

## Post-COVID-19 World Order: An Indian Perspective

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Let me start by thanking the organizers for having me as a part of this discussion today. Although the different parts of the world are trying how to figure out to interact with each other. I think the virtual world is one reality that at least we can come together for academic exchanges. It is wonderful. It is great that for organizers for inviting me and it is wonderful to become a part of this conversation.

I will talk about few aspects about the global order and how in sitting in New Delhi this global order shift looks like and present some of perspectives. And I will try to lay out some of the larger trend lines and shifts that are possibly being understood from New Delhi. So we can also think about New Delhi's priorities over the next few years emerging both foreign security policies and domestic policies as well.

Now, if you look at what is happening to the Global order there are lots of discussions around post-COVID-19 global order. There are lots of debates around what will outlast COVID-19 and what predicts COVID-19 and what doesn't and how COVID-19 itself is shaping the way we live, we exist, we communicate, we travel, we engage with each other both as individuals and as larger collective of individuals in being in the societies and nations.

The first aspect that I want to underscore in here that a lot of debated discussion that we see today about the COVID-19 impact on the global order is actually not so much related to COVID-19. What is happening to the global order was happening before COVID-19. COVID-19 pandemic has in some ways accentuated some of those trends. But those trends were visible some time back even before COVID-19. So in the sense lots of trends particularly visible before COVID-19. And it is very interesting to see once things stabilize how much

of the factor COVID-19 continues to play in the larger evolution of the global order.

First point that I want to lay out is the structural point. It is something that is very visible. It is something that is demonstrable, and it is something that all nation states bigger or small want to figure out. This is the structural reality of the great power politics. now even before COVID-19 it was very clear that the great power politics that we have known a few years since the end of the Cold War is coming to an end. The great power contestation was becoming sharper. the rise of China as a reality the way to shaping the larger discourse on global power, global politics becoming very palpable very relevant in our policy discussions. On the other hand, you have the existing global power the existing superpower. The existing biggest power in the world - the United States of America is trying to exert its own control over this shift. Trying to continue to be this big power. Trying to continue to be the big power. The larger global anchor in the global power contestation. So you have this very interesting phenomena that had emerged even before the COVID-19. You have the existing power trying to maintain its status in the international environment. And you have the emerging power that was trying to almost push its way into the global hierarchy. And you have the US-China contest that is becoming very palpable. Donald Trump ever since he came to office was very categorical. The US President was very categorical that he viewed the great power contestation is the defining element in American strategy in American strategy has evolved over last few years in this direction that makes great power contestation central to America's understanding of the evolution of the global order. So, in that sense, the great power contestation has emerged very important before COVID-19. And COVID-19 has accentuated those trends. What is happening

in the last few years is quite extraordinary that as the rest of the world grappled with the aftermath of pandemic. Some nations find it very difficult to manage and some nations can manage very well. But no one can have denied that all nations are finding that it is extremely difficult to come up with coherent policy response that can achieve results in the short-term and in the medium-term.

And that point in time you have China that is almost trying to change the geopolitical status around the world. Around China's periphery there are lots of change from South China Sea and East China Sea: the tensions to merge Taiwan strait, tensions to merge the Himalayan borders. And in the larger global institutional architecture the tension is to merge. I will come to the institution in a moment. But the larger paradigm of great power contestation is becoming sharper. If you look at the conversation between major powers like Washington and Beijing, and I think that is going to be the fundamental reality for all nation states.

So, in some ways the rise of China is presenting problems. On the other hand, you have the relative decreasing role of the US from various power regions of the world that is creating lots of incite in large part of the world about the future of the global order. So, in that sense you have the emergence of new geographies like Indo-Pacific which has become the key to understanding global politics today. The shift of the center of gravity of world politics, the center of gravity of global economics has shifted to the Indo-Pacific. You have major power contestation taking place at unprecedented level. And unlike the Euro-Atlantic community, unlike the Euro-Atlantic geography Indo-Pacific today is likely to be predominant to future of global order. Therefore, almost all the debates today are centered around Indo-Pacific. And that is why Indo-Pacific becomes such an important part of the discourse. And that is why countries like India, countries like Sri Lanka, countries like China and Japan, countries like US, France and Britain all are looking at Indo-Pacific as the key theater where important developments shape the emerging global order. This is the one

structural framework to understand the present trends, and a country like India is also trying to become a part of this – trying to understand this and trying to grapple with the challenges. It is very evident from the challenge that we are facing in the Himalayan border of the present times, but it goes much beyond that. It goes into the maritime domain, it goes into the institutional domain, and it goes into the normative domain as well.

The second order issue in here is that once you look at the structural reality what is the institutional reality? The institutional reality today is once again derived from this contestation. Institutions, multilateral institutions of today, they are not really able to live up to the challenge that contemporary world is exposing. The challenge is how do you reinvent the United Nations that was created for the post Second World War order. And how do you reorient towards the realities of today? And I think that anyone has a good answer to that. I don't think that there is a good paradigm that has evolved. But the challenges are very fundamental challenges about a multilateral global order. And in some ways that is the heart of the present dilemmas. Because multilateralism just when it is most needed has been found wanting. If you look at the pandemic, if you look at the COVID-19, the ability of the global multilateral order to manage this crisis has been found to be wanting. It is extremely inadequate. We just have to look at the World Health Organization. The initial months of this crisis how troubled from one mistake to another how one particular country is trying to dominate the work of World Health Organization and that led to a spiraling of this crisis.

So, there is this dimension of what the institutions do that are not able to manage the trends of realities of today? International institutions, multilateral institutions of the day are not really up to the mark whether it is UN Security Council, whether it is WHO, or whether it is WTO - World Trade Organization. And the other institutions created at the time of the end of the Second World War. They look tired, they clearly do not show the

ability to transcend ideological restrictions in the past and move towards new realities with new issues, new challenges, new powers and new norms.

