

A NEW WORLD ORDER: IS IT IN THE OFFING?

DHIRAJ KUKREJA

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the Berlin Wall came down on November 9, 1989, followed by the break-up of the USSR in 1991, the Cold War ended, and the USA has sat atop a unipolar world, unrivalled in its influence over the rest of the globe. However, since the last few years, the situation appears to be changing, as new, informal alliances have taken shape between nations or groups of nations with common interests. The erstwhile two great powers of the Cold War had their own interests at stake, but now the alliances have a mutual interest in overturning an international order that has long advantaged the West at their expense. As the world's sole superpower of two decades plus turns inward under the current presidency, these alliances could, or will, seek to take advantage and carve out areas of influence for themselves. Is a new world order in the offing, or will the countries and the alliances view each other with suspicion? Will these marriages of convenience last long enough to, once more, give rise to the bipolarity that the world had seen since World War II, or even multipolarity, or will the situation work loose in the face of natural rivalry rooted in geopolitics?

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It is ironical that while President Wilson believed in the League of Nations for collective security, the US Senate rejected membership to it! The League of Nations failed in its charter, and the phrase was sparingly used after World War II when plans were made for the formation of the United Nations Organisation.

The term 'new world order' has generally been used to refer to any new period of world history that displays a striking change in world political thought and the balance of power amongst nations. Notwithstanding the various explanations of the term, it is, for the most part, associated with an ideological concept of global governance, only in the sense of designating laws, rules, or regulations intended on a global scale, to identify, understand, or address issues that go beyond the capacity of individual nation-states to solve or resolve; this being achieved, not through a world government, but through various institutions of global governance, such as the United Nations, International Criminal Court, World Bank and others. It is, therefore, essential to understand the historical usage of the term.

HISTORICAL USAGE

One of the first and most well-known Western uses of the term was in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points that called for a League of Nations following the devastation of World War I¹. The war had been a catalyst in international politics and it was felt by many that the nations of the world would not be able to coexist as they once had. World War I was considered to have granted the USA the right to dictate terms to make the world safe; President Wilson had insisted for a new world order, which rose above traditional power politics, and laid stress on collective security, democracy and self-determination. It is ironical that while President Wilson believed in the League of Nations for collective security, the US Senate rejected membership to it! The League of Nations failed in its charter, and the phrase was sparingly used after World War II when plans were

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_world_order_\(politics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_world_order_(politics)). Accessed on September 1, 2018.

made for the formation of the United Nations Organisation; however, the term was revived when assessing the creation of new international institutions, such as the US-Europe security alliance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

In recent times, the most widely discussed and used application of the phrase, 'new world order', came at the end of the Cold War, but without a developed definition. Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR and George HW Bush of the USA, used the term to try to define the post-Cold War times, and the spirit of great power cooperation that they hoped might materialise. President Gorbachev's initial formulation was wide-ranging and idealistic, but could not advocate it, being severely limited by the internal crisis within the Soviet system. President Bush's vision was, in comparison, not less constrained: "A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavour. Today, that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known."² However, given the new unipolar status of the United States, Bush's vision was realistic: "...there is no substitute for American leadership."³

While the phrase 'new world order', as used to herald in the post-Cold War era, may not have been well defined, there, however, do appear to have been three distinct periods in which it was progressively redeveloped, first, by the Soviets, and later by the USA, before the Malta Conference, and again after President Bush's speech of September 11, 1990.

At first, the new world order dealt almost exclusively with nuclear disarmament and security arrangements; the phrase was subsequently expanded to include the strengthening of the UN and great power cooperation, on a

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2. Archived copy of President HW Bush's speech before a Joint Session of Congress on September 11, 1990, available on <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3425>. Accessed on September 1, 2018.

3. Ibid.

range of economic, security issues, with implications for NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and European integration being added thereafter. The Malta Conference held on December 2-3, 1989, collected these various expectations, and they were fleshed out in more detail by the media, which then included German reunification, human rights, and the polarity of the international system. However, it was the Gulf War – ‘Desert Storm’ – of 1991 that refocussed the term on superpower cooperation and regional crises, when President Bush stole the initiative from President Gorbachev. The build-up of a UN consensus to permit action against Iraq was highlighted in the US media, when an editorial in the *Washington Post* declared that “this superpower cooperation demonstrates that the Soviet Union has joined the international community, and that in the new world order, Saddam faces not just the US but the international community itself.”⁴ The US capability to exert devastating military power and leadership over a multinational coalition provided the basis for American supremacy in a uniquely unipolar post-Cold War world. A new world order seemed to have arrived on the global scene!

