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Adrift at Sea: Lighthouse in the Tempest?

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Editors' Note

WE ARE PUBLISHING *Raisina Files 2023* in what could be a year that shapes the rest of the century. The energy of a post-pandemic world is palpable, even infectious, as many seek to now build a fair and inclusive world. Yet this optimism, buoyed up by our imagination, is tempered by a very real war—a war where both aggressor and respondent agree that peace can be attained only by a decisive victory in the battlefield.

Meanwhile, our planet is taking no prisoners, and extreme weather events and disasters are pushing communities and countries to the very limits of their resilience. Technology is seeking a meta-verse away from the inefficiencies of the real world, framed in codes and algorithms that both assist, and set that world aflame. Societies that inhabit the streets, through their travails, are underwriting the valuations of corporations that feed off the virtual.

These and other equally significant developments are the point of departure for this edition of ORF's annual journal. The essays contributed by our brilliant authors attempt to answer questions that are provoked by the current kaleidoscope of disruptions and churning. Some are a consequence of recent developments, others are legacy, and still others are waiting in the shadows to emerge.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has not only cost thousands of lives, but has also inflicted significant harm on the rest of the world. From inflation due to rising energy prices to shortages in food and fertilisers, these consequences have dealt a harsh blow particularly to developing countries. To hurdle these obstacles is as urgent as the quest for an end to the hostilities in Europe.

The pandemic, the war, and in some cases poor governance and ill-advised projects and partnerships have also instigated a debt crisis in certain parts of the world. Sri Lanka has collapsed and Pakistan is on the verge, and a number of island nations and small economies are struggling to meet the dual obligations of debt service and responding to climate change. We are seeing a new fragility in our economic systems that the Paris Club and Bretton Woods institutions are unable to respond adequately to, casting doubt on their relevance and making the need for reforms even more clear.

Some stark challenges are self-created, including the repercussions of the battle for dominance in the technology domain. The digitalisation of societies has created new theatres of competition, new vulnerabilities for people, and new zero-sum games between nation-states. From controlling supply chains

to asserting the supremacy of jingoistic narratives, unfamiliar impulses have weaponised technology, once designed to serve the public good. GeoTech is now as complex as geopolitics and we will have to find new approaches to engage with it, and script arrangements that will allow us to catalyse the digital benefits while managing the accompanying harms.

Legacy challenges have not abated, either. At the Taiwan Strait, the heightened tensions are a result of history being rewritten by an expansionist regime in Beijing that is obsessed with drawing the map of Asia to its liking. A new muscularity is pairing up with legacy to alter the nature of the crisis and indeed any response to it.

We are also seeing nostalgic rediscoveries from the past. In West Asia, old relationships are being rekindled to shape future pathways. Elsewhere, states are finding succour in their ancient texts to create 21st-century architectures for governance, growth, and partnerships. Communities and countries are amplifying their own lived experiences to shape the agenda and purpose of multilateral platforms.

Amidst all this, we are being made to reflect on three key relationships that define each one of us today.

The first is our relationship—individual and collective—with our planet. We now know that climate change is the result of the breakdown of our compact with Earth. From air pollution and extreme weather patterns to droughts and flooding events—all are a loud manifestation of our failure to abide by this agreement. How do we respond to this failure? Who is in breach and who underwrites the costs of reparation? These are questions that we must respond to at the earliest if we are to arrest the likelihood of catastrophic happenings, signs of which are already becoming increasingly visible.

The second is our relationship with technology. From combustion engines to electric vehicles, from telegrams to the metaverse—can tech continue to remain a force of good that promotes inclusive growth and benefits many? And how can we ensure this? How can we make boardrooms more responsible to communities and how can algorithms and AI be re-imagined to serve our moral and socio-economic imperatives? What is the role of the sovereign state in all of it?

And the third is how we, as inhabitants of Terra Firma, arrange our lives within our country of birth, and across borders with other nation-states. Are national regimes and nationalities still sacrosanct? Has multilateralism become too dysfunctional, or can we still find the sweet spot where sovereignty and internationalism co-exist? What can help us achieve this and are elected governments still the worthiest of all?

Sixteen essays contained in this volume have engaged with our design and somewhat esoteric musings, and each one of them offers compelling ideas and sober reflections to the reader.

The journal opens with an essay on Europe where, at the time of completing this volume, Russian forces were intensifying their onslaught to capture Bakhmut, considered by the Ukrainians as their fortress. Amidst the backdrop of the prolonged war, *Velina Tchakarova* writes about the so-called 'permacrisis' plaguing the continent: where one problem is quickly being replaced by another, "while European decision-making faces the perpetual challenge of overcoming them." Yet it is not only wars of attrition that bring about cascading crises; as small states know only too well, even 'grey-zone' battles along the continuum of competition and conflict can cause damage beyond the states that are directly involved. This is what *Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby* sets out to illustrate, using the story

of the Philippines and how it navigates great-power competition. Small states leverage the utility of the world order, she says, because "the benefits outweigh the costs."

Sri Lanka may be one country that is familiar with the need to weigh benefits and costs, but the question is whether it is faring well. *Chulanee Attanayake* provides some answers, as she analyses the massive indebtedness of Sri Lanka and offers lessons for those in China's debt. While Sri Lanka's current distress is a result of factors that have simmered over decades, another enduring challenge that we examine is that of the Taiwan Strait. *Prashant Kumar Singh* writes that even as China-Taiwan relations are not 'ordinary' state-to-state ties, "they remain among the most complicated examples of how issues of sovereignty, security, and strategic order can be critically intertwined."

These same issues of security and order manifest themselves in the domain of technology—as *Vivek Mishra*, *Caitríona Heinl*, and *Nicoló Andreula* demonstrate. Vivek takes us through US attempts to decouple from China—"a necessary strategy for the US as China speeds up its tech advancements, many believe, by its use of unfair means." Caitríona discusses the emergence of outer space as "a growing security and defence domain." Nicoló then focuses on the Metaverse, and offers recommendations for how we can prevent it from becoming a playground of a few, the same ones, he says, "which have already gained significant market power through centralisation in the physical world." *Stuart Rollo* offers a note of caution too, and something bigger: to not let our societies slide towards technopoly, and instead "reassert the social and human element over the technological." To be sure, however, we can let technology shine in some contexts, as

Terri Chapman outlines its crucial role in saving lives and livelihoods during disasters. She uses a gender lens and warns, though, that these tech innovations can create more significant risks for women and girls unless their designs "take into account gender-specific experiences and needs."

This will be even more important as disasters increase in frequency and intensity because of climate change—the subject of the essays of *Ian Kemish* and *Oluwaseun Oguntuase*. Ian writes about the Pacific island states, and how their experience with climate change "will likely presage what is to come for the rest of the planet." Oluwaseun highlights how partnerships between Africa and India can help us hold back the existential threat.

Partnerships is the same subject of the succeeding three essays, as platforms from the past find favour to respond to the challenges of today. *Manjari Singh's* article elaborates on India-UAE-Israel relations, and *Sarah Teo* outlines a treatise on the continuing relevance of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific. For her part, *Amrita Narlikar* shows us how India's leadership of the G20—built upon its ancient wisdom—could bring us closer to "a more sustainable and equitable world." Mining that same wisdom, *Kajari Kamal* outlines lessons for contemporary international relations, and highlights India's deeply rooted belief that "a state's prosperity and security is innately intertwined with that of the region and the world." *Bibek Debroy* closes the volume with his ode to Democracy—"an end in itself."

We thank all the authors for their contributions. It is our hope that this publication helps clear some of the cobwebs in our minds, even as it arouses new debates. These are important for our times and we should not look away.

EUROPE ON THE VERGE: *ZEITENWENDE* OR 'THE WORLD OF YESTERDAY'?

Velina Tchakarova

"Even the true home of my heart's desire, Europe, is lost to me after twice tearing itself suicidally to pieces in fratricidal wars. Against my will, I have witnessed the most terrible defeat of reason and the most savage triumph of brutality in the chronicles of time. Never—and I say so not with pride but with shame—has a generation fallen from such intellectual heights as ours to such moral depths."

— *Stefan Zweig, 'The World of Yesterday'*

AS EUROPE CONTINUES TO grapple with Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, the prospect of devastating, cascading effects looms on the horizon.[1] Western military experts assert that Moscow's multifaceted approach encompasses three distinct yet interconnected dimensions:[2] a military aggression against Ukraine; a war against Western values, norms, and standards; and a non-kinetic war targeting the European economy through the weaponisation of commodities. These interconnected crises represent a significant challenge to the cohesion and unity of the European Union (EU) and its member states, as well as the stability and security of the entire European continent.

The war on Western values threatens EU's internal security order, while the non-kinetic war on the economy puts Europe in a vulnerable position in a vastly changing world.

After almost a year of war, it is time to reflect and assess the events that have transpired in the continent.

Zeitenwende or Status Quo?

The turning point *('Zeitenwende')*[3] in German foreign and security policy was noted with the speech of Chancellor Olaf Scholz in February 2022, marking an epochal geopolitical change; yet the extent of this shift and its true intentions remain uncertain. The hesitation in addressing the issue of the tank deliveries to Ukraine[4] is only one of many manifestations of Berlin's lack of willingness[5] to assume a leadership role and guide Europe through these historic changes. Currently, another grave escalation looms on the horizon and a prompt response is imperative as it will determine the outcome of the war.[6] However, the most recent example of the lack of unity—on the possible delivery of military jets to Ukraine—[7] proves yet again the case that Western powers are not on the same geopolitical page.

It is true that Europe has achieved the seemingly impossible in terms of coordination and coherence in responding to the Russian war against Ukraine. Given the typical pace and scope of European decision-making,[8] this is an enormous accomplishment that still stands. The nine sanctions packages alone are a clear statement.[9] The resolve to provide diplomatic, political and humanitarian aid to Ukraine is attributed to the coherence between the EU institutions and states.[10] A lingering aftertaste remains, however, as there were ongoing disagreements between the member states, based on their dependencies on Russian resources, national interests, and internal political dynamics.[11]

Figure 1:
Top 20 EU Commodity Imports from Russia (2021)
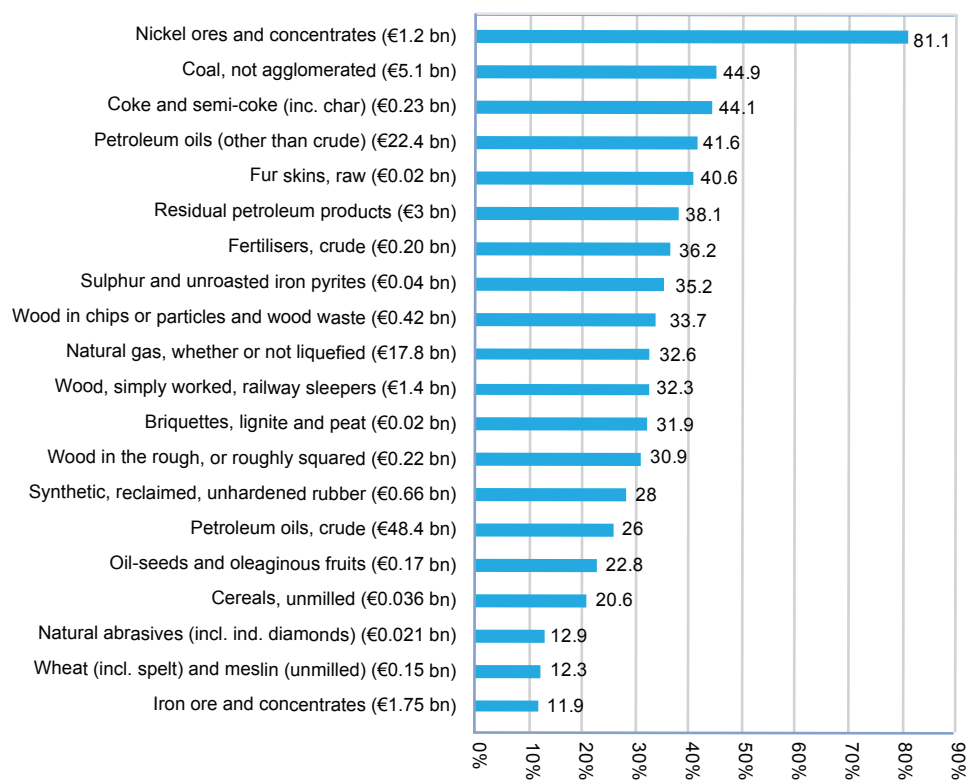
Source: European Parliament, Research Service[12]

For instance, countries such as Austria, Italy and Germany were affected significantly due to their high dependence on Russian gas supply.[13] Moreover, Hungary has impeded quick decision-making regarding the European sanctions and is currently blocking the sanctions on Russian nuclear energy.[14] At the same time, internal policy dynamics hinders the European decision-making process. The Austrian government,[15] ahead of a highly important provincial election, prevented the long-awaited accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen for the sake of its domestic political campaign on migration policy.[16] Furthermore, various exceptions[17] had to be made for different sanctions packages, with the member states contributing to the negative dynamic—from dealing with the question of diversifying energy resources,[18] to the expulsion of Russian diplomatic personnel,[19] to the support of certain Russian narratives about the invasion of Ukraine.[20] Domestic factors such as the rise of populist and nationalist movements in Europe could also contribute to European disunity.[21] These movements often have Eurosceptic views and can put pressure on governments to adopt a more nationalistic and less cooperative stance in international affairs, including the war in Ukraine.

The lack of unity among the EU member states has its roots in the historical, diplomatic, geoeconomic and cultural ties of some European powers with Russia. For instance, France and Germany, prior to the beginning of the war were engaging Moscow in a geopolitical rapprochement and normalisation of relations.[22] The lack of coordination among member states has also resulted in some European countries like Austria or Hungary taking their own actions without consulting with the EU.[23] Public opinion in Europe was another dividing line. Even though the people in the Western countries have been mostly supporting

Ukraine's cause, some governments have had to take into account that their citizens are sceptical of getting involved in a military conflict.[24]

In addition to the war in Ukraine, a battle has also been fought against the European rule-based security order, European norms and values, and Europe's global geoeconomic clout. Russia has failed in most of these endeavours for various reasons. While the instrumentalisation of energy, food and fertiliser supplies by Russia[25] has pushed prices up and brought inflation in Europe to double-digits for the first time in history,[26] Europe has been able to cushion these negative effects through energy savings, filling up storage capacities, and other ad-hoc institutional, political, and economic measures. Furthermore, the historically 'mild' winter has played a positive role, tempering energy demand. Ultimately, international efforts and institutional mediation such as the grain initiative between Russia and Ukraine under the mediation of Turkey and the UN, were able to limit some of the negative consequences.[27]

Europe: 'The World of Yesterday'?

The debate on Europe's strategic autonomy[28] has come to a dead-end since February 24th, when the Ukraine war erupted. If it were not for the United States,[29] which quickly facilitated weapons deliveries and other support since the beginning of the war and thus gave Ukraine the ability to withstand Russia's comprehensive military attacks, Kyiv would have surrendered long ago. This conclusion leads to the realisation that Europe is still unable to manage wars and military confrontations on the old continent on its own and remains dependent on US support. This becomes even clearer with the decision of two neutral states—i.e., Sweden and Finland—to take the radical step and finally apply for membership to NATO. Against this backdrop, a turning point for the European

security and defence policy may arise given how the majority of member states are more reliant on the security guarantees of the US and NATO than those of the European Union. The exceptions in this regard are four neutral island states—Malta, Cyprus, Ireland, and Austria, metaphorically referred to as the 'island of the blessed'. After Sweden and Finland join NATO, there will be serious power shifts, with Poland, the Baltic states, and the Scandinavian states gaining more geopolitical significance. This trend could put into question the German 'Zeitenwende' despite the goal of spending 100 billion Euro for defence capabilities.[30]

The ongoing situation has brought to the forefront a multitude of crises faced by Europe as a result of Russia's non-kinetic war, including food and energy shortages, migration waves, the threat of nuclear weapons use, and information warfare. Geopolitical pundits have been pointing to the emergence of the 'permacrisis',[31] with one problem quickly being replaced by another while European decision-making faces the perpetual challenge of overcoming them. This new phenomenon has supplanted the previous understanding of 'polycrisis'[32] that points to simultaneous crises in all relevant fields of activity—from finance to neighbourhood policy to security. Although the cascading effects of the permacrisis have been overcome in the short term, the major geoeconomic and geopolitical challenges remain unresolved.

The European powers must find ways to effectively manage the interrelated impacts on the economy, energy supply, political stability, and fiscal policy. The policies of the European Commission designed to save Europe—such as the Next Generation EU,[33] the EU Battery Regulation,[34] the European Chips Act,[35] and the New Green Deal,[36] could be a way to address some of the challenges that Europe is facing and leverage the opportunities. It

has become increasingly clear that no single European power can withstand these challenges on their own, and if a comprehensive and sustainable solution is not reached, Europe may find itself relegated to the geopolitical backyard like it did 100 years ago.

Europe's Bifurcation

In a highly volatile and turbulent year, one cannot but expect crucial systemic shifts and second-order geoeconomic effects from the prolonged pandemic in China as well as Russia's war of attrition against Ukraine. This year will be a turning point for European security as the global order is facing a process of bifurcation.[37] A pessimistic scenario would imply a more radical and consistent mutual decoupling between the United States and China in which the modus vivendi of coordination between China and Russia (the 'DragonBear')[38] in all strategic domains will finally become apparent. Meanwhile, an optimistic scenario reveals a more peaceful systemic co-existence as Beijing would focus on partnerships and commitments to strengthen its domestic development until it builds a credible counterbalance to the overwhelming American influence. In both scenarios, the message is clear: in the long run, every state actor—big or small—will have to choose sides between two very different global systems with their own norms, rules, and ideologies.

Against this background, the West is facing a growing split between the Anglosphere (the US, the UK) and the EU (the Franco-German backbone of the EU) when it comes to dealing with the 'DragonBear' (China and Russia) amid the emerging bifurcation of the global order. This, even if China's junior partner, Russia, manages to redraw the geopolitical map of Europe in its favour if it succeeds in its war against Ukraine. The war has created a dangerous cleavage between some of the EU

> **If** Europe fails to find comprehensive and sustainable solutions to its challenges, it could find itself relegated to the geopolitical backyard like it did 100 years ago.

members despite their coherent approach on the sanctions policy towards Russia. Central and Eastern European (CEE) members were compliant with the US position regarding the delivery of heavy weapons to Ukraine, while France and Germany were trying to initiate peace talks with Russia to help the country "save face" amid its military downfalls.[39]

In 2023, two events could exert a significant influence on European security: the NATO membership of Finland and Sweden, and a possible political union between Poland and Ukraine. The Nordic and CEE countries choose the US as a security guarantor instead of the European Union or the Franco-German axis.[40] The political union between Poland and Ukraine could be a geopolitical analogy to the German reunification in the 1990s to ensure Ukraine's rapid accession to the EU and NATO without going through a formal application process. If that happens, the balance of power within Europe will shift eastward and create completely new geopolitical realities in the continent.

Future Outlook

There are three main scenarios for the Ukraine war. In the first scenario, Ukraine receives sufficient heavy weapons systems and ammunition and is able to push back Russian troops from its entire territory, or at least a large part of it. At the same time, Western sanctions could lead to a collapse of the Russian economy or even the dissolution of the Russian Federation in the context of emerging secessionist movements and Russia's increasing international isolation. In the second scenario, a future is imagined in which due to insufficient and slow deliveries of heavy weapons to Ukraine, a Russian victory in the Donbas region becomes possible. This allows Russia to shift its focus south towards Odesa and continue the war of attrition using additional waves of mobilisation. Finally, the third scenario envisages that Ukraine becomes too slow in acquiring heavy weapons systems, while Russia, despite comprehensive Western sanctions, does not remain internationally isolated, especially due to partners like China, India, Turkey, and Iran. In this scenario, a new 'frozen conflict'[41] threatens to emerge in the coming years given Vladimir Putin's ambition to run for the presidency in the March 2024 polls.[42]

So far, Ukraine has not received any security guarantees from the West and must fight for its very existence as a nation and state, while 17 percent of its territory remains under Russian control.[43] The country is in a geopolitical grey zone between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russian imperialism and revisionism. After

a year of the most devastating war on the old continent, the situation has become even more dangerous in view of the impending escalation phase. Ceasefire and peace negotiations seem currently unrealistic due to the diametrically opposing goals of the two countries. It remains unclear how the war will end and which scenario will occur. To enable the first scenario, Europe must not only continue but also intensify its military support for Ukraine while credibly diversifying its relationships with third countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to heighten Russia's isolation.

Vladimir Putin once famously said that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.[44] The Russian president is probably the biggest proponent of the 'realism' school and has understood the geopolitics of the 21st century well, but at the same time has failed to prepare his own country, society, and military for it. Thus, he could lead the Russian country from the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century to a likely final dissolution of the Russian Federation in the 21st century. Eastern European historian Karl Schlögl is convinced that the downfall of the Russian empire is the only condition for Russia's self-discovery, regeneration and survival.[45] Consequently, what is most urgently needed is a strategic consensus within the EU and its member states to not only secure the survival of Ukraine but also enable a real victory for Ukraine against Russia.

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SMALL STATES NAVIGATE GREAT-POWER COMPETITION: NATIONALISM AS REGIME SURVIVAL

Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby

IN THE FACE OF great-power competition, countries in Southeast Asia position themselves in different ways. Some engage in balancing, while others prefer hedging. Many, however, are constrained by capabilities thereby limiting their geopolitical options to bandwagoning. What is clear is that small states' responses to great-power competition are typical of many in the formerly colonised world. As rule-takers, these countries acknowledge that while there is little room in initiating the creation of international orders, there are certainly opportunities to carve out a space for themselves within those orders. While the creation of international orders is the purview and the privilege of the big and mighty, small states can and *do* negotiate their position within that order. They may not be the initiator, but they are certainly complicit in the perpetuation of that order.

For the Philippines, for instance, lending support to the post-1945 United States-centric order serves its national interests. Opposing it was both infeasible and inconceivable, considering the country's violently unique experience in waging the Philippine Revolution of 1896 against Spain and shortly thereafter resisting (but failing) American colonialism in 1899. Before the US granted the Philippines independence in 1946, local elites proliferated and entrenched themselves in politics via their familial connections. Henceforth, nationalism became a function of these political dynasties' survival. The version of nationalism that propelled the 1896 Revolution was therefore

muted and repackaged to portray a fledgling democracy about to make its debut on the world stage as the post-Second World War dust settled. Therefore, the only way forward for the Philippines was to support the American-led liberal rules-based international order.

