We are witness today to particularly dramatic upheavals and sweeping trends – also called “megachanges” – 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,” 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 admitted 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?

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 organiser 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. Multinationals are continuing to edge out nation-states as economic entities. "Nearly 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, telecommunications giants, supermarket behemoths, car manufacturers, and pharma companies."

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 takes into the top 50 with little margin to spare). Even as nationalistic rhetoric serves as the backdrop against which global dialogues are occurring, it is being submerged 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” or Farhad Manjoo’s “Frightful Five” of the tech industry taking over the world 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. Critical moments, triggered by external or endogenous factors in an existing international-
The ‘tracks’ are effectively a durable system of new rules that reinforce and reproduce the established international order. They are today’s disruptions building enough momentum? Are meaningful changes we are witnessing representative of a qualitative shift of our existing world system or a paradigmatic shift?

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 club. 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 it 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 former contours of India’s approach are emerging, are discussed: strategic and normative.

India as a disruptor
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.”


14 Ibid. 541.


16 Ibid, 546.

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

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1 Robert J. Lieber
Professor of Government and International Affairs, Georgetown University

**IS THE US A DISRUPTOR OF WORLD ORDER?**
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.1 In practice, the UNHRC’s grossly disproportionate emphasis on condemning Israel for its real or imagined sins while ignoring or minimizing 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 proportional emphasis on condemning Israel for its real or imagined sins while ignoring or minimizing far worse abuses elsewhere seriously harms the credibility of this body. 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 consequence 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.”2 Yet, the JCPOA provides at most an interlude, currently eight to 13 years, after which Teheran will be able to rebuild its 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 programme 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.3 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 re certify 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.
Russia. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia’s post-Soviet efforts at democracy have been perverted and corrupt authoritarianism 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 murdering the 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 its 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 support 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 economic giant 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 and missile bases there, and threatened neighbours in the South China Sea. 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 Shite Houthis, as a threat against the crowned government that is supported by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The result of 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 benefiting from the existing open liberal international order, nonetheless make it a practice to violate the rules and long-time precepts 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.

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 idea that have underpinned the postwar international system, including trade, alliances, international law, multilateralism, environmental protection, torture, and human rights.

These criticisms seem harsh, but they are mild in contrast to some voices on the American left and in Europe. The columnists 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.” 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.

Alarms about Trump and his foreign policy are due in part to his own rhetoric during the presidential campaign, as well as 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. Rather than implement the policies suggested by his presidential campaign statements, however, Trump has 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.

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 disproportionately affect individuals and businesses from India, including those involved in outsourcing. Then, too, unaniemy 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. 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 US 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.
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 impossible 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

Dmitri Trenin
Director,
Carnegie Moscow Center

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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.

Russia’s relations with Europe have also suffered. Moscow has made an ill-fated attempt to begin playing on Europe-an domestic political battlegrounds. 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 chanc-es 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 Bunde-stag 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 Rus-sian 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 sometimes 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, Bosnian 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, 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 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 Libya, 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 Islamist-styled extremism 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 ignominious 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 Talibans. 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, 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. Russia 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 a variety of 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 other players, such as China, India, Iran, Turkey, and the countries of Central Asia, to create a modulus of order where the US is largely absent; i.e. Continental Asia. It will only be then that the repercussions caused by Russia in the last few years will have 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. 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 leaders. 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 Indian 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 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 partner for India. The India-Russia relationship needs an update, not a downgrade.
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.” 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.” It is safe to say that China’s embracement 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 components 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. 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-buffer 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.” 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. 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 institutions 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 leverages 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.

If China abandons that international order, it will undermine China’s own positions and cause undesirable 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. 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. 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.

The Western countries and China might differ fundamentally over whether the international order should be...
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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 through collective policy coordination, universal security through joint actions against global security challenges, and emphasising the moral principle of being “harmonious but different.”