RECENT POLITICAL USAGE

On April 19, 1994, during a World Affairs Council press conference at the Regent Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Los Angeles, Henry Kissinger, the veteran diplomat, stated, “The new world order cannot happen without US participation, as we are the most significant single component. Yes, there will be a new world order, and it will force the United States to change its perceptions.”

Leading to the turn of the century, the term ‘new world order’ has been referred to by various heads of state, in many forums, but mainly from the Western nations, to mean what was said by Henry Kissinger. In the aftermath of the infamous 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, during a speech on November 13, 2001, stated, “There is a new world order, like it or not”⁵, alluding to the terror

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4. “Summit Decision Signals Superpower Cooperation”, *Washington Post*, September 2, 1990.
 5. Archived copy of Prime Minister Tony Blair’s speech at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet on November 12, 2001, available on <https://web.archive.org/web/20090121063703/http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page1661>. Accessed on September 3, 2018.

attacks and the war thereafter to contain any such further action by state or non-state actors.

It was the maverick Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad who, in an interview with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), called for a new world order to break the influence of the Western nations. He noted that “it was time to propose new ideologies for running the world... based on world peace, global collective security, reciprocity and justice.”⁶ During the course of the interview, which came at the end of Israel’s 23-day offensive against Gaza that was widely condemned by the international community and also caused divisions within Israel’s political parties, he called the Western powers “tyrannical regimes and arrogant powers, whose policies in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan were failing.”

Power in international relations is defined in several different ways. The modern discourse generally speaks in terms of state power, indicating both economic and military power. The states that have significant amounts of power within the international system are referred to as small powers, middle powers, regional powers, great powers, or superpowers. Although there is no commonly accepted definition for what defines a powerful state, it is generally based on the influence that a nation-state can exert on the workings of the international system; NATO Quint, an informal decision-making group consisting of the USA and the Big Four of Western Europe (France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom), the G7, the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the G20 are seen by academics as forms of governments or groups that can exercise varying degrees of influence on the global scale. Some scholars of international relations are of the opinion that the declining global influence of the US and the rise of nations and groups such as China, G20, BRICS, threatens the established norms and beliefs of the liberal, rule-based world order. They describe the three pillars of the prevailing order that are upheld and promoted by the West—peaceful

6. Archived copy of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad’s interview with IRIB, February 17, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090219124613/http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=85972§ionid=351020101>. Accessed on September 3, 2018.

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international relations, democratic ideals, and free-market capitalism—which are often opposed by such rising powers. The future of the international system, whether towards a ‘new world order’ or towards a ‘new world disorder’, or to something in between, is an open question.

IS US INFLUENCE WANING?

From pulling out of treaties to belittling allies to starting trade wars, the brash and often reckless actions of President Trump are flipping over the international order that has been in place since the end of World War

II. But even before Trump’s belligerent foreign policy positions, America had been gradually losing its dominant role in world affairs. A power shift among the nations of the world began at the end of the Cold War and has been accelerating in this century. It is not as simple as saying that “America is in a decline,” since America continues to remain a powerful country – economically, militarily and technologically—but American global power has been eroding for some time. Since the end of World War II, the US has been the central player in the international system, more so after the end of the Cold War, but with the current global trends championing “America First” isolationism and protectionism, President Trump has shifted the political mood towards selective engagement, where foreign commitments are limited to areas of vital US interest, and economic nationalism is the order of the day, leading geopolitical allies and challengers alike to pay close attention.

Within the USA itself, neither American political party has come to grips with this fast developing change. Until they do, US global actions are likely to be less effective, may be, even counter-productive. Not only do China and Russia contest America’s global role, a growing number of other countries

too is asserting an independent and increasingly influential role in regional economic and security developments. Growing tensions between the West and Russia, and between the US and China, go well beyond competing interests in eastern Ukraine or over once uninhabited rocks in the South China Sea.