Another indication of support was how the Philippines doubled-down on its position in the South China Sea disputes and used lawfare. As a full-fledged member of the community of nations as well as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Philippines regularly filed one diplomatic protest after another against China's military installations and creation of artificial islands in what it refers to as the West Philippine Sea. The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back was the standoff in Scarborough Shoal in 2012 as it solidified the Philippines' decision to file an arbitration case against China. The Arbitration Tribunal's awards were overwhelmingly in the Philippines' favour, but the victory was short-lived—perhaps even pyrrhic—when former President Rodrigo Duterte shifted his foreign policy direction towards China. The Philippines' incumbent president, Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos, Jr., may have a stronger stance in upholding the country's territorial and sovereign integrity, but as of this writing, he has yet to mention the 2016 award in any platform and any of his international engagements. Nevertheless, the arbitration case has set a precedent for the Philippines, China, and international law, particularly the law of the sea, and therefore serves to sustain the existing international order.

The argument that small states perpetuate international orders, regardless if those orders are sites of inequalities and injustices, holds in the context of the utility of those structures for rule-takers. The benefits, in other words,

outweigh the costs. Small states acquiesce in exchange for benefits that ensue from being a member of the community of nations. This is no less true for the Philippines' transactional view of order: its repackaging of the nationalist narrative and its employment of lawfare are accommodations for the existing international order so that it can likewise be accommodated therein.

In International Relations, nationalism is the fuel that legitimises state sovereignty, which then sustains world orders. Ironically, however, the argument that nationalism justifies claims for self-determination exposes an underbelly that serves to undermine the sovereign states system. History is replete with examples of how nationalism has been translated to militaristic attitudes that caused and incentivised foreign aggression; many believe that the First and Second World Wars were waged because of nationalist proclivities. The standard story is that nationalism encourages zero-sum security policies, works against compromises and consensus, and undermines international cooperation. Thus, nationalism poses a serious challenge to world order.

Nationalism as such can be seen as subversive, but for many in the post-colonial world, this was the fervour that sparked many independence movements. The Philippine experience in the late 19th century against Spain and the United States demonstrates the close link between self-determination and the destruction of a world order premised on empires, but once independence (from Spain in 1898 and the US in 1946) was achieved, the Philippines burrowed itself in the American-led liberal rules-based international order. This, however, cannot be seen as synonymous with absolute support of the existing order. Throughout the post-independence era, the Philippines appealed to nationalism not to

challenge that order, but to be accommodated in it. In this sense, the driving force for the Philippines' support of the existing world order is nationalism as a function of regime survival.

This is demonstrated in the discussions below on the Philippines' alliance with the US and on the recent pivot to China. In using nationalism as a tool to justify a regime or guarantee its survival, the country was carving out space for itself while remaining embedded in—and thus propping up—the post-1945 order. Hence, nationalism was a means to be co-opted into the wider order. This argument supports the overarching thrust here that many small states like the Philippines use the strategy of accommodation to navigate great-power competition: of accommodating others and being accommodated in return in the same space.

Nationalism as subversion

The Philippine Revolution of 1896 is the origin story of the present Filipino nation-state. The years 1896 to 1902 were volatile and violent as Philippine revolutionaries battled against Spain (with the help of the Americans), and against the US immediately thereafter. During this period, the US was quick to move from sympathy to pacification.[1] From the American perspective, the newly birthed Filipino nation had to undergo a period of guardianship that re-casted the Revolution years via a colonial education system.[2] Framed against the argument that nationalism is an act of subversion against existing orders, it is no wonder that the zeal and passion that was sparked by the likes of Andres Bonifacio and Jose Rizal had to be somehow tempered and kept in line.

The events of 1896-1898 (the Philippine Revolution) and of 1899-1902 (the Philippine-American War) were centuries in the making.

Since the beginning of the Spanish conquest in the 1560s, state power was mediated through the Catholic Church. Clerical dominion lasted centuries due to the commercialisation of agriculture in the late 1700s and the role played by the so-called *mestizos* (the progeny of Spanish-Filipino or Chinese-Filipino intermarriages) in establishing businesses in the countryside, thereby resulting in the landed social class—the *hacendados*. Their growing wealth made it possible to send their children to study in Europe, who were then referred to as *ilustrados* (enlightened ones). These *ilustrados* quickly became the colony's intelligentsia and mounted a cultural opposition to Spanish clerical and political power.[3] By the late 1800s, the Spanish empire did not have the economic and political clout to stanch the rising demands of the landed classes in the Philippines, so the knee-jerk reaction was repression. It was in this context that Rizal, the central figure of the Revolution, wrote two novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, that led to his execution in 1896.

Rizal is remembered today as the First Filipino due to his representation of 'the Philippines' in his novels and as such he is the first 'to imagine this social whole.'[4] However, the insurrection that started in 1896 originated outside of the *ilustrado* class. It was instead a 'revolt of the masses' led by Bonifacio.[5] He formed the Katipunan, a secret revolutionary society, and launched an insurrection that was quickly suppressed. Nonetheless, the movement spread to the nearby provinces with young *mestizos* taking up leadership positions.[6] One of these was Emilio Aguinaldo who proclaimed the Republic of the Philippines in 1899 (and who also had Bonifacio executed in 1897).

Aguinaldo's Republic was fragile and embroiled in geopolitics. By April 1898, the US went to war with Spain on behalf of the Filipinos, but by December of the same year when the

> "Many small states like the Philippines use the strategy of accommodation to navigate great-power competition: of accommodating others and being accommodated in return in the same space.

Treaty of Paris was signed and the Philippines was essentially sold to the US, the Americans transformed rapidly from sympathiser to coloniser.[7] The years until 1902 were brutal as the US crushed all opposition. The fervour of Philippine nationalism had to be tempered and moved within the bounds of law and order with the guiding hand of the Americans, much like a child that needs a carefully cultivated environment in which to grow and flourish.[8]

Nationalism as co-optation

That Filipino nationalism fuelled independence from Spain and sparked the birth of the nation is thus far in line with the standard argument that nationalism challenges world orders. The other side of the coin, however, is that nationalism can likewise be used to sustain orders, especially if—as in the case of the Philippines—it serves the function of regime survival. The key to understanding this is the role of the oligarchy and its co-optation by the US via the creation of a bicameral legislature with numerous provincial and elective offices.[9] 'Cacique democracy' was then cemented, where the oligarchy wielded these newly created offices to entrench and consolidate their local bases.[10]

While the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation disrupted Philippine society, cacique democracy reached its apex after the US granted the Philippines independence in 1946. With the guiding hand of the Americans now gone, the oligarchs could no longer rely on their so-called big brother and had to resort to hiring private armies to protect their holdings. Henceforth, these caciques-turned-political dynasties recognised that their survival was now tied to the state. Framed as such, their appeal to nationalism, i.e., expressions and articulations performed for and on behalf of the nation-state, is revealed as a function of regime survival. We see this in several instances.

First, the Philippines began its journey as an independent state at around the same time that the Cold War was heating up. Owing to the hand it played in ushering Philippine independence in 1946, the United States insisted that the country remain in its sphere of influence. In this regard, the American rhetoric of containment was applied and was duly supported by the Philippines. The analogy of dominoes falling was repeatedly asserted regarding the fledgling countries in Southeast Asia. To prevent this, the strategy of containment was crafted on the dual assumptions that communism was a threat and that the United States must play a central role in stemming the contagion.

This resonated in the Philippines because of the growing threat posed by a communist

guerrilla movement called the Hukbalahap. This acceptance of the US containment strategy came with some qualifications as the Philippines negotiated its position under the American sphere of influence. This is evident in how Filipinos managed to push for the Rehabilitation Act in 1946, which provided compensation for war-damaged private properties. Alongside this, the Trade Act detailed policies on Philippine trade preferentials in US markets. Similar commitments were extracted from the US on the military front. The Military Assistance Agreement of 1947 aimed to provide military and naval training to Philippine personnel, authorise the maintenance of equipment, and sanction the transfer of supplies. This then became the basis for the signing of the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) in 1947, as well as the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) in 1951.

Another indication of the Philippines' appeal to nationalism was its decision in 1991 to not renew the MBA. This translated to the closure of major facilities at Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Complex and the withdrawal of American troops from the Philippines. The principal driver of this decision was that the communist threat has all but disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and while there were several threats to international security, they were almost inconsequential. In this calculation, the maintenance of military bases in the Philippines had ceased being cost-efficient.[11] Thus, the Philippines asserted its independence by pushing the Americans to withdraw their military bases from the country. Despite this, the MDT remained in place. It was an incident in the Spratlys in 1995 that would draw the Philippines and the United States closer again. The rise of low-level threats in the South China Sea paved the way for the Visiting Forces Agreement in 1999, which permitted the US military to hold joint exercises with the Philippines.

By the time the September 11 attacks took place, Philippine-US relations seemed back on track, and this prompted Philippine President Gloria Arroyo to give her unqualified support to the US, knowing full well that local terrorist groups like the Abu Sayyaf could finally be defeated under the banner of the 'War on Terror'.[12] Unlike the time when the Philippines passed the buck for defeating the Hukbalahap and thereafter acquiesced to the containment strategy, this time the Philippines pushed back and declined the US' request that it be allowed to station troops in the country on the basis that the move could inflame anti-American sentiment among the Muslim population.[13] Nevertheless, US troops were allowed into the country by the start of 2002 as part of the *Balikatan* exercises. By 2003, the components of post-9/11 cooperation between the Philippines and the United States included joint military exercises, military assistance, access agreements, and political and military consultations. The alliance has been "revitalised" and was strengthened even further when the White House designated the Philippines as a Major Non-NATO Ally.[14]

The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) is the latest instrument to complement the MDT. Geared towards strengthening the alliance by developing the Philippines' minimum credible defence posture and thereby improving both countries' individual and collective defence capacities in a changing geostrategic environment, the main feature of EDCA is a clear provision that the US would not establish permanent bases in the Philippines. Instead, the US would be granted access to and use designated areas that are owned and controlled by the Philippines. The push for EDCA stemmed from the shift of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) from internal to external security. The focus on internal security was largely due to local

insurgency movements. However, China's assertive moves in the South China Sea prompted the Philippines to not take external security for granted anymore. In this context, EDCA was designed to let the Philippines play a leading role in the strengthening of the alliance. Despite its significance, EDCA was challenged in the Philippines for its constitutionality. Critics argued that the agreement is a violation of the sovereign and territorial integrity of the Philippines, even though the government stated that this was nothing more than an implementing agreement of the MDT.[15] In July 2016, the Supreme Court ruled that the EDCA was constitutional.[16]

Around the time of the EDCA ruling was when President Rodrigo Duterte came to power. He made it clear very early during his term that he was separating from the United States and reinvigorating relations with China.[17] The pivot to China can be explained in the context of a tit-for-tat strategy. After all, a reinvigorated bilateral relationship with China translated to support for Duterte's war on drugs despite mounting criticisms from not only the US but also the European Union and the International Criminal Court that found evidence of crimes against humanity being perpetrated in the country.[18] Aside from this, closer ties with China meant support for Duterte's flagship Build, Build, Build program, to which China offered US$24 billion in investment pledges in 2016. However, the return on investment was lacking as Duterte ended his term in 2022.[19] China also benefited from the exchange. For one, the 2016 arbitration award has been downplayed and any talk about the South China Sea was marginalised during the Philippines' chairmanship in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2017. Furthermore, maritime incidents involving the Chinese militia and Filipino fisherfolk were understated, and the patrols and presence of

the armed forces and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) were constrained. As long as the Philippine position remains the same, China can be assured of enjoying these benefits indefinitely.

The Philippine-US relationship under Duterte was interesting, to say the least. He has always had a very strong anti-US position even when he was still Mayor of Davao. During his presidency, one might recall the dramatic policy shifts: from wanting to abrogate the VFA in early 2020 after his chief of police's US visa was cancelled, to suspending the abrogation at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, to finally cancelling the abrogation after US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's visit to Manila in mid-2021. This vacillation raises the question of expectations in the new administration of Marcos, Jr.

In sum, the role of the oligarchs and political dynasties cannot be discounted in how the Philippines used nationalism to further entrench the country in the existing order. This experience challenges the standard notion that nationalism undermines world orders. While this was accurate insofar as the Philippine Revolution in the 19th century, post-1946 independence indicates instances where the local elites managed to guarantee their survival by appealing to nationalist sentiments. In this regard, nationalism sustained the American-led liberal rules-based international order. Certainly, the details of this experience are unique to the Philippines, but many in the post-colonial world appeal to nationalism also as a function of regime survival. This is indicative that while many small states subscribe to the American-led order, they do so in a utilitarian fashion: they are accommodating to the demands and requirements of the existing order because they want to be accommodated in return.

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SRI LANKA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS: LESSONS FOR THOSE IN CHINA'S DEBT

Chulanee Attanayake

BEGINNING IN LATE MARCH 2022, as Sri Lanka experienced its worst economic crisis yet, over a hundred self-organised and creative protests spread across the country.[1] In the weeks preceding the protests, Sri Lankans battled power cuts that lasted over half a day and soaring prices of food and other essentials as inflation reached 25 percent in only a few months.[2] People stood in queues for many hours to purchase fuel and gas; at least four elderly people died of heat exhaustion in that chaos.[3]

Sri Lankans then took to the streets demanding the resignation of the president at that time, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and the relinquishing of power of the entire Rajapaksa family. Slogans echoed— "GoGotaHome", "GoRajapaksaHome", and "GoHome225"—

demanding an end to nepotism in government and the resignation of Cabinet Ministers.[4]

In April, all 26 Cabinet Ministers resigned, with 42 MPs deciding to function as independent Members of Parliament. The Government quickly fell to a simple majority with only 114 MPs, turning the economic meltdown into a political crisis.[5] This was followed by Mahinda Rajapaksa stepping down as prime minister in early May 2022 amidst violent clashes between pro-and anti-Rajapaksa camps.[6]

The Gotabaya Rajapaksa government tried but failed to quell the protests—it declared a state of emergency, imposed island-wide curfews, and deployed security forces. Finally, the protesters

stormed and occupied the President's House and the Prime Minister's Office, demanding the resignation of leaders. Gotabaya, elected in 2019 with an overwhelming majority, fled the country.[7] Upon Gotabaya's official resignation on 14 July 2022, lawmakers, from a secret ballot, chose Ranil Wickremesinghe as the elected Executive President.

The events brought back into focus, earlier discourse on China's debt trap in Sri Lanka. Ever since the Western media reported on Sri Lanka's leasing the Hambantota Port to China for 99 years as a case of debt-to-equity swap, Sri Lanka had become a poster child for the 'Chinese debt trap' narrative. While it was not the first time that Sri Lanka was dragged into a global discussion on China's growing role as a capital exporter, the Western reportage was pivotal. When the economic crisis hit the island nation in 2022, the debate resurfaced.[8] Following Sri Lanka's sovereign debt default in April 2022 with China being the largest bilateral creditor, the impact of Beijing's lending on Sri Lanka's crisis gained the spotlight.

Yet, Sri Lanka's economic crisis is far more complex than indebtedness to China. To begin with, China is not the largest contributor to Sri Lanka's rising external debt servicing requirements. However, the increase in servicing in loans from China has been significant over the years, making Beijing an important stakeholder in Sri Lanka's debt restructuring measures.

In this backdrop, this article attempts to unravel Sri Lanka's economic crisis and explore both, Beijing's role and domestic policy failures. It shows what role China has played in Sri Lanka as a bilateral creditor and how this has evolved over the years, and offers lessons for countries facing similar debt distress.

Unpacking Sri Lanka's Economic Crisis

Sri Lanka's economic crisis is a culmination of multiple economic and political factors that had simmered over decades.[9,10] Indeed, the country has been experiencing macroeconomic instability and economic stagnation and was suffering from a twin deficit problem—in balance of payment and foreign exchange reserves—due to years of economic mismanagement and corruption in government.[11]

Its failure to attract foreign direct investment after opening up in 1977, the civil war that created a volatile business environment for investors, and a lack of policy consistency by successive governments—all have resulted in an import-led economy that was deep in debt, in turn resulting in balance-of-payment problems and a foreign reserve deficit. Successive governments' populist economic policy decisions tied with populist electoral policies and favouring reciprocal relationships between the bureaucracies and the wealthiest, led to an unhealthy balance between government revenue collection and gross domestic product (GDP). A combination of tax exemptions and reduced tax collection granted to wealthy people, multinational corporations, and local businesses resulted in a steady decline in tax revenues beginning in the 1990s.[12] As of 2021, the tax revenue amounted to only 9.6 percent of GDP, against expenditure close to 20 percent of GDP. Poor revenue performance resulted in a decline in the government's expenditure-to-GDP ratio and called for deficit financing.[13]

Limited access to concessional loans from bilateral and multilateral partners as a result of graduating to a middle-income country forced Colombo to go to international capital markets for commercial borrowings to finance its needs,

especially in infrastructure. Consequently, the debt-to-GDP ratio, which had declined by 2009, steadily increased by 2014.[14] Constant domestic and external shocks since 2018 did not help, either. The political crisis in 2018, where then President Maithripala Sirisena sacked then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, the Easter Sunday attack in 2019, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022—caused direct and indirect impacts on the economy.

Perhaps the final nail in the coffin were continuous policy missteps and less-than-desirable economic management of the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government. The Value Added Tax (VAT) cut from 15 percent to 8 percent, resulting in Sri Lanka being downgraded to a 'substantial risk' investment category in 2020, closed doors to international financial markets. As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted exports, remittance and tourism revenues, as Colombo had to continue servicing its debts without earning dollars, and as imports continued to balloon—Sri Lanka's forex reserve decreased at a rapid rate. A ban on chemical fertilisers in the guise of shifting to organic agriculture, backfired overnight when it affected the agriculture yield, ultimately resulting in food shortages. The tea industry, one of the main sources of foreign exchange, saw its yield plummet by half.[15] The rise in the global fuel market due to the Ukraine war compounded the challenges. The result was a sharp decline in government revenue, a dramatic dip in government reserve, and an increase in imports.

Continuous shortages in essentials, including food, medicine and fuel, hyperinflation and prolonged power outages, forced the government to default on its international payments in April 2022. After ignoring calls from experts to seek IMF assistance, Sri Lanka began negotiating a bailout in April 2022. On 12 April 2022, whilst negotiating, Sri Lanka

temporarily suspended its foreign debt payment as a preemptive measure. About a month later, in mid-May 2022, Colombo missed the 30-day grace period of repayment, making a 'preemptive default' for the first time in history, leading Fitch to downgrade Sri Lanka as a 'restrictive default'.[16] The new government under President Ranil Wickremesinghe is seeking an IMF bailout to secure a US$2.9-billion assistance to be released over four years to help the flailing economy.[17]

Sri Lanka's Debt Story with China

Prior to the early 2000s, China's role as a creditor to Sri Lanka was minimal. While China accounted for approximately 10.1 percent of the country's public debt in the mid-1970s, its lending significantly declined in the following years. As such, China's debt profile in Sri Lanka at the end of the 1990s was merely 0.3 percent. Official aid loans provided by China were on interest-free basis, with long maturity periods and adequate grace periods. Since then, there has been a dramatic evolution of China's role, and today it is Colombo's largest lender and development partner.[18] China's debt composition in Sri Lanka moved from 0.3 percent to 16 percent between 2000 and 2016. By the end of 2022, China's debt stock in Sri Lanka had reached some US$7.3 billion, amounting to 19.6 percent of Colombo's public external debt. These figures include debt recorded in Central Bank and state-owned enterprises (SOEs).[19]

According to Muramudali and Panduwawala (2022), China's role as a lender to Sri Lanka evolved in four distinct phases, from being purely a bilateral lender to a project-based lender, and finally to a balance of payments supporter.[20] The first phase, between 2001 to 2005, began with China lending US$72 million through China Exim Bank for the state-owned

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Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC). It was the first time that China introduced China Exim Bank (ChExim) as a lending agency. The loan was obtained in 2001 to finance the Muthurajawela Oil Tank Farm project. It was a loan with interest payable, carrying a maturity of 20 years and a grace period of five. This phase also introduced Chinese construction companies such as CHEC and China Metallurgical Corporation to develop infrastructure projects.

During the second phase, between 2007 and 2010, there was a boom in disbursements from China, and Beijing's role changed from being a small, predominantly non-commercial lender to a large-scale commercial lender embarking on high-profile infrastructure financing. ChExim provided loans, including export or buyer's credits, for high-profile infrastructure projects such as Norochcholai Coal Power Plant, Hambantota Port, Mattala Airport and Expressway network, some of them at high interest rates.[21] Even so, the average public debt interest rate for Sri Lanka at that time was only at 3.1 percent, and therefore still affordable.[22]

The third phase occurred between 2011 and 2014, when the Sri Lankan government borrowed greater amounts from ChExim to expand mega infrastructure projects, and for

some new transport sector projects including railways, expressways, and rural roads. This phase coincided with China introducing its flagship Belt and Road Initiative, and some of the projects were included under the BRI umbrella. It also coincided with the end of the grace period on principal repayments of some of the loans obtained during the first and second phases, resulting in an increase in the principal payments from 2013 onwards.

After a slowdown in disbursements between 2015 and 2016, a fourth phase began in 2017. At this time, Sri Lanka was already showing signs of debt distress due to borrowings at the international capital market and its debt stock piled up. As the island nation's Balance of Payment became increasingly vulnerable, its foreign debt repayment continued to rise, and export performance stagnated. China then emerged as a lender of both project financing and budgetary financing. While the ChExim provided disbursements for infrastructure projects, China Development Bank (CDB) provided a US$1-billion Foreign Currency Term Financing Facility (FCTFF) as direct budgetary financing in October 2018. Since then, China has continued to provide FCTFF regularly as BOP support for Sri Lanka, allowing debt inflows from China to remain higher than the rising debt service payment

to them. Credit facilities obtained from China have helped Sri Lanka strengthen its foreign reserves at a time when Colombo's public debt-to-GDP ratio was at an all-time high, and is left with little option but to borrow further for investment purposes. FCTFF provided during the subsequent years have helped tide over external financing during the pandemic period.

Is China the Problem?