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.15 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.16

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.17 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 harbour 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 it 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 principal 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 co-operate 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.
GLOBALISATION, DEMOGRAPHY, TECHNOLOGY, AND NEW POLITICAL ANXIETIES

Samir Saran
Vice President, Observer Research Foundation

Akhil Deo
Research Assistant, Observer Research Foundation

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. 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. 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.

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. The consequences of inequality are only further aggravated by technological change, which is 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 economic powerhouse, will find itself 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. 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 manufacturing 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.

The subsequent discussion reveals three broad conclusions. 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.” 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. 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.

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.

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; fears about downward mobility amongst the older white middle-class correlate to premature mortality; and millennials in the West are far more likely to identify themselves as poor or working class as opposed to middle class. 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 benefit 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.

Adding to this, it was the American ‘rust belt’ – the Midwestern states with the highest concentration of manufacturing jobs – that saw the biggest influx of non-white immigrants. 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.

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.” 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.

Access to digital technologies, and its abetting effect on the transformation of the public sphere into echo chambers, are only exacerbating the political trends 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 has enabled echo chambers to form.

Research reveals that populist messages often get more traction online because of their anti-establishment messages. 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 automation, rather than increased global trade, which will be responsible for a loss in economic prosperity.

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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 young population by 2030, many states will also struggle to provide employment to their young labour force. 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. 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 world’s economic architecture under globalisation 4.0. This challenge portends both domestic and international consequences: scholars believe that Xi is likely to engage in diversification of the national and geopolitical posturing to “compensate for the political harm of a slower economy, to distract the public, to laud rivals who might use nationalist criticisms as a way of maintaining their own currency.”

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.

In other parts of Asia, a young polity embittered by years of corrupt dynastic politics, inequality, and poor governance has provoked resentment against political establishments 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. That these two leaders from relatively humble backgrounds came to power in democratic governments, carrying with them a populist appeal and playing 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. 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 and communal rhetoric is the corrupt and ineffective judiciary, 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 virulently 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.

The interactions between demographic change, income inequality as a fruit of past waves of economic globalisation, and technology seem to be producing an Asian 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, Philippines and
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 policy, 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 production framework, 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 One of the earliest recognisable instances of digitally networked protests in India was the 2011 anti-corruption protests. This has further fractured India’s multiple fault lines with many incidents occurring in Uttar Pradesh, home to the largest state population in the country and emerging urban centres.54 The most recent instance of agitations 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.55 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.56

The ‘Asian century’ is far-reaching. First, Asian states will engage with international politics, it will become more questionable. Third, to the extent that economic growth defined by digital technology will challenge their – will strain countries that, to begin with, exhibit weak 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 production framework, driven by manufacturing. India will have to undertake its quest for jobs in a tumultuous global economy disrupted by the fourth industrial revolution.

According to the United Nations, this will result in India having an urban population of over 800 million by 2050.57 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 2030.58 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.59 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, tax 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 stoking 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.
MINORITY REPORT: ILLIBERALISM, INTOLERANCE, AND THE THREAT TO INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Manu Bhagavan
Professor of History and Human Rights,
Hunter College and the Graduate Center-CUNY

I
N 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 organizers. The rally ended with a bout of violence near the Lee statue.1

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
Union. In Germany, according to Amnesty International, between 2016 and 2017, killings of transgender people have hit a record high, according to the Human Rights Campaign. 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.

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. 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. In Germany, according to Annemey International, violence based on race is at its highest levels since the end of the Second World War.

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. Open Doors, an organisation that tracks the persecution of Christians worldwide, ranked the country fifteenth in its 2017 World Watch List.

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… In the end, the majority will follow our point, recently declared that “mixing cultures will not lead to forestall…. In the end, the majority will follow our point; recently declared that “mixing cultures will not lead to… 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. 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.

Eventually, 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 ideally, 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, it is unjust that they should be satisfied that the proper and necessary guarantees have been given.”

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 however 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.

As a result, Japan got nowhere when it tried to insert racial equality language into the League’s covenant.

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 applications 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 minorities 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. 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.”