A growing number of other nations too is asserting an independent and increasingly influential role in regional economic and security developments. The power shifts are ever more visible. In the Middle East, the US had hoped for decades to isolate Iran as a pariah nation and weaken the regime until it fell. Today, that goal is unimaginable, though National Security Adviser (NSA) John Bolton continues to imagine it is.

Iran is, and will continue to be, an increasingly assertive and influential power in the region, defending and promoting its interests and competing with the Saudi regime, notwithstanding the reimposition of sanctions. The Russians are in West Asia for good, well-entrenched and building on their long-standing relationship with the family of Syria's dictator. Turkey, a rising regional power, has been acting increasingly independent of the preferences of the US, its NATO ally, playing its own hand in the regional power game. It can be said that it was the US itself that lent a helping hand to unleash these trends with the strategically fatal invasion of Iraq in 2003 – fatal, because it permanently removed a regional leader who balanced the power of Iran. The failure, thereafter, to create a stable Iraq stimulated regional religious and political conflicts, and subsequent efforts to influence current trends in the region were rendered futile; the continually ineffective policies in Syria and Iraq are an existing example.

In Asia, decades of US condemnation and efforts to contain the rise of Chinese power have been unsuccessful. An assertive China has now risen,

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playing an almost as powerful a role in the global economy as the US, unmindful of the trade wars initiated by President Trump. It has defended an authoritarian model for economic growth, armed artificial islands in the South China Sea – ignoring the world opinion after the verdict against it by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Tribunal—and built a military base in Djibouti. China has created new multilateral organisations for security discussions and one for infrastructure development through loans on easy terms. It has developed a global lending programme – the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) –spreading its political and economic influence into many nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The US has not been able to slow down China’s economic growth nor contain its power; China is changing the rules, whether the US likes it or not.

President Vladimir Putin has been successful, to some extent, in asserting Russia’s interests and role in the world, like any other great power. Russia is consciously and actively attempting to rebalance the US influence, with threats to its near neighbours and active engagement in the Middle East.

Military power, the American global trump card, is not showing itself to be as useful a diplomatic tool as it once was. While the USA continues to have the world’s only global military capability with an ability to deploy anywhere, evidence that this capacity effectively sustains its leadership is, however, not visible. Clear military victories are few, the Gulf War in 1991 being an exception. The endless US deployment in Afghanistan carries the hint of Vietnam in its inability to resolve that country’s civil war; the war in Afghanistan is now the longest war in US history, continuing for 17 years! Meanwhile, the militaries of other nations, acting independently of the US, are proving effective, as both Turkish and Iranian operations in Syria suggest.

The transition to this new era is proving difficult for American policy-makers. In an era of globalisation, the ‘America First’ foreign policy is based on the viewpoint that the US needs to defend its interests by acting alone, eschewing or withdrawing from multilateral arrangements for trade,

economics, diplomacy or security. President Trump praises nationalistic leadership in authoritarian countries, while democratic leadership amongst the allies is criticised as weak! In response, the allies, to some extent, have distanced themselves from the US, while other nations have been emboldened to act in an equally nationalistic and assertive way.

Some conservatives like Senator John McCain (recently deceased), have called for a confrontation with China and Russia, while strengthening traditional alliances, particularly with NATO, Canada, France, and Germany, which have been with the US for many long years; others, like John Bolton, the NSA, have advised President Trump to take action for a regime change in assertive powers like Iran, which is now being attempted through a revocation of the nuclear agreement.

When it comes to foreign policy, President Trump's unpredictability just might be his greatest foreign policy asset. His opinion of international relations is as he saw reality television: "Unpredictability and absurdity raise the ratings, while turning over the players and never letting anyone forget who is the star of the show".⁷

President Trump came to power arguing that the country's foreign policy was an abject failure and the world was in a mess. He advocated in his 'America First' policy that it was no longer the US' responsibility to clean up the mess in the world, but to pursue its own interests; he wanted America's enemies to fear it, and its allies to pay their fair share for the protection provided. In a little over two years of his presidency, President Trump is up to his ears in foreign policy controversies, and showing no signs of being constrained. His second Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and the third NSA, John Bolton, are hawks who advise extreme action or reaction, while trade experts, policy veterans and diplomats from almost all the allied nations look on with trepidation.