Contrary to popular belief, however, it was not Chinese debt alone that entrapped Sri Lanka in debt. More recent scholarly research has discredited the so-called 'Chinese debt trap' argument. Even though Beijing's debt stock in Sri Lanka has increased, the debt problem was not made in China.[23] As Chatham House notes, the borrowing from China in the BRI period only saw a modest rise from its pre-BRI period.[24]

Sri Lanka's debt problem is created primarily in the international capital market in the West due to the government's excessive borrowings at commercial rates. According to recent calculations by Sri Lankan economists, the country's outstanding public external debt stood at US$40.654 billion as of end-2021. Of this, US$37.615 billion was borrowed by the Central Government and guaranteed SOE debt.[25] Its public debt-to-GDP ratio rose from 91 percent to 119 percent between 2018 and 2021.[26] As of the end of March 2022, its external debt service payments per year were at US$6 billion, whilst its foreign reserve was only US$1.9 billion.[27]

The main driver of Sri Lanka's debt problem is the increase in the dollar-denominated international sovereign bonds (ISBs) or Eurobonds borrowed from the international capital market. As of the end of 2021, the share of Sri Lanka's ISBs is US$13 billion, or 35 percent of total government foreign debt.[28] In 2021, Sri Lanka repaid US$1 billion in principal and a further US$934 million in interest for the ISBs—47.5 percent of the government's external debt servicing that year, and twice the debt to China.

Table 1: Sri Lanka's External Debt Stock (2000 and 2021)

Creditor	Share in Outstanding Government External Debt (%)		Share in Government External Debt Repayment (%)	
	2000	2021	2000	2021
World Bank	24	10	9	6
ADB	21	15	9	8
Japan	32	9	41	6
India	0.2	2	1	3
China	0.4	20	1	20
Other Bilateral	19	3	22	3
ISBs	-	36	0	47
Foreign Held Domestic Bonds	-	0.1	N/A	N/A
Others	4	4	17	8

Source: Moramudali and Panduwawala (2022)[29]

Moreover, there was no immediate issue for Sri Lanka in servicing Chinese loans, nor was the lease of Hambantota port an equity swap as it has been perceived by the international media. The loan for the Hambantota Port is still being serviced by the Sri Lankan government and is recorded under the Treasury, after moving it from the books of the Sri Lanka Port Authority (SLPA).[30] Thus, China's role in making Sri Lanka a debt-ridden country is exaggerated.

Lessons to Learn

China's complicated debt story in Sri Lanka provides some useful lessons for other debt-distressed economies. It offers insights into China's nature as a lender in times of debt distress.

Despite being a latecomer, China today is the world's largest sovereign creditor in overseas development finance.[31] Two of its banks, the China Development Bank (CDB) and the Export-Import Bank of China (ChExim), together provide as much international development finance as the next six biggest multilateral lenders combined.[32] It is also a player that uses a different rule book than other bilateral lenders. As a result, China follows less stringent procedures for disbursing its finances. Unlike Japan or other members of the Paris Club, China does not conduct its own due diligence before providing sovereign credits and is available for every kind of project. This has allowed borrowing countries to obtain loans quickly and use them for any project. While this has made China an attractive lender to developing nations, this very quality is now proven to have serious implications for international debt management.

Sri Lanka's story shows that even though China is lenient in its lending policies, it is not so when the borrowers cannot adhere to the repayment arrangement. In general, China does not respond well to requests for debt restructuring. Sri Lanka previously sought Chinese support to restructure its debt in 2014 and 2017, but both requests were dismissed.[33] In 2022, when Sri Lanka made the same request as the crisis unfolded, and as Colombo defaulted on its debt, Beijing's response was lukewarm. As a result, Sri Lanka's efforts to begin an IMF programme have been delayed. At the time of writing this article, Sri Lanka's other creditors are awaiting China's call on the debt restructuring process.

This reveals that no matter how good a political relationship a country has with China, it cannot expect an immediate response during a time of debt distress. China's delayed response could be due to several reasons. For one, China is a newcomer to the system and is inexperienced in overseas lending.[34] It is equally inexperienced in debt restructuring. It has continuously dismissed Western-led rules and norms in the past for ideological reasons. Yet now Beijing has learnt that such norms and practices exist to protect both the lender and the borrower. Thus, China is buying time to understand the system and find ways of responding to the new developments strategically.[35] At the same time, as the world's largest sovereign credit holder, China may want to be careful to not set a precedent in its lending practices.[36] As the entire world is going through a recession, a large number of its debtors are going through debt distress. Unilaterally granting a debt moratorium for Sri Lanka would set a precedent for having similar negotiations with other debtors. This has put China in a strategic dilemma.

Meanwhile, it is to be noted that debt restructuring in China is a complicated process. Multiple Chinese financial institutions have provided loans to Sri Lanka, and these

institutions have their own processes and make their own decisions.[37] ChExim and CDB—the two largest banks that have provided loans to Colombo—operate in different ways. Moreover, the debt profile varies as Sri Lanka has borrowed both commercial and concessional loans, with the concessional loans having lower interest rates and subsidised by the Chinese government. In this context, a greater consensus within and between the banks and other financial institutions will require China to formulate an acceptable debt restructuring process for all. Similar consensus would also be required between China, other bilateral creditors such as India and Japan, and ISB bondholders. China's past behaviour in debt restructuring with countries like Zambia and Ecuador has shown that it prefers getting preferential treatment.[38] However, all the other creditors would prefer to be treated with equity relative to each other.

Finally, China's equation with other creditors will play a significant role in succeeding debt restructuring efforts. China has a complicated relationship with Sri Lanka's other major bilateral creditors, i.e., India and Japan. Their political complications will likely play out in the negotiation table. This will not only delay Sri Lanka's debt restructuring but will also affect future bilateral relations.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka's debt issue is a result of the country's weak macroeconomic policies and its high dependency on commercial borrowings and export credits to finance its twin deficit problem. China's role in this debt story is complicated and controversial. While China may not have created the debt problem, it has a crucial role in resolving it. The way China would respond will set precedence for addressing the debt distress of emerging markets.

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THE TAIWAN STRAIT:
A BELLWETHER FOR CHINA'S STORMY RISE

Prashant Kumar Singh

EAST ASIA, WHERE China's 'good neighbour' policy and charm offensive was first launched, has perhaps faced the most heat from the rise of Chinese power and the geopolitical tussles it has wrought. Various security concepts advanced by Xi Jinping, such as "a community with a shared future for humanity"[1] and "common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security,"[2] appear to address neighbouring regions, particularly East Asia. Yet, as has been seen over time, China is unable to maintain a balance between its rise and its relations in East Asia.

The region has witnessed China's persistent bids to mould it in its own image, as well as Chinese diplomatic pressure on countries to embrace concepts such as "Asia for Asians," which is anachronistic in today's globalised

and integrated world and has a chauvinistic undertone aimed at the 'outsider' United States. The region is also witnessing China's unilateral and aggressive actions to change the status quo on the ground. A military infrastructure push in the South China Sea (SCS), discarding the maritime claims of other countries, is such an example. Countries such as South Korea,[3] the Philippines,[4] Vietnam,[5] Malaysia[6] and Indonesia[7] have had to grapple with China's belligerence.

In East Asia, contestations between the region's states and China revolve around issues of sovereignty, security, and strategic order. China has often defied its own normative, universalist espousals in its foreign and security policies in the region. Its aggressive infrastructure building in the SCS has displayed a sharply distinct

unilateral approach unmindful of others' claims, while presenting itself as a votary of peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and consultation. Its preference for bilateral negotiations and reluctance to a multilateral approach to resolving the multiparty maritime dispute in the SCS contradicts its claim of being an upholder of multilateralism.[8] China sending a ship to "warn" Vietnam not to move an international court, when Vietnam "cited arbitration and litigation as two possible measures against China," raised a serious question as to what type of international multilateralism it envisages in which it is not willing to abide by decisions of international judicial institutions.[9] Further, it has not shied away from employing economic instruments in coercive diplomacy, even though it formally champions the cause of a free and unhindered globalised economy.[10] Apprehensions about its hegemonic intentions or the implications of its rise override its grand pronouncements. The "benign" China during the 1997 Asian financial crisis has become a distant memory. At present, for China, East Asia appears to be the region that undergirds its projection of global leadership.

Tempest in the Taiwan Strait

Although China-Taiwan or Cross-Strait relations are not strictly "ordinary" state-to-state ties, they remain among the most complicated examples of how issues of sovereignty, security, and strategic order can be critically intertwined.[11] Taiwan has the distinction of serving as the most consequential reference point for highlighting the consequences of China's rise—a crucial test for the geopolitical competition between China and the United States, and a test case of the US's dependability for its allies and friends. The Taiwan issue reminds the US—Taiwan's

'security guarantor' since its Taiwan Relations Act of 1979—of the reputational cost if it were to fail in supporting Taiwan.

It was in 2016 when the Taiwan Strait yet again became a strategic flash point. During that period, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which does not recognise the One-China principle, came to power; and Donald Trump, under whose watch the US reset its China policy and recognised China as a strategic competitor, assumed the presidency. Although the Russia-US face-off in Ukraine has somewhat overshadowed the geopolitical standoff between China and the US, the latter remains the primary strategic contestation in the world. Perhaps the most prominent point of reference in their strategic argument is the fragile, multilayered security-strategic situation in the Taiwan Strait.

Cross-Strait relations nosedived after the present ruling party, the DPP, much to China's disappointment, came to power in Taipei in 2016 and won another term in 2020. Cross-Strait ties had earlier enjoyed unprecedented stability, from 2008 to 2016 when the KMT—which shares the One-China principle albeit under its own interpretation, was in power in Taipei. China's displeasure with the ruling DPP not unequivocally upholding the One-China principle led to the breakdown of Cross-Strait dialogue in June 2016.[12] The dialogue had previously succeeded in establishing institutionalised Cross-Strait cooperation mechanisms across the economic and cultural spectrum between 2008 and 2016. China's displeasure also caused the collapse of their tacit diplomatic truce, reducing Taiwan's diplomatic allies from 23 in 2016 to 14 at present.[13]

China has used various methods to arm-twist Taiwan in the international arena and directly toward it in order to enforce its One-China

policy. The World Health Assembly's (WHA) and International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) doors have been closed to Taiwan due to Chinese objections. Taiwan attended WHA annual meetings as an observer from 2009 to 2016,[14] and the ICAO's triennial assembly in 2013 as a guest of its president with no objections from China.[a,15] It is now unlikely that Taiwan will be able to join any international organisations in the face of Chinese objections. Taiwanese citizens accused of wrongdoing—whether proven or not—have been deported to China from various countries as varied as Kenya, Cambodia, Armenia, and Spain. These countries treat Taiwan as Chinese citizens under their respective extradition treaties with China or because they do not recognise Taiwan as a sovereign state but as a province of China.[16] China has frequently extended its One-China policy to commercial companies[17] and non-government organisations, and it may do so even to private individuals. It has occasionally punished Taiwan with low-grade economic sanctions.[18]

China's threatening military posturing by way of an ever-increasing number of violations of Taiwan's ADIZ has been unabated.[19] It has been intensifying 'grey zone' warfare[20] and cyber warfare[21] against Taiwan, and has created a new normal in the Taiwan Strait by nullifying the hitherto respected informal median line.[22] In August 2022, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan provoked China to respond with military drills, escalating Cross-Strait tensions.[23]

The DPP government in Taipei has stayed its course, not yielding to Chinese pressure on the core questions of Cross-Strait relations—i.e., the identity of Taiwan and the future of Taiwan. Its long-held position that the future of Taiwan will be decided by the Taiwanese people and that no option is off the table remains unchanged. The latter implies that *de jure* independence is also a possibility if the Taiwanese desire it, which is anathema to China. While the Taiwanese people may differ about the DPP government's handling of relations with China, the party's position on cross-Strait relations has increasingly become a mainstream position[24]—a societal development that should worry China. The fate of Hong Kong under the 2020 National Security Law for Hong Kong validated the Taiwanese scepticism about China's offer of "One Country, Two Systems" and increased their resolve not to accept it.

Beijing-Taipei-Washington Triangle Redux

Amidst the fragility of Cross-Strait relations, the US has not only politically and diplomatically supported Taiwan, but its relations with Taiwan have also been further reinforced in their own right, which in turn enhances the US's support for Taiwan against Chinese threats. It has increased arms supplies to Taiwan in volume and frequency. Since 2017, it has approved more than US$20 billion in weapons sales to Taiwan and joint weapons production with Taiwan is reported to be under consideration.[25] Its military links with Taiwan in other forms, such as the presence of US military officials in Taiwan, have also been acknowledged.[26] US national security and defence strategic documents, as well as high-level officials, make frequent mention of Taiwan.

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a   Taiwan can become a member of only those organisations in which sovereignty is not a requirement for membership, such as the WTO and APEC.

> **"**While the Taiwanese people may differ about the DPP government's handling of relations with China, the party's position on Cross-Strait relations has increasingly become a mainstream position.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken's articulation on Taiwan was perhaps the most comprehensive yet from the US in recent decades.[27] President Joe Biden has repeatedly said that the US will defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, though his administration has more recently given those statements more nuance.[28] The visits of US congressional members to Taiwan have become more frequent, with 28 members of Congress travelling to Taiwan from January to early September 2022.[29] On the whole, the US measures, such as the Taiwan Travel Act of 2018, the TAIPEI Act of 2019, and the inclusion of the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act (TERA) in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) making provisions for grants and loans to Taiwan,[30] have irreversible effects. Thus, while China is trying to create a new military normal in the Taiwan Strait, the US may have already achieved its own new normal for Taiwan.

Some may argue that the Taiwan issue is as much between China and the US as it is between China and Taiwan themselves, and it will be resolved first between China and the US. The current strategic standoff between China and the United States is certainly not solely caused by Taiwan. Nonetheless, it is difficult to dismiss the reactivation of the historic but long-dormant strategic triangle of Beijing-Taipei-Washington. The Chinese see "the US black hand" as complicit with the DPP government in challenging the One-China principle. In their view, the US "instigates" Taiwan, "foments" trouble in Hong Kong, and "defames" China on the issue of human rights in Xinjiang—and these are all part of one story that is about the US "containing" China. In short, the Taiwan issue is central to any China-US talks, as it was recently in Bali for Biden and Xi, when the latter reminded the US that Taiwan is "at the very core of China's core interests."[31]

Bracing for Headwinds

The Taiwan contingency is not a strategic and security issue only between China and the US; it has implications for the region as well. There is a growing call for increased dialogue and cooperation between the United States and its allies, Japan and Australia, in the event of a Taiwan contingency.[32]

In the regional context, Japan has had its own history of relations with Taiwan. After 1972, when it switched recognition to the PRC from the ROC, it remained reticent on the Taiwan issue for many decades, though it was in Japan's security thinking all along— the phrase "situations in areas surrounding Japan" in the Guidelines for Japan-US Defence

Cooperation was considered couching a reference to Taiwan, too.[33] Over the last decade or so, Japan has experienced internal churn regarding its assessment of Chinese power and its implications for its security. This period has coincided with the China-US relationship entering a strategic stalemate, the Taiwan Strait becoming turbulent, and the US reaffirming its support for Taiwan in the face of Chinese aggression. It has gradually veered towards recognising China as a challenge to its security.

It is against this backdrop that, in recent years, there has been a flurry of statements expressing concern for Taiwan and the potential implications of deteriorating security-strategic situation in the Taiwan Strait for Japan's security. After nearly four decades, Taiwan was included in a joint US-Japan statement that "underscore[d] the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encouraged [the] peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues" during Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's visit to the US in April 2021.[34] Japan, in its *Diplomatic Bluebook*, published in 2021 by its MOFA, described Taiwan as "an extremely crucial partner and an important friend, with which [Japan] shares fundamental values."[35] Japan unhesitatingly supports Taiwan's bid for entry into the WHA.[36]

In early July 2021, the deputy minister at that time, Tara Aso attracted attention when he said: "If a major incident happened (over Taiwan), it's safe to say it would be related to a situation threatening the survival (of Japan). If that is the case, Japan and the U.S. must defend Taiwan together."[37] The 2022 Japanese national security strategy clearly identifies the situation in the Taiwan Strait as an immediate security concern for Japan and the international community. It states, "Regarding peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, concerns are mounting rapidly, not only in the Indo-Pacific region including

Japan, but also in the entire international community."[38] The Taiwan issue has triggered a new acrimony in China-Japan relations, and China perceives Japan as being behind the G-7 issuing a statement on Taiwan.[39]

Australia, another US ally, has also become notably vocal on the Taiwan issue as its own relations with China have gone downhill. Australia's understanding of China, like Japan's, has also shifted. China's moves in the South Pacific, where Taiwan maintains diplomatic relations, pose a strategic challenge to Australia.[40]

South Korea is widely regarded as deferential and accommodating toward China and it came as a surprise to many analysts when it broke its silence on the Taiwan issue in early 2021. Taiwan was mentioned for the first time in a US-ROK joint statement in the U.S.-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement in May 2021, after the summit meeting between President Biden and President Moon Jae-in in Washington.[41] Since then, South Korea has been reaffirming "the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."[42]

This whole situation, where the Taiwanese are drifting away from 'the mainland' and important sections of the international community are increasingly vocal for Taiwan, is not favourable to China with respect to its One-China claim. The increased international interest in and articulation on Taiwan might be a transient reaction to China's aggressive foreign policy and strategic push. It could, however, also be the result of a realisation, particularly among the United States and its allies, that expectations that China's close integration with the democratic world would facilitate its political opening up are unfounded. The interest in and support for Taiwan may be more durable and lasting, as the countries concerned

may not only be seeing Taiwan as a strategic lever against China but also appreciating its value as a democracy that needs support against authoritarianism.

If China is pushed back on the Taiwan issue and its reunification cause is rendered redundant and defunct, the "Chinese dream" will be over. China is not unaware of this. Yet, it would be a miscalculation to expect China to learn from Russia's setbacks in the ongoing war in Ukraine due to Western support for Ukraine and back down on its commitment to reunifying Taiwan. While a military invasion of Taiwan by China is still highly unlikely, its commitment to "reunify" Taiwan is unflinching. Russia's setbacks in Ukraine may have only taught it lessons about the importance of better preparation and training, as well as waiting for strategically advantageous moments. Incidentally, it is not only the US allies and partners that are expressing solidarity with Taiwan. Russia, China's "no limits" partner, has become active in the waters near Taiwan, too.[43] Finally, the US and its allies' support for Taiwan, in the event of a war, cannot be taken for granted. Their support will depend on strategic calculations, an understanding of national interests, and the personalities of the incumbent decision-makers. Thus, the long-term security-strategic scenario in the Taiwan Strait is likely to remain fragile and uncertain.

The challenge is to find a lighthouse in the midst of a storm in East Asia, in general, and the Taiwan Strait in particular. Finding one is a challenge, but not impossible. Mending fences with China has its own powerful commercial and geopolitical logic for the US, which is at loggerheads with Russia in Ukraine. Salvaging relations with the US remains a priority for China. The same holds true for China's relations with other US allies in the region. Any notions about a fundamental rewriting of relations with China with reference to the One-China policy are merely wishful thinking.

Yet, stabilising Cross-Strait relations is not impossible, either. The present deterioration in Cross-Strait ties basically emanates from the Chinese response to the ascendance of a particular kind of domestic politics in Taiwan and their sense of vulnerability in the face of geopolitical involvement in the Taiwan issue at this crucial point in Cross-Strait relations. This situation might very well change. Furthermore—and this is critical—there is no conclusive evidence that reunifying Taiwan is on Xi's timetable and is currently more important than repairing relations with the US.

What is certain is that provocations are always deliberate, and maximalist positions are unwise and shunning them helps mitigate uncertainties. East Asia needs to reaffirm faith in bilateral as well as multilateral dialogue. Inclusive multilateral initiatives in diplomacy and geo-economics with a commitment to rules-based order are indeed the way forward.

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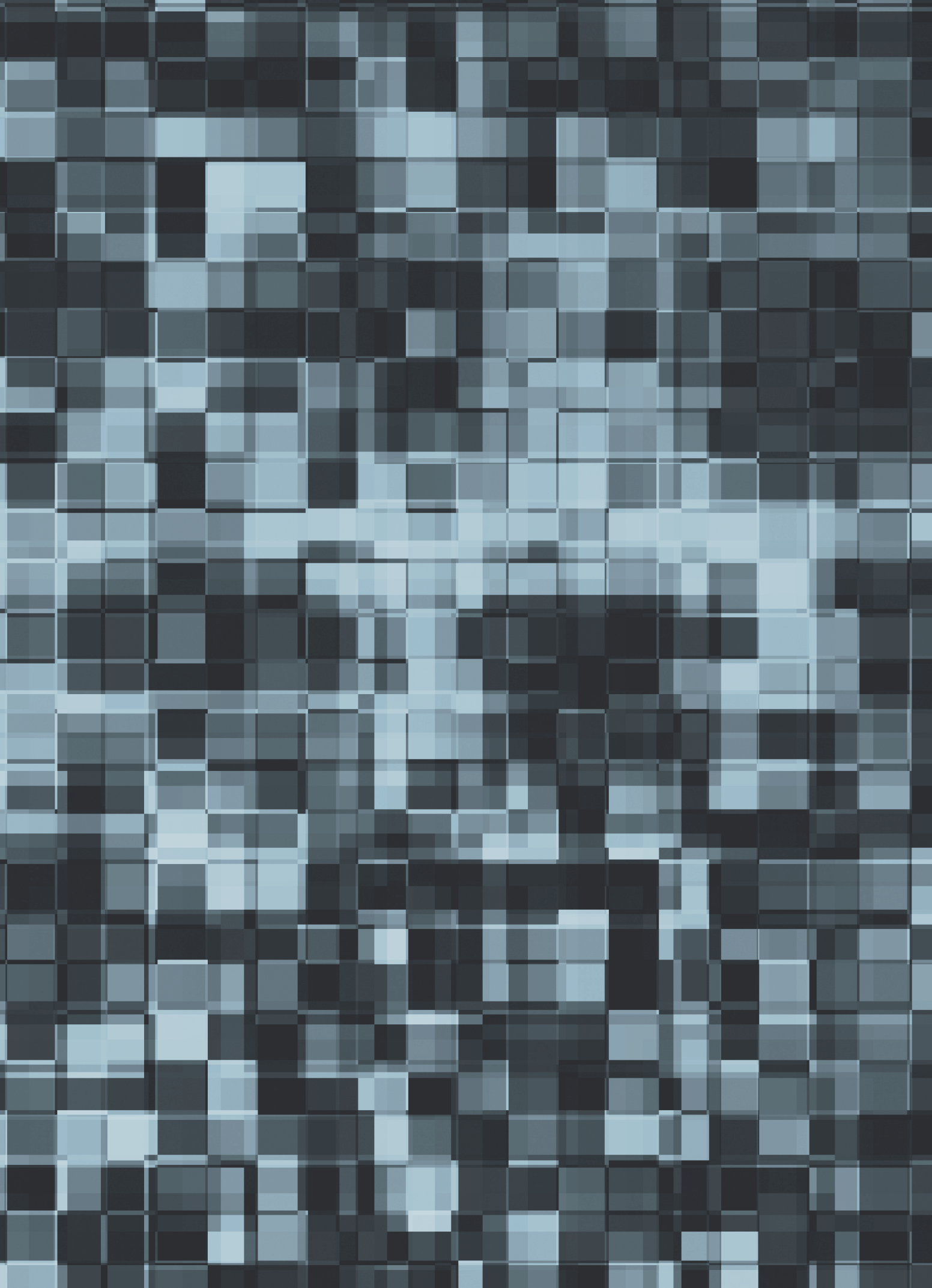
THE GREAT U.S.-CHINA TECH DECOUPLING: PERILS OF TECHNO-NATIONALISM

Vivek Mishra

THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA have entered a phase of competition for technological advantage, intensified by pandemic-induced supply chain vulnerabilities as well as a fundamental reorientation of global power dynamics where technology has come to play an unprecedented role. According to Eric Schmidt, the former Google leader, "Many Americans still have an outdated vision of China… the United States now faces an economic and military competitor in China that is aggressively trying to close our lead in emerging technologies."[1] Unless trends change significantly, the US will be competing with a China that is not only bigger in its economy but has better R&D, superior technologies, and stronger computing infrastructure. Decoupling, therefore, has become a necessary strategy for the US as China speeds up its tech

advancements, many believe, by its use of unfair means. Such sentiments are supported by the bipartisan political consensus in Washington on the need to be tougher on China. However, decoupling bears costs and challenges for both the US and China. Areas like innovation, specialisation and costs are all expected to be impacted in both countries by the tech decoupling. One obvious area of impact is slowing global trade, changing the inherent characteristics of globalisation as we know it.