So, we have the situation where the institutional architecture is posing a big challenge, we don't have institutions that actually can relate to new realities for example, if you look at the Indo-Pacific geography which increasingly dominates the discourse. In the Indo-Pacific domain there are hardly any multilateral institutions that work. And therefore, how can we construct security, economic and normative architecture in that part of the world? It is a big dilemma and it is a big challenge for the countries like India. Therefore, we are grappling with the challenge like the country of India what do we find? We find that issue-based alliances are emerging. Minilaterals plurilaterals are emerging. If you just look at the Indo-Pacific domain there are various trilateral and quadrilaterals which have generated lots of discussions. The quadrilateral which includes America, Japan, Australia and India that is generating lots of debates about future liability of such platforms. Partly because the existing platforms, existing institutions are not really capable of managing geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific and the larger global order. So in that sense these plurilaterals, these minilaterals, these coalitions that have emerged in the world have to find a way of managing collective action for problems, just like it was tried to find in the aftermath of the Second World War, but in this case it is going to be a huge challenge about major power contestation is very high as major powers are looking at it in different ways. Institutional capabilities are not at the moment in the forms that are needed to manage contemporary trends, contemporary challenges and contemporary threats. So, that is the second level of engagement with the global order. You have the structural problem and you have the institutional problem.

And finally, I would like to focus your attention to the fact that there is also a problem at the normative level. Norms that have evolved over the last few years those norms have become

instrumental in a way into state relations have been framed. So some of these norms go back to 1945 again at the end of the Second World War. Since then there had been a rapid evolution for these norms. There was a rapid evolution in norms at the end of the Cold War where you recall Francis Fukuyama who came up with the thesis of End of History. The idea is that the history is a contestation of ideas. And then the level of ideas that the West introduced free market capitalism and liberal democracy will be the order of the day. So in that sense such norms that involved in that face. We are looking at a great degree of turmoil in the way of those norms are introduced and interpreted. And whether you look at the cyber domain, whether you look at maritime domain, whether you look at the emerging strategic technologies, whether you look at how you collaborate even on pandemics where you see increasing vaccine of nationalism today. There is actual challenge as to what kind of norms can be created so that interstate relations can be conducted in much more peaceful and stable manner. At this point those norms remain very weak. And I think one particular norm which I think has a great degree of salience is evolving very rapidly, and I will call it the norm of globalization.

Again, at the end of the Cold War, the idea that now you have countries of free market capitalism and liberal democracy floor across the world. That is problematic. And the face of globalization that emerged at the end of the Cold War seems to be coming to an end today with this idea of de-globalization which have been nurtured in the few parts of the world. So it is very interesting that the powers who at one point of the time were the biggest voters of the globalization are today moving backwards in certain areas. American President called 'America First' should be the priority. You have Great Britain that has been withdrawing from the European Union. So, there is a sense where the globalization should be renegotiated among various stakeholders. Leading to this idea of de-globalization that is going forward there are fragmentations of globalization. Countries would be reluctant to

trade across domains across countries. Especially because in the recent crises many countries have found that if you become dependent on one particular country, if you become over dependent on one particular country, that over dependency would lead to subtle crises. So in that sense when you see this de-globalization being talked about. In India it has been discussed in terms of 'Self Reliance India'. Indian policy makers are talking on how India should be more self-reliant in critical sense. Now this self-reliance is not the self-reliance of the Cold War where the autarky was the dominant narrative. This self-reliance is likely different. It is about engaging with the like-minded countries and creating frameworks to engage on economic and technological issues. So it is going to be very interesting to see how this face of globalization is to be evolved which is fragmented, which is going to be differentiated, which is going to be amongst countries where there is a great degree of convergence on political and strategic matters. This way the shift is happened. In the past, the idea was if you trade more, it develops great political comfort with each other, greater strategic reliance among each other. Today the argument is that you have to have strategic convergence if you want to trade more and if you want to develop different technologies together. And that is another different pace of globalization in some degree called de-globalization. But I would say it is a different version of globalization, a more fragmented globalization that is emerging again as a norm also as an institutional framework. When you have Great Britain asking for democracies to work together to develop 5G technology, London is basically articulating the need that countries that are like-minded in their approach on strategic matters should be working collaboratively on developing the next generation of technologies, emerging technologies because that is what is going to determine the future.

Therefore, if you look at it on multiple ways structurally, institutionally, normatively you will find that challenges are everywhere. COVID-19 has accentuated these trends. And for a country like India, this is almost inflection point in

multiple levels. Inflection point in terms of understanding real challenge on strategic level. So you have China problem which is clarifying lot of assumptions on foreign policy. We have a challenge at the economic level and geo-economic level where economic globalization is being reinterpreted. And we have a challenge in institutional level, where India has to either help create new platforms, new institutes or try to reorient the existing institutions in ways that can be most productive and that can be leading to a greater collective action from member states towards distinct and emerging problems. And COVID-19 has really accentuated these trends. The fact that earlier this is done, earlier institutional and normative transformations are understood and adopted, the better it would have done for countries that are trying to give a new shape to new order. So in that sense COVID-19 has really given a new definition to the existing problems. More broadly, for a country like India the challenges are coming from multiple directions and for policy makers in New Delhi, adaptability would be the key to transform these problems into effective policy making as well as for greater role that India foresees for itself in the larger committee of nations. Thank you,

### Author Biography



Professor Harsh V Pant is Director, Studies and Head of the Strategic Studies Programme at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. He holds a joint appointment with the Department of Defence Studies and King's India Institute as Professor of International Relations at King's College London. He is also a Non-Resident Fellow with the Wadhvani Chair in US-India Policy Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC.

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