President Trump's day-to-day unpredictability may be a bother for his own staff, but a grand strategist like Dr Henry Kissinger tends to consider it as an asset; known to advise President Trump on certain occasions, he seems to

7. "Present at the Destruction", *The Economist*, June 9, 2018.

In the last three decades or so, the world has witnessed historic events that have had tremendous impacts on the evolution of a new world order. The end of Communism in Eastern Europe, fall of the Berlin Wall, unification of Germany and disintegration of the USSR marked the collapse of the bipolar order and the end of the Cold War.

detect an opportunity in President Trump's unpredictability. His guidance centres on President Trump's quest to shape a new world order that has a chance at coping with centurial challenges in a rapidly changing environment – starting with a solution to one of the US' biggest headaches of the day, North Korea. Dr Kissinger visualises an emerging great power competition among the US, China, and Russia, which will define the international system in the coming years. As that competition intensifies, the Korean peninsula, wedged between empires, will inevitably come into play. While many countries find President

Trump's tactics deeply polarising, Dr Kissinger finds American overtures to North Korea being based on a deeper strategy that could usher in a balance of power with China in Northeast Asia. To him the USA remains inherently powerful but is no longer unrivalled, with China rapidly rising as a peer competitor, while a weaker and wary Russia, enticed by the prospect of a weakening US-led order, has strategically aligned itself with China. In the emerging bipolarity, the European Union (EU) is too divided to act as a mediator, while the emerging regional powers like Japan, India, and Turkey have yet to find a firm footing, leading to a state of disequilibrium. Unless the US can find a way to both coexist and balance against a rising China, Dr Kissinger and other political analysts feel that the century could bear witness to a new tragedy in great power politics.

THE EMERGING WORLD ORDER AND CHINA'S ROLE

In the last three decades or so, the world has witnessed historic events that have had tremendous impacts on the evolution of a new world order. The end of Communism in Eastern Europe, fall of the Berlin Wall, unification

of Germany and disintegration of the USSR marked the collapse of the bipolar order and the end of the Cold War. NATO's military intervention in the former Yugoslavia and its extension in Central and Eastern Europe – much to the annoyance of Russia – strengthened America's predominance in Europe. The signing of the Maastricht Treaty, establishment of the European Union, creation of a single European currency, and three rounds of EU enlargement, have made the European Union a big player in the international arena. The 9/11 terrorist attack started the War on Terror, getting

America into war in Afghanistan and Iraq. The global financial crisis in 2008 resulted in a worldwide economic downturn with the euro-zone debt crisis undermining the European economy, and even putting at risk the very existence of the euro for a time. As China initiated its economic reforms and openness in 1978, market-oriented changes have borne fruit: China maintained the highest economic growth rate in the world for many years, becoming one of the global economic powerhouses.

China as the growing giant of Asia has attracted attention towards itself; as per predictions, China has overtaken Japan as the world's second largest economy, with the Confucian wisdom being reflected in its pragmatic foreign policy to integrate itself in the world economy. China's ascent has fuelled its ambition to be a major world power and a regional superpower. With major changes underway in the world, the global order is evolving and remaking. To characterise the evolving world order is a great intellectual challenge in the strategic community; analysts have varying opinions over the issue, with some of the view that there is a world disorder rather than world order, while some observers still believe that the world is still unipolar! There also exists an assumption that the world has transformed into a multipolar world:

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Simon Tisdall opines that what has emerged is “a tripolar world”, dominated by the USA, a resurgent Russia, and China.⁸

That the world order is moving from unipolarity towards multipolarity is almost accepted, with the main players of world politics being the US, China, the EU and Russia. Although America’s relative influence is on the decline, it is still the sole superpower, with a strong alliance in both Europe and Asia. It has a well-functioning market economy and continues to be the largest economy in the world; with a dynamic financial system in place, the American dollar remains the largest international reserve currency. To support the economy, it has the strongest military strength and largest military expenditure, with China, however, fast closing in. China is spreading its tentacles of political and economic influence into Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with the US wanting, but unable, to decelerate the Chinese dragon.