The core elements of technology and the competition around it have been underscored as a structural force that will shape the global competition, potentially resulting in new technological leaders or hegemonies in the next two decades.[2] For the US, China is at the heart of that concern.

Indeed, the US-China tech rivalry has become one of the most keenly observed areas in the emergent great-power discourse. Although the Biden administration's recent export control measures[3] against China are the current reference point, the bilateral technology interface between the two countries has been a contested domain for some time now. As part of Trump's trade war against China—including a plan to impose tariffs worth US$50 billion in May 2018—his administration imposed limits on Chinese investments in US high-tech industries.[4] It specifically targeted Chinese imports "containing industrially significant technology, including those related to the 'Made in China 2025' program".[5] This step was part of a broader attempt by the US to protect its intellectual property rights and to curb Chinese acquisition of US technology through its growing investments in the sector. Expectedly, China threatened the US with retaliatory measures;[6] it has responded only selectively at the time of this writing.

At the heart of the emerging US tech concerns about China was the investigation[7] by the United States Trade Representative (USTR) in 2017 which found that China's aggressive technology policies had put 44 million US jobs in the technology sector at risk in four ways: forced technology transfer; license requirements at less than economic value; China's acquisition of industrially significant US technology for strategic purposes; and cyber theft. The US argued that these activities violated provisions of the United States Trade Act of 1974. Such transgressions prompted the US under Trump to file a violation dispute against China under WTO provisions in March 2018, laying the foundation for the tech-decoupling with China. Throughout the Trump presidency, tariff and export controls encouraged US companies to move their manufacturing bases out of China. President Trump banned ZTE, a Chinese

telecoms-equipment maker, from buying American chips and denied Chinese company Huawei access to US components.

Biden Imprint

The Biden administration has doubled down on these measures, speeding the decoupling process. Perhaps the strongest impetus was provided by the Biden administration's decision to implement the CHIPS Act 2022. Today, there is bipartisan consensus in the US Congress on enhancing technology controls, particularly in the so-called 'strategic technologies' where China's rapid advancement is expected to challenge the US and threaten its national security and economic interests. The larger geopolitical challenge for the US is that China could use its techno-economic advantage for political leverage across the world and cause changes to the extant world order.

Given the primacy of technology in emerging geopolitics, the US focus on tech competition has both immediate and long-term motivations. The August 2022 Executive Order implementing the CHIPS Act of 2022 was critical in fundamentally altering the US's relations with China. The Biden administration has not only sped up the process of tech decoupling with China but expanded it horizontally across sectors to make tech competition one of the primary fulcrums of US China policy.

Led by the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), the US imposed sanctions on the export of advanced semiconductors, chip-making equipment and supercomputer components to China. The US Entity List, which bars US firms from importing US goods without a license and contains names of individuals, companies, businesses and institutions that require a specific license for the "export,

reexport and/or transfer (in-country) of specified items" has quadrupled, from 130 to 532, between 2018 and 2022.[8] As a result, most of the leading Chinese companies and organisations dealing with supercomputing, chip/semiconductor manufacturing are now present on the US Entity List, including China's leading company Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp. (SMIC), limiting China's access to key US technologies. Chinese companies like Huawei have been particularly affected by the extension of BIS's 'foreign product direct rule' to cover non-US items made using US technology.

The extension of US export controls has also affected the ability of third countries' manufacturers and designers to sell chips to Chinese companies like Huawei. Effectively, these steps formed a decisive moment for three reasons: they stopped the supply of high-end semiconductor chips to China; halted China's ability to get machines that manufacture chips globally; and stopped US citizens (including Green Card holders) from working for a Chinese semiconductor company or providing them support and knowhow.[9] The decision intended to provide incentives for research, development and manufacturing of semiconductors within the US.

The US under Biden is decoupling from China for two related reasons: to slow China's technology-related advances, and in turn curb its economic and, more importantly, military ambitions. The long-raging debate between hawks and doves on China within the Biden administration seems to have ended with harsh and immediate steps being taken against China. More importantly, even harsher steps are now being anticipated from the Biden administration in other strategic sectors like biotech, manufacturing, and finance.[10] As

chips are critical to Artificial Intelligence and technology, increasingly dependent sectors such as supply chains, e-commerce, autonomous vehicles, cybersecurity, medical imaging, drug discovery, climate modelling and defence production in China are expected to be hurt. However, even as these steps could slow Chinese economy and growth in multiple ways, it is also expected that US-led restrictions will trigger a domestic rush in chips manufacturing in China.

Fractured World Order

The US government's decision to technologically decouple from China can be traced as far back as mid-2010. The latest sanctions are more 'offensive', however. With continuing measures such as export and import controls, inbound and outbound investment restrictions, licensing and visa bans and law enforcement, the US has also increased investments in technological research and development. The CHIPS Act appropriates US$52.7 billion over five years for semiconductor R&D, incentivises its manufacturing in the US, and lays out ambitious expansion plans for the National Science Foundation, Department of Energy, and National Institute of Standards and Technology. This is in line with proposals in the United States Innovation and Competition Act (USICA) and the COMPETES Act that seek to create strong foundational support for research especially in STEM sectors. The CHIPS Act also ushers other new provisions such as a 25-percent tax credit for investing in semiconductor manufacturing facilities in the US, limits expansion of semiconductor manufacturing in China, and authorises close to US$170 billion in funding over five years for research and development initiatives across multiple federal agencies.[11]

> **"Technology and the competition around it is a structural force that will shape global competition, potentially resulting in new technological leaders or hegemonies in the next two decades.**

Although China has so far not reacted to Biden's steps in the same way as it had to Trump's in the 2018 tariff war, the sweeping regulations by the Biden administration has laid the foundation for further escalation in an already competitive duopoly between the two largest powers. At the global level, the steps taken by the US are also likely to redefine the metrics of great-power competition in the new world order that is hinged on technology and its use, even as chips have become central in both day-to-day living and in wars. The Russia-Ukraine war, for example, has underlined the centrality of chips in modern conventional wars. At the height of the war, Russia faced severe shortages in chips,[12] causing problems in the launch of missiles and other munitions. In what is a torturous cycle, wars like that in Europe, in turn, can have a debilitating impact on the production and supply of critical chips and affect the lives of citizens across the globe.[13]

The post-Ukraine world order has set the US and China on the path to tech decoupling, even as both countries have focused on domestic strengthening of tech manufacturing, greater economic control, and self-reliant agendas. While the US has focused on domestic growth, China has reinforced its vision through the 'Made in China 2025' (MIC 2025). It intends to boost competitiveness with the help of industrial rejuvenation and increasing its

position in global manufacturing value chains, advancing rapidly in the emerging technologies sector, and reducing reliance on foreign firms. There are 10 sectors in China's industrial priorities for 2015-2025: new-generation information technology; high-end computerised machines and robots; aerospace; maritime equipment and high-tech ships; advanced railway transportation equipment; new-energy and energy-saving vehicles; energy equipment; agricultural machines; new materials and biopharma and high-tech medical devices.[14] These innovation priorities have found technology, particularly chips, at the centre of their manufacturing and distribution processes. What the US is particularly concerned about is that China and its supported entities are being disingenuous in the acquisition and absorption of these technologies from the US and other countries and is recasting them as its own.[15] China denies these allegations.

Global Impact

The impact of US-China tech decoupling could rattle the world. Already, countries have started preparing cushions for the broader ramifications of these developments both by partnering with other countries and shoring up domestic manufacturing and supplies wherever possible. Despite the Semiconductor Industry Association's advice for countries like the

US and China to adopt a targeted regulation instead of sweeping bans to maintain a level playing field in the semiconductor industry, it remains shadowed by geopolitical interests of major powers.

Technology, particularly chip manufacturing, is central to modern economies and both the US and China have moved to ramp-up semiconductor manufacturing and control its supply in the future. Since 2020, at least 35 semiconductor companies across the US have pledged as much as US$200 billion in investments to boost domestic chips manufacturing. Leading among them are companies such as chip giant Intel which has recently pledged US$20 billion in two new factories in Ohio to make semiconductors; and Micron Technology which is expected to spend as much as US$20 billion by the end of this decade in the US. The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company also plans to triple its investments in the US to US$40 billion.[16]

China is moving to close the tech gap with the US, committing as much as US$1.4 trillion over five years to build strategic technologies and digital infrastructure domestically. These include Artificial Intelligence, Chips, 5G, and Internet of Things. It is being anticipated that China will take the same US path in highly subsiding its domestic tech companies, a process which is already unraveling. In its endeavour to become technology self-sufficient, China is likely to focus more on 'deep technology' such as semiconductors and AI. In the process, huge state subsidies are likely to be provided by China to companies manufacturing chips and critical technologies. Already, a call for ushering tech breakthroughs by mobilising national resources has been given by Chinese leader Xi Jinping in September 2022.[17] At the 20th Party Congress shortly after, the Communist Party of China (CPC) declared technological innovation as the core driver of the country's development.

The great decoupling between the US and China could manifest itself most conspicuously in four ways: technology, trade, finance, and people. In today's geopolitical landscape between the two countries, all four are interlinked. The compulsions for decoupling with China, across a range of sectors led by technology, are provoked by the threats US faces in the national security domain from Beijing. Three critical documents brought out by the Biden administration—the National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Strategy (NDS), and Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)—all point to China as the most potent challenge to US hegemony, even as Russia's war-led resurgence also presents a formidable threat. Most categorically, the US NSS defines China as the "only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective." These assessments have placed the tech-threats from China to US among its core national security concerns, pushing the US to counter such threats by steps taken domestically as well as internationally.

Conclusion

While the tech-decoupling from China remains the Biden administration's core concern, the US is expected to work with a larger network of countries to create a soft-landing impact on its own economy. US partnerships with like-minded partners and its allies are essential in tackling the China challenge and the wider ramifications of the regulations in the tech sector against China. As the US and China move towards dealing with the unraveling effects of tariff barriers, export controls, sanctions and blacklisting, two different trends are expected to emerge in China and the US-led coalition. The Chinese state will further press on with state support and subsidies to industries that deal with chips and other

critical technologies, accelerating the process of attaining self-reliance in sensitive technologies and semiconductors. Bilaterally, China could retaliate by cancelling agreements on trade with the US including the recently signed Audit Firm Supervision Agreement, or by filing a complaint of violation against the US at the WTO.

Internationally, China could strengthen its partnerships and increase investments in countries that are rich in rare-earth materials, an important component of chips, while leveraging its own rare-earth deposits estimated at 44 million metric tonnes. On the US side, private enterprises are expected to act more freely in reducing the impact of the new restrictions and regulations by offshoring responsibilities to other countries and partners. Critical in such efforts will be the US-led 'Chip 4' alliance comprising Japan, South Korea and Taiwan—three countries which control much of semiconductor manufacturing, design and supplies. As Chinese threats to these three countries precede the chip-conundrum and are tied to the larger Pacific balance, they are only likely to intensify.

Lastly, the effort of the US to create a resilient technology partnership against China in the Indo-Pacific and beyond has to be carefully calibrated. Especially as the Biden administration enters a 'democracy versus autocracy' debate to target and differentiate from China, it has to be careful about the assessments from its other Indo-Pacific partners. Not all countries conform to Washington's definition and understanding of democracy, especially those from the global South. The US should strike a balance and accommodate its other partners in the Indo-Pacific in its efforts to link a human rights 'code of conduct' with export controls.

With tech-related and tech-enhanced capabilities, 'grey zone' activities of countries are likely to increase. These expectations only heighten when assessed in relation to China. Only time will tell if US concern over China's tech rise is overstated.

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OUTER SPACE AS A GROWING SECURITY AND DEFENCE DOMAIN: STRATEGIC LESSONS ON CYBER DISRUPTION

Caitríona Heinl

AN INCREASING NUMBER of states across the globe have been pushing outer space to the mainstream of their key security and defence policy agendas in recent years. In February 2022, the cyber attack publicly attributed to Russia on the day of its invasion of Ukraine, causing a communication outage, sparked even greater attention on the strategic security and defence aspects of space. The activity was quickly referred to as "an eye opener".[1]

The attack itself disabled the ability to communicate with Viasat's KA-SAT satellite network which supplies Internet access to citizens not only in Ukraine but in other parts of Europe, too.[2] Despite the apparent objective of disrupting Ukrainian command and control, these attacks against commercial satellite communications networks caused spillover effects in other European countries.

The incident is especially notable because even though it could have impacted government and military objects, it also impacted civilian objects, the Ukrainian population and other parts of Europe outside the zone of conflict.[3] It affected telecommunication systems, caused loss of Internet access and disrupted energy infrastructure, primarily wind farms in Germany. The Ukrainian civilian population were prevented from accessing reliable information during the conflict and EU civilians were impacted due to spillover effects outside the conflict zone.[4] In May 2022, Elon Musk tweeted that while SpaceX's Starlink satellites had so far resisted Russian hacking attempts, their efforts were increasing.[5]

Continuing, albeit heightened, pursuit of space-based secure connectivity during peacetime and conflict

Despite such incidents and provocations, it is well-recognised that the domains of space and cyber are increasingly important. Indeed, numerous efforts were already underway before the invasion of Ukraine, around the designation of space infrastructure as critical infrastructure, enhancing its resilience and ensuring connectivity. One such example pre-dating the Ukraine war is the European Commission's 2020 proposal for a Directive on the resilience of critical entities to reduce the vulnerabilities and strengthen the resilience of critical entities or infrastructure within 10 identified sectors that include digital infrastructure and space.

Today, a clear case study now exists on how the ability to deny the use of space to an adversary has become part of modern warfare. The EU is currently raising two pertinent questions in this regard: (1) How many pieces of critical infrastructure in the EU depend on space services?; and (2) How well are these assets and services protected?[6] Not only are these crucial questions unanswered in the EU, but they are relevant to all nations attempting to draw lessons from events of the past year to inform their future strategies. Other cyber-related activities of concern include deorbiting satellites, compromise of ground infrastructures, and disruption of satellite control systems. German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock, recently explained that since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, officials are also learning how Ukraine's cybersecurity authority experts are deploying commercial Starlink terminals to help Ukrainians stay online and how they have dealt with attacks on their energy systems.[7]

In other words, more resilient infrastructures will go some way to ensure that connectivity is maintained even when a cyber attack takes place. Some examples of practical steps taken subsequent to the Viasat attack include the issuance by the United States' Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency of an advisory for satellite operators to be vigilant, requesting all organisations to lower their threshold for reporting, and sharing indications of malicious cyber activity.[8] The Satellite Industry Association also issued a statement of "commitment to cybersecurity best practices", expressing concern about "evolving attacks by criminals, terrorists, and nation states", while the resilience of satellite networks is said to be turning into a major concern for the US Department of Defense.[9] The US Space Force has started a programme to ensure that commercial satcom networks that support the military are cyber secure, too.[10]

Other notable developments provoked by the war in Ukraine include growing levels of advocacy for space industry cybersecurity standards due to heightened awareness about the vulnerability of satellites. For example, some experts are advocating that the German Federal Office for Information Security guidance for satellites could serve as a model for broader European or international cybersecurity standards for the space industry as it grows and introduces commercial software.[11] Other cybersecurity discussions are ongoing among space agencies from countries such as the United States, Japan, China, Canada, Germany and Italy through the Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems.[12] The Space Information Sharing and Analysis Center also facilitates information exchange about cyber threats, which is especially important as cyber threats evolve along with the growing commercialisation of the satellite industry.[13]

Nearly one year after the invasion, Josep Borell, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is seeking to emphasise this growing focus on the security and defence aspects of space. He argues that, among other steps, there is a need to (1) improve common understanding of space threats, reinforce capacity to analyse space-based risks, threats and vulnerabilities, and better understand counter-space capabilities and intentions of competitors; and (2) focus on protecting space infrastructure and making it more resilient, including through protecting supply chains.[14]

Global re-appraisal of strategic security and defence aspects of space: Pivotal before and after the Ukraine invasion

There is heightened awareness about the need to enhance space-based secure connectivity and resilience of space infrastructure. Increasingly too, states are re-examining the strategic security and defence aspects of space. A plethora of national strategies reflecting such rethinking have been released recently or are in the making.

The US government, for example, in December 2021 released the 'White House United States Space Priorities Framework' where it noted the present historic moment of rapidly accelerating space activities, resulting in new challenges to global space governance as well as safe and secure space operations.[15] The country intends to bolster its space sectors, including national security, recognising that the domain underpins national security and the ability to respond to crises and space capabilities enable the military. The US therefore intends to protect space-related critical infrastructure and strengthen the security of its space industrial base, emphasising

especially an aim to work with the commercial space industry and other non-governmental space developers and operators. It is hoped that this will help improve the cybersecurity of space systems, ensure efficient spectrum access, and strengthen supply chains' resiliency across the space industrial base. The US also aims to defend its national security interests from the growing scope and scale of space and counterspace threats. It is noted that "[t]he military doctrines of competitor nations identify space as critical to modern warfare and view the use of counterspace capabilities as a means both to reduce U.S. military effectiveness and to win future wars."[16] Enhancing resilience—through cyber and other means—of the national security space posture is thus described as contributing to strategic stability.

The European Union (EU), for its part, through the High Representative published an article on the European External Action Service website four days before the Ukraine invasion underlining how the classical understanding of "defence" is evolving to encompass other domains such as cyber and outer space.[17] The High Representative explains that work packages on defence and space policies were adopted by the European Commission at the time, given the maturing of space into a strategic domain and recognising that it is an "essential enabler for most of our daily activities, whether the Internet, telecommunications, or the movement of people, ships, aircraft or vehicles."[18] EU endeavours will include the enhancement of European strategic autonomy in this field, new strategic EU space infrastructure to provide European space-based secure connectivity through a governmental, highly secured communication service and high-speed broadband access service to provide universal access to the Internet and reduce the digital divide.[19] Part of the EU's agenda is to examine the security and defence aspects of space in line

> **"**Efforts were already underway before the invasion of Ukraine, around the designation of space infrastructure as critical infrastructure, enhancing its resilience and ensuring connectivity.

with its Strategic Compass which is associated with a new roadmap on critical technologies for security and defence to boost them through research, development and innovation and reduce strategic dependencies.[20]

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom's (UK) first National Space Strategy and Defence Space Strategy emphasise the importance of space for the nation and defence. In February 2022, the UK's Secretary of State for Defence explained how "[d]aily life is reliant on space and, for the Armed Forces, space underpins vital, battle-winning technologies. From space we can deliver global command & control, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, precision navigation, and more. Adversaries understand this reliance and are increasingly able to exploit vulnerabilities, threatening our strategic stability and security."[21] Like the United States, the UK government highlights that this is a "pivotal moment" for defence where it aims to rapidly operationalise the space domain.[22]

One year since the invasion, the EU's High Representative, Josep Borell, is also upping the ante, explaining that "[o]ur lives depend increasingly on what happens there, not 'just' for the transport sector, IT, telecom or research, but also for core security and defence issues. Moreover, the geo-political competition we see on Earth is projected into space, resulting

in a growing level of threat affecting our security."[23] He notes that cyber-relevant aspects must continue to be addressed as geopolitical competition does not appear to be waning.[24] The Ukraine war has highlighted the crucial role of space assets and services in security terms, as satellite imagery and communications remain a 'game-changer' for the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the citizens alike by providing access to information and situational awareness.[25] In other words, according to Borell, the war against Ukraine has given the EU "extra motivation to enhance security and defence including space" and it is currently working on a new strategy on space security and defence that is expected to be released in March 2023.[26]

The EU is certainly not alone in its re-appraisal of the security and defence aspects of space. Following the 'U.S.-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology' agreed in May 2022, the inaugural meeting which was led by the National Security Advisors of India and the US in January 2023, agreed to deepen their technology partnership and launch new initiatives between both governments, industry and academia in domains such as space.[27] Similarly, analysts note how regional rivalries in the Asia Pacific have escalated within the space domain, with developments in security space capabilities and strengthening of minilateral security cooperation frameworks that in this case are said to be primarily driven by China's

achievements in space and counterspace aspects.[28]

Mitigating future spillover effects: International consensus, implementation of frameworks of responsible state behaviour, and confidence-building

Subsequent to Russia's targeting of critical infrastructure in Ukraine and the spillover effects on civilians, diplomatic efforts have been made to call attention to violations of international law and the undermining of the rules-based order and agreed normative framework for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. This framework is laid out through the UN Group of Governmental Experts' consensus reports and reaffirmed by the preceding UN Open Ended Working (UNOEWG) prior to the current iteration. For one, statements made on behalf of Germany to the UN OEWG Intersessional in December 2022 specified that Germany and its partners have adopted a joint practice of attributing cyber incidents. Recent attributions include the spillover effects from Russia's cyber attacks against Ukraine on critical infrastructure in Germany, which can be clearly traced to Russia's cyber attacks against Ukrainian targets.[29] Many other statements indicating such public attribution to Russia from the EU, EU Member States, and countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, the UK and New Zealand assert that this activity amounted to Russia's violation of the normative framework for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. However, accountability and norms implementation continue to remain unresolved and subject to ongoing negotiation. Other ground-breaking questions on international law that have come to light include Ukrainian

officials' requests that the International Criminal Court investigate whether certain Russian cyber attacks supporting its kinetic military operations that targeted Ukraine's critical infrastructure and civilians could constitute war crimes.[30]

In addition to such challenges to normative frameworks and international law, European officials further note that as a result of the Viasat attack, they learned that (1) this is a quickly evolving threat landscape; (2) such spillover effects are concerning because there is risk that a nation not directly involved in a conflict could be dragged into it; and (3) this type of spillover scenario can make it difficult to determine international law questions surrounding what is considered to be armed attack and where this threshold is crossed.[31] Another concerning new trend brought to light in this conflict, which could have inherently destabilising effects, is the increasing involvement of so-called 'hacktivists' from both sides of the conflict. This trend is raising questions surrounding how international and national law can deal with this development, where hacktivists were primarily part of civil society movements in the past.[32]

To conclude, these serious challenges provide examples of questions that require further examination globally to promote stability in the near future. In the meantime, practical cyber cooperation measures between states could be initiated to begin exploring these real-life scenarios that have arisen relating to the protection of space-related critical infrastructures. Engagement could take place through the many existing bilateral, regional/sub-regional and global cyber cooperation mechanisms. Examples include the ongoing work of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) and ASEAN Regional Forum on cyber confidence building measures. Moreover, an "open, informal and

cross-regional group of states" to advance confidence-building measures within the UN OEWG has also been convened within the second iteration of the UN OEWG.[33]

There could be potential for this group to examine these questions in its future endeavours at the global level. Other practical state cooperation measures that could be considered on this subject include information exchange on relevant incidents and changing risks that present themselves in this domain; sharing good practices and information on revised legislative and regulatory solutions; and cooperating on capacity building, including through engagements that can involve relevant non-government stakeholders.