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 fact that Germans were in fact the largest ethnic minority – empires all dissolved at the end of the war. A number of smaller successor states and mandates emerged in their place. 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:

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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 witnessing 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 Rakhine community has been targeted in a “well-organized, coordinated, and systemic manner” by the Burmese army and vigilante groups. The state government 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 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.28 From the outset, India played an outsized role in expanding human rights norms, seeking to bridge the 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 localities.29

The High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations, Manuela Buerk, in a presentation before the UN Human Rights Council, asked: “Consider the Rohingya’s 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?”30 Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire, who commanded UN peacekeeping forces in Rwanda, told Sky News: ‘You’re into the midst 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’re operating [sic] to do.”31

THE slaying in February 2017 of Srinivas Kuchibhotla, a 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.32 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 to go back to his own country, the assailant shot him.33 Not surprisingly, Indi-an 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.34 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 erosion of norms, leaving us particularly vulnerable now.35 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 the international efforts like the 1992 UN Declaration on Minorities and the byzantine patchwork of protections and mechanisms created by human rights treaties are unlikely to do much to stem the fires of rising hatred.36 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.

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.
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.”

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 industrial 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.

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. As for pace, this is what happens in an internet minute in our digital world: 16 million texts are sent; 4.1 million YouTube videos watched; 3.5 million Google
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. 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 worldwide. 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. 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. 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 communications 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 patient can also study, assess, and interpret data. This data is then assessed through a self-driven machine learning programme that can resolve complex problems.
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 study 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 been in the system for 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 Competitiveness Index. Ranked 51 for 2017, 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 technolog-}

ies. 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 its training programmes.

This is of course linked to the fact that while India may have millions of young and educated professionals, 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 250 universities.13 China, South Korea, and Japan dominate this ranking.

The level of unemployment is therefore high and likely to worsen with the arrival 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 UBS 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 growing 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 miniscule act.” It lags behind others in the broader Asian region when the innovation variables are contextualised against the size of its economy, or compared on a 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 Price-waterhouse 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 bank 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.
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.10

Large-scale industrial and manufacturing projects will be managed through cloud computing. From concept to design to manufacture, delivery, every step of industrial and manufacturing processes will use platforms 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.11

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12 This conversation on R&D and innovation is based on the author’s article “India’s billionaire count is rising, but the country is trailing when it comes to backing innovators,” DNA, October 29, 2017, http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/column-investing-in-rd-key-to-growth-2556951.
14 Ibid.
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 interrelated factors: the assertion of history, the realisation of geography, and the weaponisation of economics.
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. 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.” Xi’s call was far from being ceremonial tokenism. Under Xi 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.”

This assertion of China’s rightful place in tian xia – which French interprets to mean “nearby Central Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia” – 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 Sea – 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” 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 independence, 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-politicality 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 furthers 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 resurrected the idea of a Spice Route through the Indian Ocean. Books written by thinkers close to the current Indian dispensation have drawn attention to India’s vast maritime heritage, 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.”) 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. 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.” 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 war – and remains – communist. For American strategists a rebalanced came 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 consolida- tion 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.”

It comes as no surprise that the birth of a new geopolitical term – Indo-Pacific – is coincident with a re-emergence of great power politics.
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 Mahanian.”14

However, it 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.”

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.20 The implication here, of course, is that just as the US sought to veto the influence of the Caribbean powers in the Greater Caribbean through the Monroe Doctrine, China too will adopt a similar doctrine for the SCS. Kaplan presents 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.”21 For the Chinese, the SCS is of particular importance: “Indo-Pacific countries control a large part of the SCS, which is a ‘natural shield’ for China’s densely populated and most-developed southern parts.”22 Having a “strong foothold”23 in the SCS – which essentially connects western Indian Ocean to Northeast Asia – would, Li argues, act as a “restraining factor” for the US navy.

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 that we are? More ethical? Less nationalistic?”24 Pushing this argument further: as Indian naval capabilities grow, what stands in the way of India to also seek exclusive 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.