Against this backdrop of a resurgence of protectionism through ‘America First’ by President Trump and the forthcoming Brexit in 2019, the Chinese president has called for a new type of globalisation. At the 19th Party Congress, in November 2017, President Xi Jinping called for a “community of shared human destiny”, elaborating China’s vision: “We call on the people of all countries to work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind, to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity”.⁹ The proposition states that human beings have only one Earth and proposes that all nations must coexist in this shared space. Under President Xi Jinping’s idea, all countries should give due consideration to the legitimate concerns of other countries while pursuing their own interests, thus, making a mutually beneficial and win-win international partnership, as opposed to the current dominant conception of international

8. Simon Tisdall, “Munich Conference: Three Dangerous Superpowers – and We’re Stuck in the Middle”, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/19/munich-security-conference-nato-trump-russia-china-superpowers-europe-pig-in-middle>. Accessed on September 22, 2018.

9. Xi, Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”, Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf. Accessed on September 23, 2018.

relations — namely, one of anarchy, power politics and a winner-takes-all dynamic. In China's proposed society, the world would continue in the general direction of economic liberalisation, but would also work towards a new global system that is more equitable, inclusive and fair, a community of shared human values and destiny in a shared process of globalisation.

Through this message to the world, President Xi Jinping has emphasised on the kind of role he sees for China in the emerging international order. The message is clear: China will be an architect of world peace, a stalwart of global development, and a staunch upholder of the international order. As for the way of diplomacy, China seeks communication rather than confrontation, while seeking partnership rather than an alliance, pursuing its independent and peaceful foreign policy, while defending its legitimate interests, and dedicating itself to construct a stable and balanced framework for relations with great powers. Such a message, as analysed by strategists, indicates the emergence of a key feature of a new world order, as scripted by China. To connect the world for free trade, China has launched initiatives like the One Belt One Road (OBOR), also known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), for which it is using economic carrots and sticks with nations that cannot fund it through their territories. China hopes to gain influence through such moves; many nations like the Philippines are moving closer to China's orbit and benefiting from its economic largesse; however, such economic carrots come with a price — toeing China's political aims and diminishing political independence. Like it has done with South Korea, Norway, and Mongolia, China punishes nations that cross it politically, by stopping trade and by using its state-owned media to rally consumers to boycott foreign brands. China, through its ambitious plans, aims to connect the commercial worlds of Europe and East Asia via infrastructure links that will knit the vast landmass of Eurasia together.

To promote security for its trade, Chinese strategists advocate the country's rapidly modernising armed forces as essential, with the navy playing a central role for keeping potential adversaries away from its shores, while providing protection to its sea lanes. It is with this intention that China has armed the islands in the South China Sea as 'unsinkable destroyers' in

the event of an armed conflict. Western strategists, by contrast, advise a continuing presence in East and Southeast Asia because China's growing belligerence is unsettling the American allies. Hopefully, the USA will not fall in to the 'Thucydides Trap', (when a rising power causes fear in an established power which escalates toward war)!

CHINA'S SUCCESS IN MOULDING THE NEW WORLD ORDER AND INDIA'S PARTICIPATION

Can China really make an impact on the emerging new world order, despite the 'Trumpisms' emanating from the US? One needs to understand the desires of the Chinese leadership, notwithstanding its harsh dictatorial rule, and increasing military spending. China, today, is back on the world scene, after about a century and a half that includes Western imperial occupation, plunder by warlords, a Japanese invasion, civil war, revolutionary upheaval, and the recent phenomenal economic growth, and hence, has its own sense of being a great power. The world, however, is very different, with the USA still leading it, especially in China's own backyard in East and Southeast Asia, and is, thus, chary of accepting China as a great power.

China's new power position rests on an extraordinary increase in economic output since the late 1970s, when the market reforms were introduced. Over the same period, as defined by the World Bank, the number of Chinese people living in extreme poverty has fallen to 80 million, a tenth of what it used to be.¹⁰ China is the world's biggest trading nation, with an economy second only to that of the US; there is hardly a country in the world to which China is not either a source of consumer goods, or a destination for commodities and investments. It, therefore, wants, and as some grudgingly accept, deserves, a greater role in world affairs, more so in its immediate neighbourhood.