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THE BATTLE BETWEEN HEGEMONY AND INTEROPERABILITY IN THE METAVERSE

Nicolò Andreula

IT IS EASIER to define the Metaverse by what it is not.[1] The Metaverse is not AR/VR, because users can also interact with other interfaces (smartphones or computers); the Metaverse does not come from gaming, and this is demonstrated by the virtual game platforms themselves, which are veering towards other markets or businesses; the Metaverse is not Web 3.0 which, unlike the former, includes only decentralised worlds; and the Metaverse is not a desert, considering that 400 million monthly active users were recorded in 2022.[2]

To be sure, there are some compelling definitions of the 'metaverse', such as: "the evolution of the current internet from something we primarily observe to something we are more immersed in."[3] Or else, as venture capitalist and Metaverse expert Matthew Ball

points out, projecting his vision into the future, a potential "interoperable network of real-time rendered 3D virtual worlds and environments which can be experienced synchronously and persistently by an effectively unlimited number of users with an individual sense of presence, and with continuity of data."[4]

While there are many aspects of the Metaverse that can be difficult to define, what is clear is that there is only one Metaverse. It encompasses various virtual worlds that exist parallel to the physical world—such as Decentraland, Fortnite, Roblox, Minecraft, and The Sandbox—but it is all part of a single entity.

To further understand the concept of the Metaverse, it might be helpful to use similes and metaphors. One way to think of the

Metaverse is as a semantic field, or a group of words in a language that is related to a specific area of meaning. In the case of the Metaverse, the platforms within it are organised based on their level of immersion, data continuity, and persistence. However, unlike a semantic field, the interoperability between these platforms is not guaranteed. They are all part of a single set but do not necessarily share or use the data they have in common. It is as if the individual words in a lexical field have rebelled against the shared meaning and are now competing for dominance. There is no alliance or interoperability between these platforms in the Metaverse.

The battle for users' 'eyeballs'

In the competitive landscape of the Metaverse, platforms are constantly strategising to gain an advantage over their rivals. They protect themselves from external threats, and build systems to attract and retain users. It is similar to any other battle, where each side tries to anticipate their opponent's moves, strengthen their defences, and win over those not directly involved in the conflict.

The following are some examples.

• In August 2022, The Sandbox, a virtual world based on the Ethereum blockchain, launched Alpha Season 3. It registered more than 200,000 monthly active users (a more-than-significant milestone) and immediately hosted some 90 'experiences', of which 27 came from partners of the calibre of Warner Music Group. Offering the opportunity to participate in new interactive *play-to-earn* games and offering access to exclusive events and projects, sales for the platform increased by 190 percent compared to the previous quarter. The

number of users following the initiative was surprising: the platform reached around 39,000 daily users, and the website hosted 1.6 million visitors in the last month.[5] The only hint of interoperability was related to NFTs: owners of the largest collections of *non-fungible tokens*, such as Bored Ape Yacht Club,[6] had the opportunity to use the tokens as avatars in Alpha Season 3. This move resembled less a strategic alliance, and more a particular wartime patronage aimed at hegemony.

• Commenting on Q3 2022 data, Roblox CEO David Baszucki cited strong growth in the platform's key operating metrics, due to the synergistic action of developers (about 4 million) and experiences (30 million, including gaming and events). He said these events created "high-quality experiences that appeal to a broad, global audience."[7] In parallel, however, Roblox said it was continuing with a defensive capital allocation strategy focused on maximising long-term shareholder value. Even then, the third-quarter figures are impressive: revenues totalled US$517.7 million, up 2 percent from the previous year; average daily active users were 58.8 million, recording an increase of 24 percent from 2021; and hours spent on the platform grew by 20 percent to 13.4 billion.[8]

• In September 2022 alone, Decentraland welcomed 56,000 daily users, a 6-percent increase from August. Once again, the reason lies in the implementation of a precise tactic: in the same month, the platform offered more than 160 experiences, including a fashion event—a usual strategy, as Pride Week is organised in June, Art Week in August, and the Music Festival in November.[9]

> **"**One way to think of the Metaverse is as a semantic field, or a group of words in a language that is related to a specific area of meaning.

As can be inferred, victory comes from attracting as many eyeballs as possible. Similar to the *engagement rate*—dependent on the engagement derived from a piece of content—*Eyeball Driven* is a marketing strategy adopted by websites, social media, or streaming services,[10] and inherited in the Metaverse, which derives profit solely from the number of views received. The more users access the platform, the more visibility the platform gains. The more experiences and services are added, the more users there will be. This is also key in the Metaverse, where platforms first have to be "known" and "tried" by users. And then one can look at other key performance indicators such as engagement rates.

If nailed, profits for the platforms (and, inevitably, for the brands displayed "in the window") can be steep. This may also explain why, on the 18th of December, Twitter announced a ban on users promoting their presence on other social networks—a policy that was then promptly withdrawn following objections from users.[11] This is also the reason for the growing polarisation and specialisation of platforms in the Metaverse that are able to monetise visitors' virtual footprints.

The bright side of competitive pressure: the "*meta-Job to be done*"

In 2016, Clayton Christensen studied consumer behaviour to develop a strategy for selling more milkshakes at McDonald's. If the greatest consumption of milkshakes occurs in the morning, during the car ride from home to work, why not make the drink more viscous so that it lasts longer, create self-service dispensers in drive-ins, and make more robust packaging? The Harvard professor coined the concept, '*Job to be done*',[12] suggesting that consumers purchase a product to fulfil a specific purpose. If that purpose is satisfied, they will continue to choose that product. This concept emphasises the imperative for companies to not only consider what they are selling and who their consumers are, but also the reason why their product is needed. Understanding the 'why' can help companies effectively meet the needs of their customers and maintain their loyalty.

The creators of *Pokémon Go* perhaps also believed that a milkshake is just a milkshake. Despite *Pokémon Go's* extraordinary initial success, within months, the augmented reality

game—a true precursor to the Metaverse—proved to be a failed experiment in a major innovation precisely because it lacked the 'why' necessary for triumph.[13]

Indeed, Christensen's mantra echoes among the Metaverse's most important platforms. One thinks of Fortnite, a *free-to-play* game that, sensing the possible success of virtual *player vs. player* (PvP) battles, modified the original *player vs. environment* (PvE) prototype and achieved enormous popularity. A *Job to be done* that has been fully fulfilled thanks also to the strategy of collaborating with famous brands and hosting big events. Indeed, all the biggest platforms (Meta, Decentraland, Zepeto, The Sandbox) have realised that *JTBD* can be achieved by making activities more efficient, focusing on entertainment, and adding value to social interactions, which, however—and this is the focal point—must never go beyond their scope of action.

The downside of competitive pressure: too many shoes for one user

Imagine being limited to wearing a pair of shoes only in the city or store where you purchased them or being wealthy in one country but unable to use or convert your currency in another. This is the reality in the Metaverse, where it is not possible to bring assets, data, information, or even your identity with you as you move between virtual platforms. For example, you may be able to buy a particular virtual pair of shoes on Roblox, but your avatar on Decentraland would have to wear a different pair and pay for them with a separate, non-convertible currency (MANA) rather than the currency used on Roblox (Robux).

As one may guess, the barriers to entry and exit raised by platforms for defence, indirect attack

and hegemony can easily turn into a limitation for users. It could also represent a missed opportunity for profit for companies.

Therefore, some external players, aware of the potential losses due to the absence of interoperability, have taken steps to implement "alliance" pacts. This is the case with *Ready Player Me*,[14] which allows users to create a customisable avatar and employ it on different gaming platforms. This was also done with *Louise: the game*, created by Louis Vuitton in which the brand offers customers the chance to collect and transport a variety of looks across different platforms as part of a Customer Loyalty project.[15]

'If we don't end war, war will end us.'[16]

It is often said that all is fair in love and war, but both can come with significant risks. The lack of interoperability and standardisation in the Metaverse creates a general anarchy, as individual independent realities governed by their own laws co-exist.

It is worth noting that the lack of cohesion between platforms in the Metaverse contributes to the proliferation of extremist movements, facilitates money laundering, and makes it more difficult to combat terrorism. As the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force is one of the key features of the modern state, Metaverse needs an established body with a monopoly of the use of virtual force. The current absence of institutions would make it easier to carry out terrorist activities: for instance, recruitment would be facilitated by augmented reality and artificial intelligence, coordination and training would be accelerated by 3D reconstruction of possible objectives, and the very existence of the metaverse would create new potential targets for extremists – such as virtual spaces

and buildings.[17] Just as in the real world, there is a need for a supranational organisation in the Metaverse that is empowered to issue general and individual measures that become part of the systems of rules for all participants, rather than being optional. Without this type of organisation, it is more difficult to establish a cohesive and orderly society within the Metaverse.

It is important to be intellectually honest and acknowledge that while interoperability may increase the risk of inappropriate use of data for influencing user behaviour and choices, it could also be a means for achieving better regulation of privacy, security, and data protection. A higher protocol for compliance may be a utopian solution in the real world, but it is possible that such a solution could be implemented in the virtual world of utopia within the Metaverse.

Meta-armistices and meta-peace treaties: Recommendations for governments and organisations

To maintain balance within the Metaverse, it is important to regulate the presence of individual platforms and horizontally integrated ecosystems, as well as the dominance of Big Tech companies investing in this new sector. For example, Apple announced the launch of a VR headset in 2023 and already controls the entire value chain for a market segment, from hardware to marketing. Google also plans to integrate future services with current ones, and Microsoft acquired Blizzard in January 2022.[18] Without intervention, the Metaverse may become a market controlled by a few actors from within, as well as by the oligopoly of large technology companies from the outside, which

has already gained significant market power through centralisation in the physical world.

What 'peace treaties' need to be concluded to distribute the Metaverse space in a fair manner among major 'powers' and emerging, independent players? What can governments and organisations do to foster and stimulate desirable interoperability?

Investing in technology. To improve the Metaverse, it is necessary to increase integration and connectivity systems, with a particular emphasis on leveraging blockchain technology as a secure, transparent, and universally verifiable mechanism.

Building multiple layers of standards. Each pillar of interoperability needs to be built: a standard model, to reproduce properties, assets and geometries of virtual environments; a protocol standard, to facilitate interactive and transactional contracts between the user and the server; an identity standard, to provide unique credentials that can be used in multiple worlds; a location standard, to search for places and landmarks in virtual worlds (an evolution of the URL); and a currency standard, to facilitate trade and exchange of currencies.

Officially regulating digital markets, including in the Metaverse. Laws need to be drafted for the regulation of Big Tech and platforms, regarding antitrust, competition, data protection, and GDPR enforcement. The Digital Markets Act and the Digital Services Act,[19] approved in July 2022 by the European Parliament, are already moving in this direction.

Strengthen open Metaverse projects. It is crucial to support and intensify existing standardisation initiatives. One example is the World Economic Forum's *Defining and Building the Metaverse*,[20] which strives to create

economic and governance frameworks for secure and economically viable interoperability. There is also the *Metaverse Standards Forum*,[21] supported by companies such as Meta, Google, and Microsoft, which serves as a cooperative body of organisations and businesses to accelerate the development of this project.

A crucial question is whether the Metaverse will remain a closed space, dominated by a few players (the same Big Tech that now rule the internet and social media), or will open up to the active participation of smaller companies.

Henning Stein, Global Head of Thought Leadership and Market Strategy at Invesco, has observed that it is likely that investors themselves will want to take advantage of a more stable universe where "the giants are able to perpetuate their rule."[22] At the same time, it must be admitted that an open space is more likely to collapse due to the possibility of a single bid becoming dominant. In the long run, however, this scenario could annihilate innovation—impossible without conflict or collaboration, but more than necessary in the virtual world.

The aforementioned standardisation initiatives push in favour of opening up the Metaverse, a fertile ground for progress; they serve not only to regulate but also to connect companies. Even more supportive are the antitrust agencies, which tend to apply the same rules used in any sector to the digital universe. With the Digital Markets Act and the Digital Services Act,[23] approved in July 2022 by the European Parliament, the EU is already moving in this direction. Its intention is to rebalance the balance of power of Big Tech. This example could be followed by other nations, in the interest of inclusiveness, transparency, and user protection.

Recalling the metaphor of the semantic field, individual platforms must work together and collaborate in constructing a shared meaning for the Metaverse. Such union will soon be more than a hope, but a necessity. This would allow the Metaverse to be a place where one can always and everywhere virtually be oneself, despite the many divisions that exist.

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TECHNOPOLY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Stuart Rollo

DISCUSSIONS ON THE BENEFITS and harms of technological innovation are often limited to accounts of the merits and disadvantages of particular technologies insofar as they make human life more or less easy, efficient, comfortable, and safe. Less common are discussions that investigate the differences between exactly *who* benefits, and *who* pays the costs, of the rollout of any given technological innovation. Rarer still is enquiry into the deep transformations that occur not as a result of the effects of particular technologies, but of the implementation of a logic of technology at the very foundations of human society, culture, and politics. Neil Postman's concept of the development of 'technopoly', a society that subordinates all political and cultural life to the dictates of technology, is particularly clarifying on this point.

Such discussions are rare for the simple reason that many of the assumptions of tech-utopians are, in a sense, baked in to the formula of (now neo)liberal capitalism that has served as the governing ideology of our political transition into a technological society. Tech-utopians see an ascending arc, generally beginning around the time of the Enlightenment, of successive and compounding technological revolutions across industry, agriculture, health, transport, and communications, that have led to a more connected, interdependent, and prosperous world. The most effusive panegyrists of technology will even point to its supposed pacifying effects on the global system and declare: plenty brings peace.[1]

Tech-utopianism is in essence a digital continuation of the Whig theory of history—a

deterministic appraisal of the positive and enlightening influence of technology. The idea has become increasingly prevalent the world over, having radiated out of the hubs of the global tech industry for decades. Tech utopians see technology as more than a suite of tools to reach human ends; rather, technology itself shapes a more perfect human society that would be impossible without it. Society is thus not just enabled by tools and machines, but modelled on their logic in its values, institutions, and culture. This mode of thought, as will be explored in more detail later, has come to shape not just social and economic, but also foreign and security policy in the United States and elsewhere.

In a cultural climate so deeply influenced by technology, its myriad ill effects go largely underappreciated. The impact of technologies, as Neil Postman pointed out, is not simply in what they *do* (for good or ill), but also in what they *undo*.[2] Indeed, a large degree of deleterious doing and undoing has been occurring since the social centring of technology began in earnest in Western Europe during the 18th century. The Enclosures, the Clearances, the regimentation of what had been organic, localised, and idiosyncratic social life into an industrial society structured around market logic produced urban squalor, social depredations, and significant physical, material, and spiritual reversals of quality of life among the average worker in the Western industrialising countries. The negative impacts suffered in the West were far surpassed in the colonised world that was coming to provide the territory and raw materials required by industrialisation and the nascent technological society. The burden of supporting this transformation came at the vast expense of the local populations on the global periphery, in terms of their lives, material wealth, and cultural integrity. The edifice of the technological society, and the very real boons

that it has brought with it, were built on these foundations.[3]

The Development of Technopoly

Human society has been engaged in a long process of technological innovation for its entire history, and the discovery, production, and exchange of novel technologies lies at the heart of civilisation building. In China, India, and West Asia, highly technological, complex, and scientifically developed societies have existed for millennia. Yet despite engaging in the long and persistent developments of tools and material processes over centuries, as well as producing epoch-shifting singular advances across fields like mathematics, metallurgy, and chemistry, these societies were never defined by their technological acumen in the same way that the West, and increasingly the entire modern world, has come to be.

Today, technology—due to the near limitless opportunities for productive and commercial expansion it brings—infringes upon all social, cultural, traditional, and religious norms, customs, and ways of living that would otherwise disrupt technological development. Lewis Mumford, appraising the transition to a technological society that was already occurring in the United States in the 1930s, described the situation thus: "The habit of producing goods whether they are needed or not, of utilizing inventions whether they are useful or not, of applying power whether it is effective or not pervades almost every department of our present civilization."[4]

The effects of technology Mumford described have become far more intense, pervasive, and globally distributed than they were in the 1930s. All societies throughout history have been shaped by tools and technology, and had

their customs and culture reoriented around them; in the premodern world, however, this occurred as a slower and more dynamic process, whereby the tools and technologies themselves, and their uses, were strongly bound by social and cultural norms. It is only under capitalism and its unbounding of the relentless surge of technological innovation that those social practices and ways of living that were once stable and solid have begun to melt into air, and technology threatens to define society and culture with no serious countervailing force.

Historian Fernand Braudel believed that, in the premodern world, it was the "slow, mute, and complicated" mixture of social and cultural forces that tended to shape how and when technologies were adopted.[5] Leading theorists in the study of the social and political implications of technology tend to agree that, from the 19th century, this dynamic has become inverted. Today it is technological forces and innovations that are constantly acting to shape and reshape society, creating a new type of society referred to as a 'technocracy' by Neil Postman. According to Postman, in a technocracy everything must give way, in some degree, to technological development. The social and symbolic worlds become subordinate to technological development. Rather than being integrated into culture, technology and tools come to attack existing culture and to supplant it. As a result, all of the components of the pre-technocratic world, the traditions, norms, myths, politics, rituals, and religions— have to fight for their lives.[6]

The technocracy, bound as it is to the dictates of a logic of technological innovation as 'progress', does not yet entirely subsume the social and symbolic worlds.[7] However, with the coming of the digital revolution, Postman saw the West, and particularly the United States, transitioning from a technocracy into a technopoly, a society anchored completely in an instrumentally rational and technological approach to the understanding of humanity and its place in the world. Under the conditions of a technopoly, any vestige of Braudel's 'slow force' of the social regulation of technology is replaced by an ever more rapid pursuit of technology as an end in and of itself, and as the key ingredient in the solutions to any and all questions of social, political, and economic organisation that arise. It is, in Postman's words, "the submission of all forms of cultural life to the sovereignty of technique and technology."[8]

Technopoly and International Relations

Particularly in its spiritual home, the United States, the ideology of technopoly has also come to shape approaches to international security and global affairs. Tech-utopianism was already prominent in American visions of geopolitics by the latter stages of the Cold War, exemplified by then President Ronald Reagan's assertion in 1989 that the "Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip."[9] But it was during the immediate post-Cold War era, with the ascendance of the concept of the 'end of history' and the purported permanent triumph of the American model of economy and governance, that the approach to foreign affairs that promised to reorder and improve the world through a potent mix of technology and free market capitalism became policy orthodoxy.

> **"In a cultural climate so deeply influenced by technology, its myriad ill effects go underappreciated. The impact of technologies is not simply in what they *do*, but also in what they *undo*.**

This was nowhere more evident than in the approach of the Clinton administration towards China during the 1990s where it was decided, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square protests, that encouraging more global business, foreign investment, and technological integration into the expanding web of digital networked communications, would act to reshape China in the West's image. In January 2000, after visiting an internet café in China, then President Bill Clinton remarked that it was the most interesting and ominous sight that he took in on his trip: "the more people know, the more opinions they're going to have; the more democracy spreads."[10]

While the Clinton, Bush Jr., and Obama administrations executed their foreign policy in varied ways, they all harboured a belief in a causal link between the spread of technology, increased economic interconnectedness, a growing middle class, and transition to democracy. This perhaps reached its apogee in 2010, when the Secretary of State at that time, Hillary Clinton vowed to make internet freedom a cornerstone of American foreign policy: "Freedom of information at cyber speeds will open up regressive and repressive societies and regimes to the wonders of modern liberalism."[11] This tech-exuberance has now met a growing level of circumspection, as the United States itself is embroiled in internal political struggles over perceived limits to free speech, and the ability of organised persuasive communications and overt and covert censorship to undermine democracy.

