paves the way for China to consolidate its role as a leader. While these organisations' politicisation remains a serious concern, it also presents a possibility of re-evaluating the broad concept of global governance. Until now, it is the powerful countries that have shaped the geopolitics and controlled the multilateralism. Nevertheless, it is now time for small and middle states to work on the balance of power equation that would be prevalent in the post-COVID-19 world.

For the survival of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and the concept of multilateralism, it is essential

for reforms in the international system. These reforms will help to promote and build partnerships. It will provide opportunities and be the cause of fundamental change in the field of multilateralism. [19] Nonetheless, it is these developments that can bring an unexpected turn in the global economy as well.

IV. GEO-ECONOMICS

The geo-economics situation has been widely affected by the COVID-19. It has forced the world to acknowledge various fault lines: economic disparities, economic order, the concentration of the global supply chain, and above all, the broken global economic leadership. It has only been possible due to the offshoring of manufacturing and industrial capacities from the West to China. The West has strict regulations on wages and works environment, which costs dearly to the capitalists.

China thus stepped up to fill this void. The West also turned a blind eye towards these developments because of the profits earned from big companies' low-cost labour. Subsequently, it allowed Beijing to strategically built influence over the global economy by having a hegemony on the global supply chains (GSC). This economic independence has given the political and economic leverage to China so that it can flex its muscle in the region. It was just Asia, but now it also involves the European Union (EU), especially Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Since 2012, the region has been a part of the unique initiative of China known as 17+1, which is rather unilateral, as it serves the motives of China only. [20] The Chinese economic dreams were further expanded in the World Economic Forum of 2017 when there was an economic fallout under the Trump government. Consequently, China exploited this situation to its fullest. With the COVID-19 prevailing across the world, China has again been exploiting the situation. Due to the lockdown in place, the economy has taken a slump. Several underdeveloped and developing countries have been severely affected. It has forced them to depend excessively on external financing. There is an enormously negative impact on the growth prospects, exports, and financial accounts of the emerging economies. [21] Moreover, China has used this moment for their benefit through various measures. First, China has been selling masks and ventilators for a profit to countries in desperate needs. They are even selling the stockpile that came as an aid when it was fighting the virus. The Chinese are using this to influence the countries and to promote their goodwill. Unfortunately, it is far from real as Chinese-made test kits have been disposed of by several governments as they do not work. [22] To add to that, Mark Green, USA Republican Congressman, claimed that France would be provided with face masks from China only if they allowed Huawei entry for 5G. [23] Although

the French Embassy refuted the claims, yet it shows the power wielded by the country through their 'mask diplomacy'.

Second, China has been spreading its footprint among the economies of smaller nations through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is a unilateral global project by Beijing through the construction of new supply chains and trade routes. [24] It is designed to fulfil the economic interests of Beijing as the flow of raw material from Africa and Asia is controlled, which allows China to supply finished products to the world. Unfortunately, the BRI spending in smaller states raise concerns about debt sustainability, which is then again used by China to force these economies in the debt cycle.

The third is the expansion through technology. Released in 2015, 'The Made in China 2025' initiative is a strategic plan of the People's Republic of China to modernise the manufacturing base by rapid innovations of ten high-tech industries. [25] The whole initiative undermines the promises of globalisation. A significant feature of the plan involves forced technology transfers that put the Chinese economy in a competitive position.

If that is not enough, China flexed its muscle after the pandemic was in control in its territory. It has been busy using state propaganda through social media on the origin of the virus. It is also accelerating its territorial expansion in the South China Sea, [26] Australia, [27] Nepal [28], and India-China border. [29] Hence, it would not be wrong to forecast that China's goals are likely to remain the same in the post-COVID-19 world.

So, it is necessary for fragmenting GSC, trading with nations where there is political trust and above all, controlling the sphere of technology among many others. With China trying to assert its historical position of supremacy in Asia and dominate the world with its 5G network, one can expect the governments to act as 'gatekeepers' of the flow of goods and services for the sake of national interest. Thus, the world should get ready for the new normal- 'gated globalisation.'

V. TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a field that will play a vital role in the post-COVID-19 world. from arms and ammunitions, telecommunications, and advanced unmanned systems for the military to the driverless cars in the civilian sector thing is clear- whosoever controls the tech world, dominates the 21st century. The front runner in geo technology would be the 5G network. 5G is deemed as the future of global telecommunications. It offers enough bandwidth that it can make even the unimaginable a reality.

However, this technology demands billions of dollars in investments to install the fibre-optic networks needed for these systems and several billion more to operate it. [30] 5G domination is based on both the companies and the countries that design and invest in this framework. The dominating country then further has a significant stake in the information transmission, and the sources authorised to access the system.

So far, in this USA vs China's technology war, it seems that the latter has the upper hand. The reason is that the 5G network relies on fibre-optics that are very expensive to install and require an infrastructure investment that may again cost tens of billions of dollars. Through its IT giant Huawei, China has so far been a step ahead to build and install this network at bargain prices, with companies ready to splash in money. Several countries have already started adopting the Chinese versions of 5G, with Huawei, having agreements with at least 30 countries. It concerns as it is alleged that Huawei has strong ties with China's military and intelligence agencies. [31]

The pace at which the company can win foreign contracts in Western nations gives the Chinese government the advantage to infiltrate intelligence agencies and gain access to modern Western technology by stealing innovation secrets of companies and political intelligence of political organisations from across the world the post-COVID-19 era. [32] Consequently, if China ended up dominating the 5G spectrum, the outcomes would be adverse for the USA and the whole world as it would compromise the freedom itself. Hence, in the post-COVID-19 world, the USA needs to take control of this situation. The superiority of Huawei is the \$75 billion worth of subsidies from the Chinese government. [33]

These subsidies allow it to construct the network at below-market cost and cut competition, especially Western ones. Without these subsidies, Huawei would not have this financial advantage. Therefore, if the USA and the other countries are not ready to match these subsidies, the battle would be won by Huawei by default in the post-COVID-19 world.

One way of putting up a fight is by subsidising the 5G technology in the USA and allow and allows Verizon, AT&T, Apple, and Sprint to match the financial leverage that is enjoyed by Huawei. These recipients are the best choices, based on US national security perspective. The companies should come together and pool in assets to establish 5G networks throughout the world.

This way, two purposes will be solved - first, funds will not be wasted by providing separate subsidies to each company and second; all four will have the capability to compete with Huawei on a firm financial basis. In this manner, these companies from the USA can match the price structure offered by Huawei. It gives the USA a chance to penetrate the markets of Huawei and

take control of the market.

In this manner, both the possibility of Chinese monopoly and the concerns of the infiltration of major allies' intelligence services is also prevented. It creates sense security to the Western companies and prevents the loss of freedom amongst the traditional economic, political, and military allies in the post-COVID-19 world. All is not yet lost. The time is although less, but the world has a clear agenda. Countries would have to come together to isolate China in regards. Telecom operators in countries must come up with a plan for building 5G. Else, the future of telecommunications will only flash: "Made in China." [34]

VI. WAY AHEAD

The post-COVID-19 world era would be mostly responsible for reshaping the international order of the 21st century. Various factors will play a significant role in determining the world order. The most important would be the geopolitical scenario, multilateralism, economic situation, and, above all, technological domination. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, it was the USA led hegemony. However, China has also been raising its stake in the international forum through systematic means. For a long time, China has been cementing itself as a global contender for the leadership position. With an uneasy American leadership and a hard-hit Russia, China led world order does not seem impossible too.

It is evident with the actions that it has carried out so far post-controlling the country's virus. Also, how the international organisation has failed to address the situation is a cause of worry. With WHO under the radar, and China having the veto power in the UNSC, even the UN feels irrelevant. Hence, if the liberal institutions must exist, they have to undergo reforms, else, they shall lose their significance. So, either the P5 must be expanded, or the new world order will revolve around another international forum for international cooperation.

With the Chinese muscle and money power reigning across the world, especially in the South Asian region, it would not be surprising if the West looks up to India as an alternative. However, how far Delhi can tackle Beijing depends entirely on how the country can deal with the pandemic. The country has taken efforts by providing aid to SAARC countries, calling out for reforms in the WHO and G20. These steps will help India break the notion of 'non-involvement in international issues' and make it a global actor in the post-COVID-19 world order.

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