It is agreed that Asia needs a lot of improvement in its infrastructure. India itself is a partner with China in the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). But the BRI is far more ambitious and widespread, making inroads into Europe and to an extent,

10. "Disorder under Heaven", a Special Report on Asian Geopolitics, *The Economist*, April 22, 2017.

coalescing Eurasia. The BRI, as it progresses, is becoming a debt-trap for the borrowing nations that cannot repay the Chinese loans, raising fears amongst sceptics that the borrowers would become Chinese strategic toeholds, as has happened in Hambantota in Sri Lanka. There is also the possibility of some borrowing nations turning against China; Malaysia has reneged on two major projects worth about \$ 22 billion, calling them scams of the previous regime. Pakistan, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has empty coffers to repay its loans, mainly from Chinese banks and is desperate for a \$12 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which the US is objecting to as it fears a rescue attempt for the banks. China may step in and lend Pakistan the money (most of which will come back to it), but such a move will damage the credibility of the BRI (even as this piece was being written, while Pakistan has decided to review a railway project, a part of the CPEC, worth \$ 2 billion, it has managed a \$6 billion loan from Saudi Arabia and a \$1 billion loan from China, to tide over its immediate financial issues).

Most of the countries do not wish to accept the tough terms and conditions of loans from institutions such as the IMF; China, on the other hand, is offering huge loans on easy terms, but with some conditions. There are no global tenders; all contracts go to Chinese companies, most of which are state owned, as are the banks. Easy money from China once appeared lucrative, but the implosions of projects in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and the Maldives, show how such easy loans can become burdens. In Sri Lanka, the Hambantota port did not pick up any business and soon became a white elephant; when the country defaulted on its loan, China wrote off a billion dollars in return for a 99-year lease – while it may be a financial disaster for Sri Lanka, it is a strategic triumph for China: getting a port in the Indian Ocean by luring Sri Lanka into a debt trap! Countries are normally sensitive to issues concerning sovereignty; even the USA has faced local hostility against its bases in Asia. Chinese strategic ambitions could be, thus, hit, further making Chinese loans for the BRI less attractive. Repeated defaults of loans could endanger the Chinese economy, which as it is, has the highest debt/GDP (Gross Domestic Product) ratio in the world of over 300 per cent. The 2008 financial meltdown

India also has a prominent role in promoting other causes, namely, climate change, digital cooperation and peace-keeping, either with the UN or another nation. China and Russia, on the other hand, are viewed with suspicion and, hence, do not have adequate moral clout as India has amongst the comity of nations.

has shown that even the richest nations can be severely affected by bad debts.

How and where does India fit into this geopolitical and economic quagmire? At one time, India and America did not see eye to eye on most international issues. US diplomats had a constant crib about India never voting with them at the UN. Times have changed and today India's voting pattern is no longer the complaint anymore; it is now about cooperation, deliberations and discussions to create consensus. India understands its position in the world hierarchy, given its economic strength, and is, thus, increasingly involving itself in international issues that

have domestic policy implications, unlike in the past, when it rallied around issues with little or no domestic impact. Climate change, widespread pollution, disease, drugs and digital turmoil, all have a profound effect on the average Indian.

During the writing of this piece, the Indian foreign minister was in the USA for the UN General Assembly meeting. During her visit to the USA, the minister joined President Trump in co-hosting an important meeting, along with a select group of countries on the spread of drugs; both the USA, and India have a serious drug addiction problem, with President Trump having declared a public health emergency last year. In the recent past, India and the USA have also cooperated to issue a political declaration on tuberculosis, permitting poor nations to use World Trade Organisation (WTO) authorised life-saving medicines. India also has a prominent role in promoting other causes, namely, climate change, digital cooperation and peace-keeping, either with the UN or another nation. China and Russia, on the other hand, are viewed with suspicion and, hence, do not have adequate moral clout as India has amongst the comity of nations.