As a result of shifting geopolitical conditions, created in no small part by the American embrace of the financial opportunities offered by economic integration with China during the 1990s, a brewing rivalry between the United States and China as the two competing poles of the global economy, and two potential claimants to the position of global leadership in the 21st century has emerged. Supremacy in networked digital technologies will be the crucial factor dictating relative economic power between the two countries during this period.[12] In the coming decades, the tech sector is forecast to have a far higher rate of growth than the traditional economy, and rivalry in the area will be fierce. Key technologies like artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and quantum innovations, are seen as critical to holding global power as the century unfolds. China sees these as areas of technology that may allow it to leapfrog the United States, and the US sees them as areas of the high-tech economy where its own continued dominance could result in the permanent relegation of China to the status of a lower-tier industrial power.

William Burns, the current director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, has confirmed that, in his view, technological competition will

be the main arena for rivalry with China in the years ahead.[13] China has already supplanted the United States in several areas of global economic leadership. Over the past 40 years China has transitioned from a marginal economic outsider to the world's largest economy (by purchasing power parity), trader, manufacturer, and holder of foreign exchange reserves.[14] The United States remains the global leader in many of the most strategic industries of the 21st century economy, including arms manufacturing, aerospace engineering, and digital networked communications. Maintaining this lead, by cordoning off the American 'National Security Innovation Base' and 'Defence Industrial Base' (i.e. the national base of technological innovation) from Chinese imitation and competition has become the most visible priority in American strategic planning in its growing rivalry with China.

Under President Trump this was most visibly and comprehensively manifested in the 'Clean Network' program, which was established to exclude 'untrusted' Chinese carriers from the US telecommunications network, remove Chinese applications from American mobile app stores, exclude Chinese businesses from accessing personal and proprietary information held in American cloud storage, and ensure the integrity of the physical infrastructure, like undersea cables, that underlie digital networks.[15] While heralding a radical departure from Trumpian politics, the Biden administration has demonstrated near-total continuity in prosecuting technological rivalry with China.

In one of his first major addresses to the houses of Congress, President Joe Biden stated that to win the 21st century struggle against China, the United States had to "develop and dominate the products and technologies of the future."[16] In October 2022, perhaps the

most significant action of the brewing techno-economic conflict was undertaken by the United States government, when it announced a set of sweeping export controls on advanced computing and semiconductor manufacturing items to China.[17] Gregory C. Allen, Director of the AI Governance Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, described the actions as the beginning of "a new U.S. policy of actively strangling large segments of the Chinese technology industry—strangling with an intent to kill."[18]

Economic and strategic rivalry at the cutting edge of technological innovation both broadens the field of hostile international action, and stifles shared global benefits that are created through the integration of international technological cooperation. The perils of the combination of extremely potent new technologies and technopolistic societies unable and unwilling to restrain or regulate their spread in the face of fierce geopolitical rivalry should not be underestimated. The potential harms of the unchecked spread of Artificial Intelligence into human decision-making, particularly in the sphere of international security, are today relatively well-known, there is less recognition of the possibility of catastrophic downsides to other vanguard technologies. The advantages that quantum supremacy, as one example, would confer are so massive that there is a certain strategic logic behind conducting pre-emptive military strikes should it appear that a rival is developing a clear technological lead in the field. Ian Bremmer has argued that the threat of this structural opposition in technological innovation is becoming so great that governments should immediately prioritise sharing information on developments in quantum computing, one of the most critical and increasingly protected new technologies, because "even the threat of such a breakthrough could trigger World War III."[19]

Conclusion

The benefits of technological innovations, particularly in terms of material wealth, health, and luxury, are widely heralded. But the cascading surrender of social life to technology, and the slide towards technopoly, threatens to curtail the moral, intellectual, and cultural horizons of humanity. The need to reassert the social and human element over the technological is a key theme in much of the work of the great theorists of technology of the 20th century. Heidegger, McLuhan, Mumford, and Postman all reached similar conclusions on this matter, emphasising the need to rediscover and reassert the uniquely human element, expressed through the blending of the artistic and the intellectual rather than just the scientific and rational. In Mumford's words, "In order to reconquer the machine and subdue it to human purposes, one must first understand it and assimilate it."[20]

This task is made all the more difficult today for the abstract, complex, and layered system of technological interventions that now underlies much of human social, economic, and political life. In the 1960s Marshall McLuhan was grappling with the essence of machine technology, particularly as it manifested in the production and dissemination of media, and how it restructured human society to be more machine-like.[21] How much more difficult, less immediately visible and visceral, and less comprehensible to the non-expert will the effects of quantum science, machine learning, and AI and their implications for human society be for 21st century global society to grapple with? Still, with more advanced and more abstract technologies driving a significant part of society's current 'progress', and with more advanced technology emerging at the centre of international strategic rivalry and war-making, it has become more imperative to understand technological developments deeply, and give serious weight to their costs as well as benefits.

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TECH, DISASTERS, AND GENDER: LEVERAGING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES FOR FLOOD RESPONSE

Terri Chapman

THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE change are already being felt in every region of the world, with the most acute effects in low-income countries.[1] Extreme weather events are increasing in frequency and intensity, putting more people's lives, welfare, and livelihoods at risk.[2]

To mitigate climate change—indeed, for the survival of humanity—the imperative is to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)s. In parallel to rapidly decarbonising, adaptation initiatives are equally critical for assisting individuals and communities already facing the life-changing impacts of climate change. This is especially needed in low-income countries disproportionately confronted with more frequent extreme weather events and the resulting pressures on incomes and consumption, health and safety, access to food, health, and security.

This article explores, using a gender perspective, the increasing use of digital technologies in flood mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Today, some 1.8 billion people are at significant risk of floods,[3] most of them in low-income countries.[4] Over the last two decades alone, floods accounted for 43 percent of climate disasters and affected at least 2 billion people.[5]

Progressively, digital technologies and tools are being deployed by national and local governments, communities, and individuals to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover

from flood events. The way these technologies are designed, used, implemented and evaluated have significant implications for gender parity.

Gender and Floods

Climate shocks such as floods affect people in different ways and can exacerbate existing inequities.[6] Often, women and girls face greater exposure,[7] owing to various factors including patriarchal power structures, social norms that restrict their access to information and technologies, unequal control over finance and assets, and labour market and income dynamics.[8] Women are not inherently weaker or more vulnerable; rather, social, economic, and political structures often make them so. Gender also intersects with other identities— race, age, ability, and immigration status—that together create unique vulnerabilities. It is essential, therefore, to recognise how these different dimensions of identity shape women's exposure, vulnerability, and coping mechanisms and to ensure that adaptation efforts adequately respond to women's diverse experiences.

Four times as many women as men in India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka died during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.[9] The higher mortality among women was partly because women were more likely to stay behind to care for children and others in need, because more women were at home or near the sea when the tsunami hit, and women were less likely to know how to swim.[10] During the 2007 tsunami in Somoa and Tonga, 70 percent of the adults who died were women.[11] To be sure, however, this will not always be the case, as gender interacts with other factors like income, resources, and opportunities to determine vulnerability.[12]

Safety is also an essential concern for many women during and after weather events, informing their decisions about when and whether to evacuate. For example, during the floods in North East Bangladesh in June 2022, shelters housing some of the 7.2 million affected people did not have separate WASH facilities (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) or spaces for women and girls that could provide them security and protection.[13] Perceptions and experiences of safety in such public spaces are essential in informing women's decisions about where it is safe to seek shelter. Moreover, gender-based violence poses particular threats to women during crises.[14] Across 19 countries, researchers found that drought spells are associated with increased inter-partner violence against women.[15] After two cyclones in Tafea, Vanuatu, cases of domestic violence increased by 300 percent.[16] A study of inter-partner violence in the United States before and after Hurricane Katrina, found that the incidence of violence against women nearly doubled after the storm, from 4.2 percent of women to 8.3 percent.[17]

Education is also interrupted for those impacted by flooding. Even when floods have receded, children often remain outside school to help their families in recovery, and schools remain damaged or else utilised as shelters. Half of the schools in Vanuatu were closed for a month in 2015 due to Cyclone Pam.[18] In the same year, more than 4,000 schools were damaged, and more than 600 were destroyed during Cyclone Komen in Myanmar.[19] Some years earlier, the devastating floods in Pakistan in 2010 led to the closure of 8,000 schools and the transformation of an additional 5,000 into shelters.[20]

Girls' education tends to be disrupted for longer periods of time during climate shocks, compared to boys'. The destruction of education facilities, damaged transportation infrastructure, family financial burdens incurred from the disaster, and unavailability of rehabilitated WASH facilities in schools, among other

factors, do not impact children equally.[21] After the floods in Pakistan in 2022, for example, a third of parents reported that it would be more difficult for their female children to return to school.[22] This is because girls often carry a greater burden of unpaid and care responsibilities, which can increase during and after floods or other weather-related events. Flood impacts on household incomes can also mean fewer resources available for children to attend school, with boy children being more likely to return.

Moreover, across countries with varied levels of economic development, women often face unique insecurities before, during, and after flood events due to factors such as occupation, income, and relative lack of ownership and agency over the family's financial assets.[23] For instance, during a disaster, financial assets in the form of savings are often critical for ensuring consumption of essential commodities.[24] However, women tend to own fewer assets than men.[25] They are also more likely to have tangible assets in the form of jewelry, expensive fabrics, or cash rather than a bank account, and those possessions are at-risk during floods.[26]

Digital Technologies for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

Many digital technologies and tools are used to help communities adapt to the increasing risks of flood events. Governments and organisations are working to bolster resilience using tech innovations, from geospatial mapping to IoT-enabled smart infrastructure, AI-based forecasting, and digital communications and social media. However, if not done well, the planning, design, and use of such technologies pose risks for further exacerbating gender inequalities in developed and developing countries alike.

Digital technologies offer tools for potentially more effective and timely disaster risk reduction and response, but they can also create more significant risks for girls and women, especially if they are not designed using an inclusive and participatory approach that takes into account gender-specific experiences, needs, and perceptions. Moreover, the lack of access to information and communication technologies among women hampers access to critical information, services, and support. It is crucial to ensure that the use of digital technologies in DRM are gender-inclusive and respond to the unique vulnerabilities faced by women and girls, and other marginalised populations. Table 1 provides examples of digital technologies used in different phases of flooding DRM.

Innovations and new applications of digital technologies are transforming flood mitigation and preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. For example, disasters can cause immediate and long-term food insecurity. The World Food Program (WFP) developed a mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping (mVAM) program which allows them to collect household survey data on food security situations via phone calls, SMS, and voice response.[27] The household food security data is uploaded to the HungerMap website, which provides real-time information to inform program and emergency response efforts.[28]

Table 1: Key Technologies for DRM in Flooding

Phase	Activities	Example Technologies
Mitigation	Building and managing dykes and dams	• Remote sensing to detect structural weaknesses in dams and dykes • Computer modeling of flooding risks and vulnerabilities
	Reforestation and rehabilitation of natural ecosystems	• Drone-supported planting • Satellites and GIS to map natural ecosystems • Tracking of animal movements and their migration corridors
	Land-use planning and flood-plain management	• Model and predict land-use changes • Real-time flood warning systems using mobile phones
	Community engagement	• Mobile apps through which communities can inform authorities about vulnerabilities and map risks • Information campaigns via digital media
Preparedness	Meteoritical observation infrastructure and systems	• IoT-connected weather monitoring and A.I.-enabled forecasting • Satellite-based technologies to gather meteorological data from remote and inaccessible areas
	Spatial mapping	• Digital spatial mapping technologies like GIS or Open Street Map to produce hazard maps
	Construction, implementation, and testing of early warning systems	• Real-time monitoring of risks with sensors (e.g., for wind speeds and water levels) to improve response time • AI-enabled cross-checking of data • Digital communication systems to inform people (e.g., warning apps, push messages to mobile phones)
	Stockpiling	• A.I.- enabled forecasting, digital accounting, and monitoring tools • Digital inventory of stockpiles to track expiration dates and supply levels • Smart purchasing of supplies based on market prices and inventory
	Identifying vulnerable individuals and communities	• Geospatial surveys using software such as Open Data Kits
Response	Emergency Services such as search and rescue, evacuations	• Drones used for aerial surveillance and delivery of goods • Social media monitoring • Geospatial maps
	Provision of shelters and basic needs	• Apps to inform citizens about the nearest shelter facilities • Communication infrastructure between shelters and authorities
	Surveillance	• GIS mapping and use of drones for aerial surveillance
	Communications	• Broadcasting emergency messages to mobile phones (nationwide or location-specific) • Social media platforms
Recovery	Livelihood support	• Automated disbursement of cash transfers via electronic/digital tools based on validation of the need
	Establishment and rehabilitation of basic services	• Giving real-time updates on the restoration of services to enhance transparency
	Reconstruction	• Digital management tools to streamline and coordinate processes (e.g., construction)
	Learning and planning	• Digital surveys, volunteer mapping, aerial monitoring using drones

Source: Author's own, using various open sources.

> **"**Across countries with varied levels of development, women face unique insecurities before, during, and after disasters due to factors such as occupation, income, and agency over financial assets.

Online flood risk and hazard maps can be vital for making informed investment decisions, such as where to settle or start a business. Many geospatial mapping tools, such as ArcGIS and OpenStreetMap, are used to collect data and disseminate information about the spatial allocation of hazards such as flooding.[29] One example is Nusaflood, created by a women-led team in Indonesia. Nusaflood provides an easily accessible spatial visualisation tool that maps future flooding risks. The tool was designed to help people (even those with limited digital technology skills) make informed decisions about where to live, invest, and work in Indonesia with future flooding risks information at hand.[30]

Websites and apps with real-time weather and storm-related information, such as weather forecasts, severe weather-impacted areas, and evacuation routes, are critical for planning and decision-making in the event of a weather event. Cities and national governments are also investing in various hydrological and meteorological monitoring infrastructures and systems to forecast and monitor such events.[31] Many such systems involve remote sensors, IoT-connected devices, and A.I.-based weather models used for forecasting.

With the onset of a flood, early warning systems (EWS) are important for disseminating information to the population about events

monitored through such systems. EWSs use applications and text messaging to send alerts and warnings. EWS information must be collected and disseminated in an appropriate, timely, and applicable way and this information should reach the most disadvantaged communities.[32] When early warning systems are not designed with diverse end-users in mind, especially the most vulnerable, they exacerbate the risks of flooding hazards. For instance, after the floods in Pakistan in 2010, the government established an early warning system in the Lai Basin.[33] However, an assessment of the EWS found that it failed to engage the relevant communities in its design and that the key risk messages needed to be more easily understandable and aligned with different perceptions of flood risk among the population.[34] Moreover, EWSs often transmit information through channels that are more accessible to male audiences,[35] delaying women's access to that information.

Some initiatives are underway to address gaps in information about unfolding weather events. For example, the Women's Weather Watch (WWW) was established in Fiji after the 2004 floods.[36] WWW started a bulk SMS system, radio station, social media pages, and messaging apps to disseminate real-time, understandable information about weather events.[37] WWW specifically targets their information to rural women.[38]

Other applications such as the Trilogy Emergency Response Application (TERA) allow two-way communication between affected people and responders.[39] Meanwhile, the WFP created Mila, an AI-based chatbot that provides people in Libya with information about humanitarian services.[40,41]

Finally, digitally enabled platforms and apps are used in recovery. For instance, digitally enabled transfer systems allow for rapid identification of people in need, and the deployment of cash transfers.[42] In the aftermath of a flood event and during recovery, mobile technologies can be crucial for accessing financial resources and critical digital documents such as proofs of identification, deeds, health records, or visas.

While remarkable progress has been made in developing and applying digital technologies for planning, responding to, and recovering from flood events, a gender-responsive approach is crucial for ensuring that they do not replicate and deepen existing inequities. Strategies could include the following:

Engagement of women and girls at all stages of technology design, iteration, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Increasing access and ownership of digital devices such as smartphones, as well as enhancing access to and use of the internet among women and girls.

Ensuring that EWSs are responsive to gender differences in perceived risks, messaging, decision-making, vulnerability, and social norms.

Promoting the use of low-tech solutions where relevant. While digital and advanced technology solutions are often exciting, recognising when low-tech solutions are more effective and efficient is critical.

Recognising and responding to the preferences, needs, and capabilities of women with intersectional identities and vulnerabilities.

Leveraging digital tools where appropriate to enhance access to social protections, insurance, digital documents, and digital banking among women.

Generating and analysing gender-disaggregated evidence about new digital technologies and tools to evaluate their impacts on gender-transformative DRM.

Building back better by ensuring that recovery initiatives are gender-inclusive and promote and support gender equity across domains.

As the impacts of climate change increase in frequency and intensity, adaptation efforts are crucial. Flooding poses a significant risk to communities around the world, and as countries, cities, and communities work to mitigate and prepare for flood events, digital technologies offer immense potential.

However, they could also deepen gender inequities, leaving women and girls more at risk from the severe impacts of flood events. It is important that technology firms, international organisations, governments, humanitarian organisations, and communities take a gender-transformative approach as they make disaster readiness plans. This will ensure the equitable inclusion of women and girls and enable their full participation in decision-making, planning and response.

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ONE REGION, TWO NARRATIVES: THE PACIFIC, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND SECURITY

Ian Kemish

THE GLOBAL NARRATIVE about the Pacific largely focuses on the geo-strategic competition that is playing out in the region. China is seeking new security deals with Pacific Island countries, prompting intensified diplomatic engagement with the region from Australia and its democratic allies. Strategists are concerned that greater regional security ties with Beijing, coupled with targeted Chinese political engagement and concessional finance, may over time help China establish a naval base in the region to support a blue water navy extend its global reach.

The inhabitants of the Pacific themselves see security through a fundamentally different prism and have made it clear that they see climate change as their most serious security

risk. They express impatience with the strategic rivalry between their external partners, alarm at signs of greater militarisation in the region, and frustration that the international community has been giving climate change less attention than they believe it deserves. As the then Fijian Defence Minister put it in 2022:

> *Machine guns, fighter jets, grey ships and green battalions are not our primary strategic concern. Waves are crashing at our doorsteps, winds are battering at our homes, we are being assaulted by this enemy from many angles.*[1]

In their 2018 Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) security declaration, the region's leaders made it clear that they saw climate change as "the

single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific." This sentiment in the 'Boe Declaration' lies at the core of other important regional statements and documents. It is central to the PIF's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent[2] which sets out the Pacific community's thinking on a pathway to a more secure, resilient, and prosperous regional future.

These two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. To accept that climate change presents the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) with an existential challenge does not require ignoring the China problem. Many Pacific islanders share concerns from other geographies about the expansion of Chinese influence, and there is a contest of values underway in the region. In some countries, Beijing's aggressive public information activities threaten to undermine media freedoms;[3] there is also a lack of transparency in the links between Beijing and some leaders in the region,[4] and civil society representatives are concerned that Chinese training activities for military and police forces in the region will undermine their commitment to respecting freedom of speech and the right to demonstrate.[5]

Those who hope to engage successfully in the region must have a clear grasp of the Pacific islanders' overriding perspective—i.e., that climate change is an existential threat and therefore their top priority.

The Vulnerability of the Pacific

Current discourse on the Pacific's vulnerabilities to climate change tends to underestimate the challenge, focusing on potential impacts of sea-level rise on fragile, low-lying atoll countries. Indeed, Pacific leaders themselves have repeatedly highlighted this risk in global

forums, as they have worked to convince the international community to take stronger climate action. The Tuvalu Foreign Minister's speech before the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26),[6] which he delivered as he was knee-deep in seawater, was a high-impact way of making such a point.

Environmental scientists agree that sea-level rise is a serious consequence of global warming and a significant challenge for the atoll countries, even if estimates of the potential extent of the rise remain subject to a large margin for error.[7] Yet, the threats are more complex and extend to all countries of the region. While the reef island nations of Kiribati, Tuvalu and Marshall Islands are among the most climate-vulnerable in the world, others such as Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands and PNG are some of the most disaster-prone.[8] Across the region, climate change is making flooding, storm events, droughts, and biodiversity loss more frequent and intense. Saltwater intrusion is degrading groundwater resources, leading to a reduction in available agricultural land, and higher water temperatures are damaging reefs and, therefore, leading to a decline of fish stocks.[9] Global warming is likely to see tropical tuna stocks shift into sea territory outside island states' economic zones,[10] denying the people a vital source of revenue and food security.

The implications for the region's economic prospects are significant indeed. Deloitte estimates that, because of climate change, the economic growth trajectory across the broader Indo-Pacific may slow down to three percent on average between 2050 and 2070, about one point lower than annual growth in the first 20 years of this century.[11] The PICs are especially vulnerable given the central role of their agriculture and fisheries sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on

their economic progress, hitting their tourism industries particularly hard. This presents a crisis of multiple proportions for the region.

As Australia's Climate Council puts it, however, the Pacific should not just be seen as a "poster child"[12] for the existential threat that is climate change; nor should the PICs be regarded as merely passive participants without agency. Over the years, countries of the Pacific, working with other small island developing states, have worked to bring global warming to the centre of global discourse. Most recently, in late 2022, Vanuatu led the way in tabling a UN resolution seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice to clarify what responsibilities governments have to protect future generations from the adverse consequences of climate change.[13] Such an advisory opinion from the ICJ could strengthen the positions of vulnerable countries in international negotiations and help define climate change as a human rights issue.[14]

Climate Change as a Regional Security Issue

Since the change of government in Australia in May 2022, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has acknowledged what the Pacific Islanders have long been trying to underscore: that climate change needs to be seen as a pressing security issue for Australia and its Pacific neighbours.[15] Indeed, many other governments have acknowledged for some time now that global warming should be seen through a security prism. The fact that Albanese found it necessary to explicitly spell out such a link largely reflected the reluctance of his predecessor, Scott Morrison, to do so. The Morrison Government saw national security as a priority that played to its strengths but showed little real enthusiasm for climate action.

There is no dearth of literature examining the link between climate change and security. For example, Chris Barrie, a former Chief of the Australian Defence Force and honorary professor at the Australian National University, describes climate change as a threat multiplier which intensifies social fragility, further strains already weak institutions, shifts power balances, and destabilises peacebuilding and recovery efforts.[16] Some security analysts highlight, for instance, that the Syrian civil war, which began with a general uprising in 2011, followed the country's worst drought on record.[17] While there were other factors to the public discontent—including the regime's brutal response to the uprising and the role of extremist ideology in the emergence of the Islamic State—food insecurity and the resulting rapid urban drift played crucial roles.