But 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: “All of 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 globalisation, they have to be reinvented in more blunt and ideological form by, as it turns out, the communications revolution.”25 If the US is a counter-example to the claim that globalisation homogenises – “flattens,” to use a Thomas Friedman idiom – an entire continent, then so is the India-China dyad.

The 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.”26

BRI, which states that the initiative shall be based on “the `five principles of mutual coexistence” and how BRI also 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 baselines 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.

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 this 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.27 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 the potential to create vulnerabilities and socio-economic desirability.28

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Blackwell 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.”29 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.”
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, China’s strategic space will be vastly diminished. Along with China, and often side-by-side, India has argued for the Indo-Pacific to be credible in the world. But beyond this, the modern Indian model – of a syncretic, liberal, democratic republic – must sustain itself. It 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 embrace protectionism. India needs to succeed at home for the normative Indo-Pacific to be credible in the world.

Coda: Putting India in the Indo-Pacific

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2 Bicken, Out of China, 407.
4 French, Everything Under the Heaven, 4.
17 Kaplan, Asia Pivot, 45.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
24 Robert D. Blackwell and Jennifer M. Harris, War by Other Means: Geronovolos and Staunton (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2016), 117.
25 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
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.” For the Middle East, this new state of affairs has manifested in conflict and instability. But the region is not hermetically sealed. 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 the Sunni tribes. In Yemen, Iran has actively supported the Houthis (a Yemeni religio-political movement rooted in Zaidiyah, 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 it has been able to take advantage of the war in Syria to create 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 in harm’s way. Its major goal, once it settled on one after various organisational manifestations and ideological tilts, 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 relig...
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.

ERS tremendous pressure on energy prices and emerging markets. In turn, elevated oil prices complicate the constant battle against inflation. Current geopolitical instability threatens nascent economic recovery in the region, while oil prices continue to rise, seeing two-year highs. This suggest that instability in the world’s largest oil producer, Saudi Arabia – which will happen if the King and his son continue to overlay 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.” 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.

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. 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.” 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. 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.” In terms of investment, India has inked deals with the Arab states, Israel, and Iran at different levels and in different arenas. While bi-

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.” 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.” 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 – 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.

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, persecution and terrorism in the Middle East and have done a better job of integrating migrants into 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.

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.

Implications for India

1. 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). 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. 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. Rather than acting as a hub for global commerce and movement of its disgruntled and zealous inhabitants. Rather than enhancing 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 handsomely. 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.

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 handsomely. 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.

dominicdudley/2017/05/09/india-new-middle-east-strategy/
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.

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 society — 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).

Transformations refer to “fundamental changes in structural, functional, relational, and cognitive aspects...
of socio-technical-ecological systems that lead to new patterns of interactions and outcomes. 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. 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. This is across both local and global landscapes. For instance, in emerging economies in general, and in India 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 consumption. 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. 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:

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. 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 peacable 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 transformations, 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.

Climate change adaptation will primarily be about water, as stated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2008. 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. 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. Thus, any changes in Indian cities will have a huge impact upon global efforts to reach the two-degree goal signed in Paris in 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.
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. 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. 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.”

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 river, the interactions between and their neighboring upper riparian for water supply, transboundary water governance will continue to have direct and indirect consequences on the other, positive or negative.

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 sedimentation… [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.

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 and socio-economic impacts.

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 and 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 fresh water deposits in lakes and rivers. So-called “virtual water” – the indirect trade of water through exports of crops and livestock products – 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.

India’s case with water scarcity and inefficient water governance raises several implications that are relevant for global food and water security. It puts into question the current cartography of food production as well as the “fair” monetary value of food. 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 interactions (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 diversity across 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.


17 Anne Susan Sam et al., “Analysing Vulnerability to Climate Change in India with Special Reference to Drought Risk: Results from a Field Survey,” in *Climate Change Challenges (SC) and Social-Economic-Ecological Interface Building*, eds. Sunil Nautiyal et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016).


23 Although this is a huge improvement from the 45% with access to electricity in 1990, World Bank Database. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS?locations=IN.