CHALLENGES TO ESTABLISHING THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Recent years have brought deeply disturbing developments around the globe. As Robert Kagan writes in his book, "In the face of such disarray, a worst possible response based on a misreading of the world, American sentiment seems to be leaning increasingly toward withdrawal and looking inwards."¹¹ A Russian dictator, would-be European dictators, though elected, and a Chinese leader, who wields absolute power, all have a vision of transforming the world based on the model of their respective nations. It was once believed that economic success would eventually lead to political liberalisation, that it is now seen how autocracies practise state capitalism that is compatible with repressive governance; geo-economics had replaced geopolitics but today geopolitics is seeing a return; the nation-state that was considered a relic in a world of globalisation and inter-connectivity, is now returning in emerging nationalism and protectionism.

As the world moves ahead in the 21st century, it faces challenges that are measurably worse than may be even five years ago. Increased war-related violence has given rise to a world order under challenge and rent by tensions; proxy wars in Ukraine and Syria are reminiscent of the Cold War era. The comforting factor is that the violence and proxy wars are not leading the world towards instability, since the conflicts are restricted to specific regions. There, however, are four issues, which demand immediate attention from international actors and the UN.

- New conflicts in West Asia and North Africa account for the overwhelming majority of the increase in global conflict fatalities. This is primarily due to the long ongoing civil war in Syria and the emergence of the Islamic State

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11. Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and the Imperiled World* (New York: Penguin Random House LLC, 2018).

of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other such terrorist groups in and beyond Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Nigeria.

- The involvement of the ISIS and other terrorist groups is a key factor in the increase in conflicts, leading to a complex new challenge to peace and security operations, and towards a new world order.
- The world today faces tensions in areas of strategic interest to regional, global and aspiring powers, such as in Eastern Europe, West Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and the Korean peninsula. Although the total global spending has remained largely unchanged since 2010 –around \$ 1.7 trillion¹² the rising Chinese and American arms spending portends risks ahead.
- Apart from violent confrontations, attacks in cyber space are a major cause of concern, with commerce, communications, individual privacy, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), and critical infrastructure mainly vulnerable. Attacks in cyber space are difficult to trace and attribute, and even when they can be, legal and ethical questions persist on what constitutes proportional state response.

The recent intensification of great power competition, mostly dormant since the end of the Cold War, is a major challenge to the new world order. National and nationalist interests have exceeded economic competition and threaten the broader security environment. A resurgent Russia and the economically expanding China have both begun to push back on American dominance, although in very different ways. The leaders of both nations have expressed their intention to alter the international order, while the American leadership is intent on retaining its primacy, albeit through policy frameworks that do not seem designed to achieve that result!

CONCLUSION

The recent announcement of the withdrawal of the USA from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), generally known as the Iran

12. Bruce Jones, Charles T. Call, Daniel Toubolet, "Managing the New Threat Landscape", *Brookings Foreign Policy Journal*, September 2018.

Nuclear Agreement, is having serious geopolitical repercussions, some direct in nature, while others more as collateral. In 2015, despite there being differences in perceptions, the USA, Britain, Germany, France, China and Russia, the P5+1, came together to finalise the Iran Agreement. In 2018, the USA has exited the deal unilaterally, not supported by its major Western allies, China and Russia. Thus, on the opposite sides of the fence, the move will further erode the American ascendancy in the world order and even accelerate the fragmentation of the order. China and Russia, too, do not agree with the US move and are not likely to agree to any renegotiation of the deal with Iran. This has further exacerbated tensions; the reimposition of US sanctions, and the declaration of a trade war with China, would, therefore, lead to an unravelling of global trade.

The fallout of the US exit from the Iran Agreement, the Paris Accord on Climate, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) have led the relations amongst allies and among other major powers to become more transactional, leading to the dismantling of the post-World War II world order. The uncertainty and unpredictability in a changing scenario in the global geopolitical landscape is the reason, perhaps, pushing long-time adversaries such as North and South Korea to seek an end to their strained relations, unmediated by the great powers. This could also be the reason for China and India to moderate their adversarial relations and work together to soften the impact of global order uncertainties. New coalitions would emerge and also disappear as the old world order transforms and the new world order takes time to be established, demanding a nuanced approach by all the major players that want to support an effective multilateral order.

This is a time of serious challenge that will test the world ahead!