Some observers argue that there is little evidence that climate change is a direct cause of conflict in the Pacific,[18] but acknowledge that it can at least interact with existing conflict drivers in unhelpful ways. While there have been no climate wars in the Pacific, conflict specialists point to the risk that climate change will exacerbate existing tensions in fragile parts of the region.[19] One example is Papua New Guinea's autonomous region of Bougainville, where a post-conflict society is still struggling to get back on its feet from the secessionist war of the 1990s. Another example is the overpopulated Malaita province of Solomon Islands, a flashpoint in the civil war of the early 2000s that led to the deployment of an Australian-led regional stabilisation mission, and where environmental degradation has led to reductions in arable land.[20]

It is in local, every-day, community-level life where the security implications of climate change in the Pacific are most stark. In Papua

> **"The Pacific should not just be seen as a 'poster child' for the existential threat that is climate change; nor should the islands be regarded as passive participants without agency.**

New Guinea, tensions within family groups and communities, or between neighbouring tribal groups, can explode in ways that may not gain the attention of international strategists, but which nonetheless cause great social damage. In the slum settlements in PNG's national capital and other urban centres, or in traditional villages confronted with food insecurity, conflict can manifest itself in family and gender-based violence, or in tribal fighting over scarce resources.[21] This kind of 'lower-level' conflict tends to pass unnoticed by those used to working on a broader strategic canvas.

Climate Change Partnerships with the Pacific

To be regarded as a truly valuable partner by the Pacific nations requires showing, in word and deed, strong support for the region's concerns about global warming. Partner nations can do this both by cutting emissions at home, working to enable greater global cuts in the coming years, and supporting the PICs as they struggle to contend with regional impacts. Initiatives in this field will be seen by the region's countries as more important than military partnership and support.

But why should this kind of engagement with the Pacific be a priority at all?

It goes without saying that the Pacific's experience with climate change will likely presage what is to come for the rest of the planet. This should give all of us a fundamental interest in the region. The protection of biodiversity across the world's largest ocean should stand as a worthwhile cause all on its own.

The arguments for engagement can also be expressed easily in strategic terms. For Australia, the region is well understood to be of primary strategic concern given the imperative to protect the supply lines that stretch across the ocean and link Australia with its most important ally, the United States. The southwest Pacific can also present risks associated with political stability, illegal migration and transnational crime that require careful, every-day management for a littoral country like Australia. Canberra has historically accepted a responsibility to support the PICs when they are beset by natural disasters or civil conflicts.

For other more distant Indo-Pacific powers, including India, the arguments for engaging the Pacific may be less obvious and immediate, but

they are clear enough, just the same. China's growing activity in the region portends significant changes in the global strategic balance. As this author has argued previously,[22] the democratic powers cannot simply leave it to Australia in the Pacific, to carry the democratic 'standard' and engage the region amidst an increasingly difficult struggle between two value systems.

Thanks to its new, more progressive climate change stance, the current Australian Government is better placed than its predecessor to help guide broader international engagement with the Pacific. It has pledged a 43-percent reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and has set a target to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. While some other developed countries are pursuing even more ambitious climate objectives, this is a more forward-leaning approach than that of the previous Australian administration, and it has better positioned Canberra to signal to the Pacific that it is serious about climate change. Australian ministers visiting the region have made a point of emphasising their solidarity on the issue, and Australia took the opportunity of COP27 in Sharm-el-Sheikh to lobby to host a conference in the region of the UN Climate Change Convention parties. This is of symbolic value, even if there remains some scepticism in the region about Australia's resolve to abandon fossil fuels.[23]

This is supported by a substantial regional program of development support focused on climate change. Australia is providing A$2 billion in climate finance over 2020-25 to developing countries in the Indo-Pacific, with at least A$700 million of this being directed to the Pacific given the region's particular vulnerabilities. Through its development programmes, Australia works to protect biodiversity and help build community resilience to climate change, while delivering direct humanitarian support to those impacted by food insecurity.

Supporting regional responses to climate change presents some capacity challenges for Australia. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has for some time now accepted that the growing frequency of climate-induced natural disasters in the region, combined with the risk of exacerbating conflict, risks stretching Australian military capability and deployments.[24] The widespread flooding in some parts of Australia in the first weeks of 2023 is also a reminder that the ADF and other emergency response organisations will remain hard-pressed in managing the impacts of climate change at home.

A factor in Australia's calculus must be that climate change could lead over time to significant population displacements in its neighbourhood. Mass migration is, after all, held to be one of the most significant impacts of climate change. This is not merely theory; it is estimated that up to 24 million people have been displaced by climate effects each year since 2008.[25] While the size of population movements brought about by climate change would likely be more significant in Australia's southeast Asian neighbourhood, given the relatively small size of the Pacific communities, Australia would be expected to shoulder a more significant share of the responsibility when it comes to climate refugees from the Pacific.

Other countries have much more direct experience of climate-induced population displacement. India is a notable example. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), five million Indians were displaced because of climate change and natural disasters in 2021.[26] India is itself widely agreed to be among the most vulnerable countries to global warming, with as much as 80 percent of the population living in regions that are potentially exposed to extreme weather events.[27] India has also learned a great deal about the impact of climate

change on agriculture. All this should make for an informed and sympathetic partnership with the Pacific. In considering climate change partnership with the region, India could draw on its own experience in confronting the effects of global warming along its long coastline and across its own 1,300 small islands.

A number of major democratic nations and international organisations have signalled an interest in engaging the Pacific more closely. Japan, the United Kingdom, the European Union and United States have all announced policy initiatives to this effect in recent times. And France remains a significant Pacific power, maintaining three territories in the region and a significant aid and military presence.[28] Each of these entities have important contributions to make in helping mitigate the region's own emerging 'polycrisis' which combines a stark climate threat with the residual effects of a damaging pandemic and the potential harmful influence of an expansionist Chinese regime. India, with its impressive development narrative, major power status and cultural links to the region, also has an important part to play.

While the PICs would be interested in India's own credentials as a country committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, their expectations will naturally differ from those applied to Australia, given India's different place on the development trajectory. The region's policymakers will have noted India's updated national climate plan including it 2070 net-zero goal and 45-percent reduction in emissions intensity by 2030. As with Australia, there will be some who argue that these targets do not go far enough. But for the developing countries of the Pacific, it is important that India, too, has accepted that it has a responsibility to act.

India is already providing some development support for the PICs in areas such as agriculture, health, information technology and energy. Ramendra Prasad of the University of the South Pacific has proposed a useful roadmap to extend this cooperation into the climate change area.[29] It includes leveraging India's technological and policy development experience to help Pacific nations build holistic strategies for building climate change resilience, while pursuing renewable energy and sustainable development strategies. Prasad also enjoins India to get involved in supporting climate change mitigation, resilience, and adaptation—noting that China has begun to manoeuvre in this space.

The work on adaptation and resilience that is underway at a local level in India may well be useful in supporting cooperation in this field. This includes programs to install 'cool roofs' in some cities, the work of some front-line communities to make renewable energy more accessible, and state-level 'heat action plans'. It is imperative for India to find ways to engage in the Pacific at an appropriate scale, and a focus on sharing the benefits of these local, community-led initiatives would likely be more successful than 'macro' national policy approaches.

Respect is the key to success.

Environmental scientists have often observed that small island communities have adapted their environments and social systems for thousands of years[30] in the face of climate challenges, and that the settlement and continued occupation of these extremely fragile islands has involved working with nature to survive. These 'nature-based solutions' have

included tree and mangrove planting to stabilise shoreline and help replenish productive land and water systems, building natural fences as protective sea barriers, and consolidating land formations to better support agriculture practices.

For external partners, the best way forward is to adopt an engagement approach that respects this wealth of experience, while thinking carefully about how international scientific and engineering knowledge can best complement traditional approaches. Thoughtful specialists in this area argue for a 'co-production' model based on partnerships between international and local actors—an approach that supports the establishment of clear social, environmental and engineering standards; involves clear monitoring and evaluation processes; and provides pathways for investment and support by regional and international organisations.

A mature approach involves learning from the longstanding sensitivities that have been on display in the region when it comes to overseas development assistance. Like other developing countries, the PICs bristle at any suggestion that external players are casting themselves as rescuers, or that they are dismissing local perspectives and seeking to impose their own solutions.

Some of these island states may be shrinking, but they remain sovereign.

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SHARED VULNERABILITIES, COMMON DESIRE TO SURVIVE: INDIA AND AFRICA LEVERAGE CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

Oluwaseun J. Oguntuase

INDIA AND AFRICA ARE two regions that bear a disproportionate impact of climate change, even as their per-capita emissions of greenhouse gases are lower than global average and they are responsible for only a small share of the current stock of emissions. The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)[1] has warned that India—home to 20 percent of the world's population—could face multiple climate change-induced disasters in the next two decades. In the African continent, meanwhile, eight countries are among the ten most vulnerable in the world.[2]

Yet, climate is a global common, and therefore the mitigation of climate change is a global public good. This shared responsibility to combat global warming continues to shape international climate change diplomacy, paving the way for agreements that seek mitigation and adaptation measures, and the appropriate financing.[3] Indeed, the evolution of climate diplomacy has been a logical consequence of long-lasting concerns about nature and human survival that have preceded the construction of the current climate action regime.[4,5] In recent years, new networks and approaches to establishing a global conversation on the consequences of, and solutions to climate change,[6] have emerged. These include the birth of multi-stakeholder global partnerships such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which will be highlighted in this article.

India in Global Climate Diplomacy

India is a prominent case study of how a state navigates climate diplomacy. It has shifted from its earlier defensive, neo-colonial attitude on the matter of climate responsibility, to a more proactive and cooperative internationalist approach in recent climate engagements. It has chosen a cooperative strategy to emphasise its responsibility through diplomacy and sustainable energy investments, in the process buttressing its role as a global powerhouse and widening its influence on partner countries.

India's push for cooperation on climate change has expanded beyond simply seeking a multilateral solution to organising the emerging powers, or newly industrialised countries of the developing world into a coalition.[7] India has been a part of three significant groupings—the Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC) countries, the Brazil, Russia, India and China and South Africa (BRICS), and the Group of 77 (G-77) countries of the Global South.[8] BASIC was a key player at both the Copenhagen and Paris Conferences of the Parties (COPs) where India was recognised as a drafting author of the agreements.[9] A last-minute agreement negotiated between leaders from BASIC and the United States led to the adoption of the Copenhagen Accord.[10]

For Africa's part, all countries of the continent are part of the G77. The group provides the means for countries of the Global South to articulate their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on crucial international economic issues within the UN system, and promote South-South cooperation for development.[11] Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the G77 + China coalition has historically argued for financial support from the wealthy nations to enable developing countries to mitigate the impacts of climate change and adapt to the already changing climate, based on the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'.

At COP27 in 2022, India was an assertive yet cooperative key actor, welcoming the establishment of the Loss and Damages Fund while clarifying that it would not be contributing to it but will stake its claims. Indian representatives proposed that countries agree to phasing down *all* fossil fuels, and not just coal. Arguing on principles of global justice and equity, India blocked an attempt by wealthy nations to push for the use of terms such as 'major emitters' and 'top emitters' in the cover text of the Summit; it was supported by other countries including China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. At the same Conference of the Parties, India also reiterated its desire to continue to foster strong international cooperation through forums such as ISA and CDRI.

The Case for the International Solar Alliance

The birth of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) as a child of the ambitious 'One World, One Sun, One Grid' initiative of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was announced at COP21 in Paris by the Indian leader, along with the French president at that time, François Hollande. The formation of ISA by India, jointly with France, reinforced India's presence as a dominant global force in climate action. ISA was proposed as a multi-country partnership organisation with membership from the 'sunshine belt' countries lying fully or partially between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.[12] The multilateral treaty status accorded to ISA by the United Nations came into force on 6 December 2017.

> **"India has shifted from its earlier defensive, neo-colonial attitude on the matter of climate responsibility, to a more proactive internationalist approach in climate engagements."**

ISA is envisioned as a platform for cooperation on solar energy, promoting new technologies and financing to achieve global energy equity. The goal is to mobilise more than US$1 trillion in investments to set up 1,000 GWs of solar installations globally, thereby making clean power affordable and universally accessible by 2030.[13]

Headquartered in New Delhi, ISA has increased Indian involvement in renewable energy projects in Africa.[14] The aim is to make positive contributions to the common goals of improved energy access, enhanced energy security, and provision of more opportunities for better livelihoods in rural and remote areas.[15]

Africa is often referred to as the 'Sun Continent'—the continent where solar radiation is greatest.[16] It is located between latitudes 37°N and 32°S, and spans a vast area that crosses the equator and both tropics. The solar energy potential of Africa is arguably limitless. However, most African countries have yet to effectively utilise the abundant solar energy available to them. It has been maintained that, with falling solar generation costs over the past decade, solar can be the cheapest source of electricity in Africa.[17] Solar potential is fairly distributed across all the countries, with an average of 6 kilowatt hours (kWh) of solar energy per sq m available per day.[18] The total solar potential of all countries

in sub-Saharan Africa alone, is about 10,000 GW.[19]

Following the first summit of ISA held in March 2018 in New Delhi, India has earmarked a credit line of up to US$2 billion, with 15–20 percent of the amount to be earmarked for 179 solar-related projects in African countries.[20] ISA has also partnered with the African Development Bank to develop 10,000 MW of solar power systems across the Sahel region, which aims to provide electricity to approximately half of the 600 million Africans who remain off-grid.[21]

There are three flagship programmes driving ISA interventions in Africa: Scaling Solar Applications for Agriculture; Affordable Finance at Scale; and Scaling Solar Mini-grids. Two additional programmes—Scaling Residential Rooftop Solar and Scaling Solar E-mobility and Storage—are in the pipeline. ISA projects across Africa include setting up of solar PV power plants, mini-grid and off-grid plants; solar-powered irrigation systems; rural electrification; street lighting; solar energy linked cold-chains and cooling systems; and solar-powered urban infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and government establishments. Others are a 500-MW Solar Park in Mali; solar facilities and solar home systems in Burkina Faso, Uganda and Tanzania; solarised and efficient cold food chains in

Nigeria; and solar-powered pack houses and cold storages in Senegal and Ghana. [22]

An appraisal of initiatives and activities of ISA in Africa shows their significant contribution to sustainable livelihoods through job creation, increased incomes, poverty reduction, improved productivity, quality education and healthcare, food security, and social stability. Improved access to solar energy also ensures sustainable consumption and production, and contributes to environmental conservation by reducing deforestation and land degradation.

ISA's work in the African continent merely reflects the vibrant and multidimensional relationship between the two regions, underpinned by well-established bilateral trade.[23,24] Over the years, Indo-African relations have expanded beyond political solidarities, to increased trade and investment, as well as scientific and technological cooperation.[25]

In July 2018, PM Modi outlined the 10 guiding principles for Indo-African engagement during his address to the Ugandan Parliament in Kampala. This vision for Africa represents continuity in policies that have historically defined Indo-African partnership.[26] The goal is to dovetail India's growth story with Africa's Agenda 2063, and spur mutual resurgence.[27]

Indo-African relations were further institutionalised with India's decision to enter into a structured engagement with African countries under the framework of the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS). Four editions of the summit have been held so far—in 2008, 2011, 2015 and 2020. These summits have intensified India-Africa engagements through trade—duty free tariff schemes, investments including grants and concessional lines of credit, knowledge sharing, technology transfer and capacity building programmes. India has also shared its developmental experiences with African countries through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation and Special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme.[28] India has also emerged as one of the top five investors in Africa in recent years, with cumulative investments on the continent amounting to around US$74 billion in 2021. India's bilateral trade with Africa reached US$89.5 billion in 2021-2022.[29]

The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

Recognising the importance of disaster resilient infrastructure to adapting to a warming world, the CDRI was launched by Prime Minister Modi during the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019 in New York. The African member countries of CDRI are Ghana, Madagascar, Mauritius and South Sudan.

Like ISA, CDRI is a demonstration of India's global leadership role in climate action and disaster resilience. CDRI is a multi-stakeholder global partnership of country governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, private sector, and knowledge institutions. CDRI is supported by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to facilitate knowledge exchange, technical support and capacity building to develop resilient infrastructure and fortify existing infrastructure for resilience while fulfilling the commitment to leave no one behind. It covers areas of governance and policy, emerging technology, risk identification and estimation, recovery and reconstruction, resilience standards and certification, finance, and capacity development.

CDRI has launched a US$50-million disaster trust fund to build disaster-resilient infrastructure systems in developing countries and island nations which face the greatest threats from climate change. The fund, called the Infrastructure Resilience Accelerator Fund (IRAF), was announced at COP27. The IRAF will enable the CDRI to achieve its mandate of resilience through risk-informed investments and infrastructure development resulting in reduced vulnerability of populations and reduced impact of extreme events and disasters on infrastructures.

CDRI endeavors to augment the capacity of the governments, private sector, and other organisations in ensuring resilient infrastructure by facilitating trainings and projects under its capacity development programme. The goal of the programme is to develop and strengthen the processes, resources and skills of organisations and communities, enabling more effective and sustainable infrastructure systems and services. Recent capacity development initiatives by CDRI in Africa include: recommendations on a proposal for capacity development of academic institutions and infrastructure professionals in Mauritius; rapid learning needs assessment study for transport, telecommunications, and power sectors in Mauritius in association with the country's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre; and development and sharing of a course description for a customised training course on disaster-resilient infrastructure for the Road Development Authority of Mauritius. Other CDRI activities include consultations on resilient infrastructure in Mauritius, and bilateral engagement with governments of Madagascar and Rwanda on potential collaboration on disaster-resilient infrastructure projects.

Conclusion

The existential risks posed by climate change to humanity have led to the emergence of multi-stakeholder global partnership organisations like India-led ISA and CDRI. The establishment of both the ISA and CDRI is an example of India's progressive and cooperative climate engagement to shape and strengthen bilateral ties with other countries. Supporting and partnering with African governments through these organisations presents avenues for New Delhi to exercise its soft power towards influencing international and national agendas.

In Africa, the link between climate change and sustainable development is two-way, with enormous resources required for both climate change mitigation and adaptation. While spinoffs from ISA footprints across Africa extend beyond climate mitigation and adaptation to significant impacts on sustainable livelihoods of millions of Africans, CDRI activities in the continent are sparse and have limited contribution to the countries' ability to adapt to climate change. Africa needs climate-resilient infrastructure to adapt to climate change and sustain economic growth to pull its people out of poverty. A staggering sum of US$170 billion annually in long-term financing is required to develop climate-resilient infrastructure in key sectors across the continent.[30] This underscores the need for more CDRI initiatives and projects to complement the efforts of ISA.

Besides shared disproportionate vulnerability to climate change, India and Africa have many advantages that can be leveraged for mutual
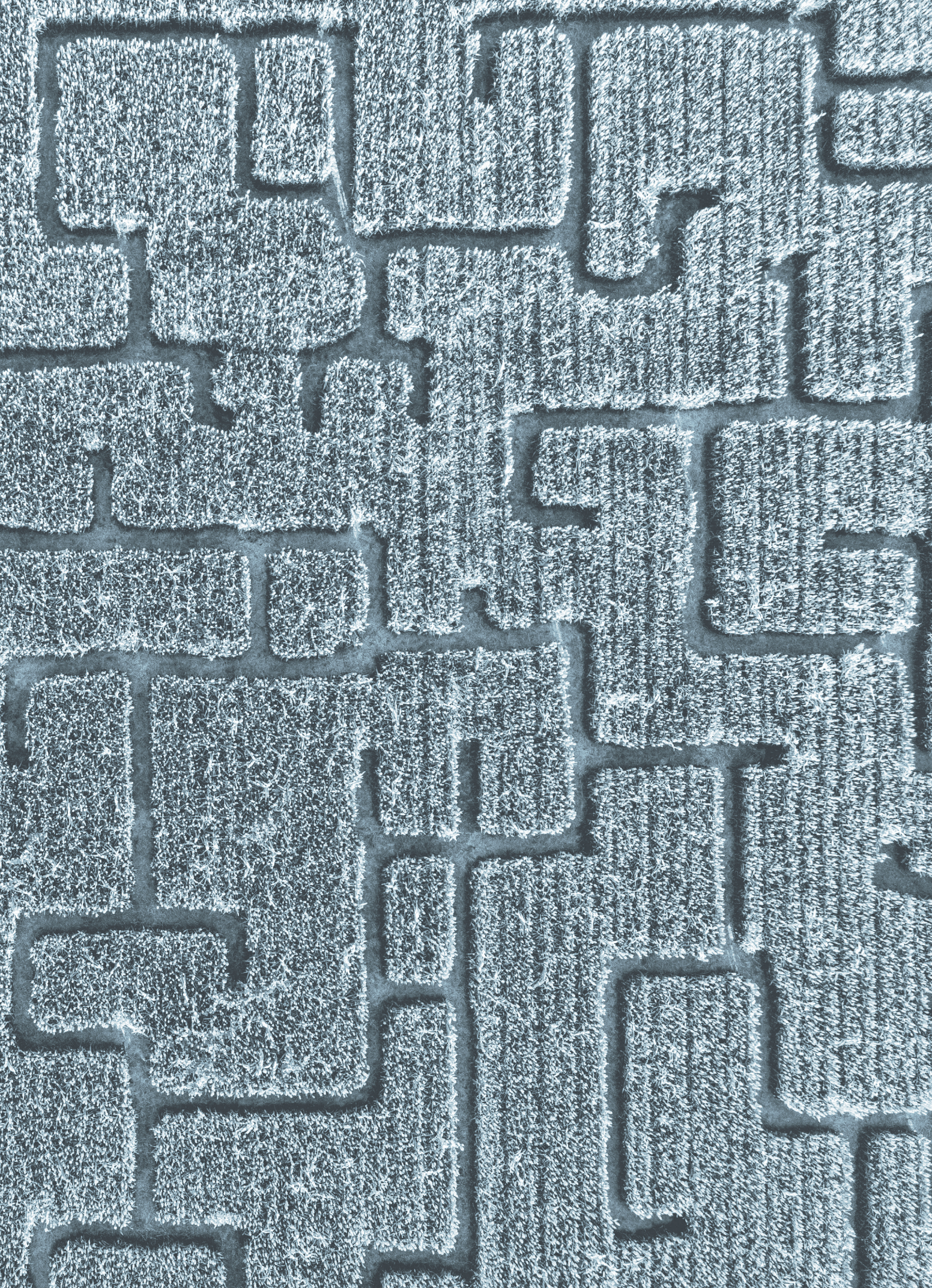
benefit. These include their innovative youthful demography, fast-growing economies, huge markets, and vast natural resources. Looking ahead, Indian governments must continue to grasp the mood and changes in Africa to effectively deploy an array of soft power manifestations, beyond climate diplomacy, to sustain New Delhi's cordial relationship with the continent amidst fierce competition from Beijing, and to continue to be the voice of the Global South, at the heart of which is Africa. For Africa to benefit more from an ambitious New Delhi to combat climate change, African leaders must study carefully, learn, and build on the merits of India's experiences with climate diplomacy.

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INDIA-UAE-ISRAEL RELATIONS:
FROM NORMALISATION TO COMPLEMENTARITIES, COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION

Manjari Singh

FROM NON-RELATIONS TO clandestine engagements, to normalisation in ties—partnerships between India, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have transformed over the recent decades. The India-Israel-UAE trilateral in its current form offers a definitive example of a blend between *Realism* and *Constructivism* approaches in International Relations. By channelling *Realpolitik*, the three nations are allowed to give primacy to their national interest. At the same time, geopolitical and mainly geoeconomic realities, along with emerging non-conventional global crises, have led the three countries to cooperate on areas of mutual concern, for instance in building an India-Middle East food and energy corridor.[1]

Given the geopolitical complexities vis-à-vis Israel's independence in May 1948, India formally recognised the Jewish nation on 17 September 1950. However, owing to its concerns on Palestine, New Delhi took more than four decades to normalise its relations with Tel Aviv and soon, defence and agriculture became the bedrock of their bilateral ties. Strategic partnerships in multifaceted domains started only in June 2017, when by visiting Israel and Palestine separately, Prime Minister Narendra Modi signalled New Delhi's decoupled approach.[2] The 1992 normalisation was primarily driven by shifts in the global geopolitical atmosphere with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Under the Modi

administration, geoeconomic drivers along with parallels in ideologies have led to a closer embrace with the Jewish nation.[3]

Today, total trade between India and Israel stands at US$7.86 billion.[4] On the defence front, Israel accounts for about 8.48 percent of India's total arms imports and is its fourth largest supplier after Russia (46 percent), France (27 percent), and the United States (12 percent). In terms of agricultural support, Israel has not only shared its agri-tech and water conservation technologies with India but has also established around 30 agricultural 'centres of excellence' across the country.[5] Akin to diplomatic attachés, Israel has deployed its agriculture and water attachés to India as a special appointment to assist in the country's agricultural development.[6]

Indo-Emirati relations, meanwhile, were for long anchored on the 3Es of energy, economy, and expatriates—and largely transactional. It was only in January 2017 that the two signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement, and relations started to flourish in multiple domains. Today, the UAE is not only India's third largest energy supplier (US$20,320.22 million)[7] but is also its third largest trading partner with total bilateral trade standing at US$73 billion in 2021-22.[8]

The UAE, on the other hand, was once Israel's nominal adversary but informal relations between the two have existed since 2010. In November 2015, Israel opened its first diplomatic mission in Abu Dhabi.[9]

Thus, at the bilateral level, India's engagements with Israel and the UAE, and those between Israel and the UAE have been at an upward trajectory. The normalisation of UAE-Israeli relations under the banner of the Abraham Accords[10] brokered by the US during the

pandemic, in August 2020, has paved the way for enhancing the trilateral relationship. It has also enabled the three partners to channel their unique strengths for future partnerships, among which is the establishment of a transregional order along the India-Middle East-Europe corridor. This transregional order is based on economic complementarities, potential vibrant ecosystem, and technological capabilities. In its true sense, the 'normalisation' of relations has pushed the countries towards three Cs: complementarities, collaboration, and cooperation.

These developments have led some scholars to refer to the trilateral as an 'Indo-Abrahamic Accord'—[11] reflecting New Delhi's newfound, trustworthy geopolitical space as it expands its clout in West Asia. Moreover, India's stature as a South Asian giant is no longer a secret to the world. India's economic stability and growth, which has increased the country's purchasing power parity, makes it a lucrative market for foreign direct investments by partnering countries.[12,13]

The India-UAE-Israel Trilateral Cooperation

Eight months after the normalisation of relations between Israel and the UAE, India signed a trilateral partnership with the two regional players in May 2021. At present, the estimated US$110-billion deal by 2030 is focused on producing innovative robotic solar cleaning technology in India for a landmark project in UAE.[14] While the project has a single agenda, it is pegged with innovation and business potential, and therefore will play a crucial role in the two countries' overall cooperation.

Likewise, at the quadrilateral level, India-Israel-UAE, and the United States in October

2021 formed a minilateral aimed at economic cooperation. (This would later be named 'I2U2' in July 2022.) Meetings have been held at various levels—sherpa, foreign ministerial, and heads of state. While a number of conventional and non-conventional areas of mutual interest have been charted out—ranging from water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security—emphasis is being given to catering to global as well as regional energy and food security challenges.[15]

The minilateral aims to be inclusive and is seeking to involve both public and private sectors in initiatives in infrastructure, connectivity, low-carbon development, and public health. Thus, India's engagement with its West Asian partners at both trilateral and quadrilateral levels aims to create a synergy of areas for cooperation.

Is India Planning for an Inter-Regional Connectivity Corridor?

Since September 2020, the US-brokered peace accord signed between the UAE and Israel has facilitated India's trilateral level interaction with both its important West Asian partners.[16] Prior to this, India had managed to maintain a flourishing relationship with both Israel and the UAE individually, by effective application of its strategic autonomy in the region.

Additionally, America's role in facilitating India's clout in the wider West Asian region cannot be underestimated. While New Delhi has managed to build a tripartite agreement with Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi, its recent diplomatic outreach towards Egyptian Arab Republic indicates that a wholesome connectivity corridor is under progress. A meaningful connectivity corridor would require India to have good relations with

all major players in the region, especially from the Mediterranean via the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. In that context, India-UAE-Israel relations are more than what meets the eye. While both Israel and UAE are in West Asia, they are in different regions— the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, respectively. The recent diplomatic upscaling of relations between India and Egypt will ease India's access to the Suez Canal and Red Sea, especially if the preferential trade agreement between the countries is elevated to a free trade agreement.

Moreover, a sustainable economic and commercial relation requires elimination of trade barriers and a defined route for easier transportation of freight. Following the signing of the Abraham Accords, significant developments in bilateral relations between Israel and the UAE have taken place, most notable of which was the signing of a free trade agreement between the two countries in May 2022.[17]

Likewise, India and UAE signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in February 2022, coming into force in May 2022, which ensures free, open, and non-discriminatory trade between the two countries.[18] The comprehensive agreement guarantees greater access for UAE exports to the Indian market by reducing or removing tariffs on more than 80 percent of the products traded.

A similar agreement is being negotiated by India and Israel to ease their bilateral trade.[19] India's growing diplomatic bonhomie with Egypt and its increasing interest in the region indicates that the country is looking forward to signing a comprehensive inter-regional free trade agreement with several partners.

> "Geopolitical and geoeconomic realities, along with emerging non-conventional global crises, have led India, Israel, and the UAE to cooperate on areas of mutual concern.

Thus, a vibrant trilateral relation between India, UAE (in Persian Gulf) and Israel (in the Mediterranean region); comprehensive free trade agreements between the partners; and inclusion of other inter-regional players—all indicate that India is serious in its plan for a connectivity from Mediterranean to India via the Red Sea and the Gulf.[20] In November 2021, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met his UAE, Saudi, Egyptian, Greek, Israeli and Cypriot counterparts on the sidelines of the 12th Sir Bani Yas Forum held in Abu Dhabi.[21]

The proposed corridor is likely to connect India, the Gulf, parts of Africa and Eastern Mediterranean, with regions in Europe. Still in its preliminary stage, such a connectivity corridor is akin to the International North-South Transport Corridor[22] and the Chabahar port[23] development initiatives by India which links Europe, Russia, Central Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan to India. While Russia and Iran are India's partners in the latter two projects, America's involvement along with UAE and Israel in the development of the connectivity corridor is the best example of India's strategic autonomy at multilateral levels. Interestingly, by building these corridors, India along with its inter-regional partners is not only aiming to secure safe transit of freight but is also safeguarding its interests in the western flank of the Indo-Pacific. In a way, this is India's own version of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Food and Fuel Corridor

Existing global food crises in many parts of the globe, heightened by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the ongoing European war, have created an escalating demand for food especially in West Asia. The region is dependent on Russia and Ukraine for much of its food requirements. As per a May 2022 Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) report, of the 50 countries dependent on both Russia and Ukraine for food, nearly 10 are in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region, whose combined dependence level on the two countries is above 30 percent.[24]

At both trilateral and quadrilateral levels, India-UAE-Israel have been working on creating food corridors to address food insecurity issues in both South Asia and WANA. An India-Middle East Food Corridor—a new West Asia value supply chain—aims to harness the three countries' commercial, investment, market, and technological synergies to form a tripartite alliance and become a food exporting powerhouse.[25]

The probable food supply chain forged from innovative, agri-tech and climate-smart technologies is likely to effectively reconfigure commercial relations along the India-Middle East-Europe proposed connectivity corridor. At the same time, the route will also be used as an

energy corridor for the inter-regional partners. The prolonged Russia-Ukraine war has created a supply-demand gap in food and energy and thus the two are the most critical components in the regions that will be served by the connectivity corridor.

To be sure, the geopolitical and geoeconomic significance of all the three corridors—connectivity, energy, and food—is not new; the vitality of these projects rests on the fact that both UAE and Israel, individually, have been playing a critical role in advancing India's food production and distribution. The strategic power and sustainability of the India-Middle East Food and Energy Corridor derives from the fact that it is organically developed and strengthened, first, at bilateral levels. By involving private sector, joint venture investment and bilateral public-private engagements, the partnering countries are seeking to ensure the viability of the corridor.

For instance, Israel has been bilaterally involved in India's agricultural sector since 2014 when it started creating Centres of Excellence (CoEs) across the country. Today there are 30 Israeli-developed CoEs in India that involve private companies and concentrate on farmers' training, and effective use of agri-tech and smart-tech to increase crop yield. Likewise, since 2019, the establishment of food parks in India was already an integral part of UAE's logistical plan ideated ahead of the I2U2 format.[26]

Engagement beyond bilateral levels enables the partner countries to focus on employing a more sustainable food-water-energy nexus approach along the corridor. Thus, the US's involvement in the I2U2 is critical as it ensures political commitment and would make the engagement more binding. While the US is not a benefactor of the corridors, its involvement in the inter-regional partnership provides it an

edge by marking its presence in the strategic architecture of the Indo-Pacific. This is crucial for checking China's growing commercial and strategic footprint in the Western Indo-Pacific, more specifically in West Asia, where the US is seemingly losing its foothold.

There is a synergy in both the initiatives, therefore. Under the I2U2 project, UAE has pledged to invest US$2 billion in the construction of a series of integrated food corridors and parks across India. To incorporate food-water-energy nexus, the food parks are created in such a manner that they will simultaneously work towards increasing food production and reducing food wastage, conserve water, and employ renewable energy sources. At the same time, the corridor seeks to address food and energy security aspects in a more holistic manner by aiming to achieve three main goals—namely, increasing crop yields in India; enhancing farmer's incomes by supplying them with high-quality seeds, equipping them with agri-tech facilities and marketing crop produce at better rates; and maintaining export-quality standards to cater to the South Asian and West Asian markets.[27]

It will, therefore, address *access, availability, utilisation* and thereby *affordability* and *stability* aspects of food security.[28] While the use of the corridor ensures *accessibility* of food and fuel and increased production of crops by using climate-smart technology, and agri-tech addresses the *availability* aspect; excess and sustained supply helps in maintaining commodity price thus addressing *affordability, utilisation,* and *stability* components of food security.

The second project emphasised in I2U2 and in the trilateral engagement is aimed at advancing a hybrid energy plant in Dwarka, Gujarat with a wind and solar energy capacity of 300MW. The

US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) and UAE's International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) have pledged to invest in the proposal as knowledge and investment partners. USTDA has invested US$300 million in a feasibility study for the project. The involvement of private sector firms will enable the project to achieve India's goal of reaching 500GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030. Thus, the success of the project will define India's potential in becoming a global supply chain hub in renewable energy.[29]

By leveraging the strengths of each partner—i.e., the US's political commitment, Israel's top-notch climate-friendly technologies, UAE's investment capabilities, and India's human capital, vast cultivable land and limited diplomatic hurdles to ease business prospects—the joint initiative could be a viable solution to meeting inter-regional food and energy requirements along the India-Middle East-Europe corridor.

To conclude, the normalisation of Israel-UAE relations has enabled India to engage with its two vibrant West Asian partners at the bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral and multilateral levels. Such multi-level engagements have helped the countries channel their 3Cs—complementarities, cooperation, and collaboration—in various aspects. Such results-oriented mindset is key in developing an inter-regional connectivity corridor along the Europe-Mediterranean-Gulf-India route.

By employing a food-water-energy nexus approach, the three countries are aiming to strengthen their economic and political prospects along the Western Indo-Pacific. At a time when Indo-Pacific features heavily in India's strategic calculus, more robust partnerships with the UAE and Israel will be crucial in meeting its strategic objectives in the region. After all, food, energy, and water are critical non-conventional strategic components of the future. By catering efficiently to the global supply chain, India and its inter-regional partners are marking their place at the global high table.

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ASEAN AND MULTILATERALISM IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Sarah Teo

THE MULTILATERAL ARCHITECTURE in the Indo-Pacific has undergone important shifts in the past decade. These include the expanded East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2011 which has inspired optimism, the first-ever failure of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to issue a joint communiqué after a foreign ministerial meeting in 2012, and recent concerns over the future of multilateralism prompted by escalating geopolitical rivalry.

To be sure, the network of regional forums popularly described as an 'alphabet soup' has continued to grow—both in number and agenda—for the most part of the post-Cold War era. This largely aligned with expectations about the persistence of institutions, and has led to an increasingly crowded institutional landscape in the Indo-Pacific. New arrangements emerge to address gaps in regional multilateralism and, to varying extents, either complement, or compete with existing platforms. Against this backdrop, this article examines the past, present, and future of the regional multilateral architecture in the region, with a focus on ASEAN's role.

The Past: ASEAN in the Regional Multilateral Architecture

Many of the existing multilateral forums in the Indo-Pacific were established relatively recently. While ASEAN was launched in 1967 with the founding five members (and Brunei joining as the sixth member in 1984), it was only in the

late 1990s that the organisation took shape into today's familiar form of the ASEAN-10. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) platform and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) were established in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a response to the new post-Cold War environment. The ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and the EAS, for their part, emerged from the need to bolster regionalism in the wake of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s. Subsequently, in the late 2000s, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus were introduced to meet the demand for defence diplomacy activities. In more recent years, countries in the region have signed on to mega-free trade agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Alongside these larger multilateral arrangements, more targeted minilateral initiatives such as the Malacca Straits Patrol and the Trilateral Cooperative Agreement have also taken shape.

Not all of these initiatives have been centred on or led by ASEAN. There is no doubt, however, that the association has been at the hub of the multilateral architecture in the broader Indo-Pacific (or Asia-Pacific) region. This is a role that ASEAN has sought for itself following the end of the Cold War, and one that non-ASEAN partners have been broadly supportive of. The concept of 'ASEAN centrality'—first officially mentioned in the joint media statement of the 38th ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting in 2006—calls for the association to lead regional cooperation and for non-ASEAN countries seeking to engage with the region to be mindful of ASEAN norms and processes. More importantly, having ASEAN serve as the hub of regional multilateralism has also meant the broad embrace of the ASEAN model of inclusive, big-tent engagement. The membership compositions of the ARF, EAS

and ADMM-Plus reflect this approach. Indeed, the ASEAN-10 itself is a demonstration of how cooperation and dialogue could be facilitated among countries with diverse political and economic systems.

This ASEAN model of dialogue and cooperation with like-minded and non-like-minded partners alike, worked well for a period of time. From the early 1990s to late 2000s, circumstances proved conducive for the ASEAN approach. There was a general willingness on the part of the major and regional powers to engage with one another, and with a multilateral architecture that appeared to give precedence to the smaller Southeast Asian countries. To be sure, ASEAN did face challenges during this time; one needs only to look at the debates over the EAS membership, or ASEAN-US relations in the wake of the Asian financial crisis and 9/11 attacks, to see that many of ASEAN's geopolitical challenges in that period were fundamentally similar to what it has to deal with at present. ASEAN was nevertheless able to work through these challenges and stake a large claim on the development of regional multilateralism. Despite the disputes among China, Japan and South Korea, for instance, the three Northeast Asian countries agreed to participate in the APT framework that was launched in 1997. Even the typically reclusive North Korea gained membership to the ARF in 2000, amid improving inter-Korean relations. To a considerable extent, the ASEAN model of multilateral cooperation flourished.

These favourable circumstances for ASEAN subsequently evolved, with observers pointing to the late 2000s as a turning point.[1] The 2008 global financial crisis raised questions about the sustainability of US leadership in the extant liberal international order—circumstances regarded as vital to peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia. It was also around the late

2000s that tensions in the South China Sea rose, China-Japan relations worsened over a collision in the East China Sea, and North Korea conducted its first nuclear test. Alongside Beijing's apparent assertiveness in its foreign policy and Washington's rebalance to Asia under the Barack Obama administration, China-US relations entered a more competitive phase.

The impact of these developments highlighted the limits to the ASEAN model of multilateralism.[2] Subsequently, forums such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the Australia-United Kingdom-US (AUKUS) arrangement, as well as networks like the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Belt and Road Initiative, emerged as an additional layer of relations in the regional architecture. In the context of China-US rivalry, the militarisation of the South China Sea amid the slow progress of the code of conduct negotiations, and the Donald Trump administration's disinterest in ASEAN-led platforms—the emergence of new minilateral or multilateral arrangements have unsurprisingly spurred concerns about ASEAN's role and the continuing relevance of its approach towards regional affairs.

Even as individual ASEAN member states may differ in their respective assessments of these developments, looking through an institutional lens, the main source of anxiety would be the potential erosion of ASEAN cohesion and centrality. This would shape the form and function of the multilateral architecture, and the preferences of regional countries when it comes to multilateral cooperation. Keeping in mind these dynamics, the next section considers three current trends that are likely to influence the regional multilateral architecture in the near to medium-term future.

The Present: Three Trends to Watch

First, the concept of 'like-mindedness' has grown in salience as a driver of multilateral cooperation. To be fair, some form of like-mindedness has historically been a necessary condition for multilateralism. However, past regional initiatives—especially the ASEAN-led ones—have reflected like-mindedness more in the context of shared interests, while recent arrangements have appeared to also focus on like-mindedness in terms of political values and systems. This trend is expected to continue, especially in light of the Russia-Ukraine war, China-US competition, and the political crisis in Myanmar. The White House's latest National Security Strategy, published in October 2022, starkly explains the challenge posed to the US and democracy by "powers that layer authoritarian governance with a revisionist foreign policy," such as Russia and China.[3] The US's Summit for Democracy in 2021—which excluded majority of the ASEAN member states—further underscored the divide between democracies and non-democracies.

Similar sentiments about the fight for democracy have been expressed in the context of newer regional arrangements such as the Quad and the Chip 4 initiative. The former (comprising Australia, India, Japan and the US) had its origins in Japan's late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's aspirations of fashioning "Asia's democratic security diamond," while the latter (currently with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the US) has been described by Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen as an attempt to strengthen supply chains for "democracy chips."[4]

While the ASEAN Charter calls for adhering to principles of democracy and promoting human rights, ASEAN—mindful of the

different domestic political systems among its member states—has generally avoided wading into the debate over 'democracy versus autocracy/authoritarianism'. ASEAN-led cooperation has thus been motivated by mutual interests, particularly in economic prosperity and non-traditional security threats, rather than by shared political values. The sustainability of this approach for ASEAN, however, may start to be challenged by the political upheaval in Myanmar, where the military junta seized power from a democratically elected government in February 2021.

The coup's impact on ASEAN diplomacy has been twofold. At one level, ASEAN has arguably exercised collective will in barring high-level representation from the junta at ASEAN summits and ministerial meetings. At another level, however, ASEAN has not been able to prevent the withdrawal of some dialogue partners from an ADMM-Plus working-level meeting co-hosted by Myanmar and Russia.[5] Assuming this becomes a longer-term trend for ASEAN activities and coupled with the growth of 'like-minded' networks elsewhere in the region, multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific as a whole may become driven more by similarity in political values.

Second, middle or medium-sized powers are likely to assume more conspicuous roles in the regional multilateral architecture. For countries such as Australia and Japan, certainly, it would not be unfamiliar territory. Being among ASEAN's oldest dialogue partners, Canberra and Tokyo have supported ASEAN's community-building efforts and are founding members of many of the ASEAN-led forums. Both countries have also been active initiators of and participants in non-ASEAN groupings such as APEC and the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue. As See Seng Tan notes in his 2016 book, these non-ASEAN stakeholders have had "just as much influence as ASEAN, if not more, in defining the shape and substance of Asia's multilateral architecture."[6] This appears likely to continue, alongside the increase in minilateral groupings involving these stakeholders.

One example is the Quad, which has evolved into a regular feature of regional diplomacy. In addition to engagement spanning working groups, ministerial meetings and leaders' summits, the Quad agenda covers a range of issues such as climate change, critical and emerging technologies, and infrastructure. AUKUS would be another grouping to watch, especially given expectations that it may eventually expand to include Japan.[7] As the Quad and AUKUS develop institutionally, the roles of their member states in the regional architecture would be progressively elevated.

Countries that have been traditionally distant from regional strategic affairs are also carving out a greater profile for themselves in the Indo-Pacific. The very concept of the Indo-Pacific, for example, sought to accord a bigger role to India in the broader region. While India's interest beyond the Indian Ocean region remains a topic of debate,[8] its participation in the Quad and its Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) suggest the potential for the South Asian country to be more engaged in the broader region. South Korea has also released its Indo-Pacific strategy after several years of ambivalence. The strategy calls for strengthening the rules-based international order, and seeks to incorporate a security and strategic dimension to Seoul's regional approach that has conventionally leaned more towards economics and functional domains.

> **Past regional initiatives—especially ASEAN-led—have reflected like-mindedness more in the context of shared interests; recent arrangements appear to also focus on like-mindedness in political values and systems.**

Additionally, the United Kingdom has stepped up its efforts to boost relations with the region. It is not only part of the AUKUS arrangement, but also ASEAN's newest dialogue partner. Other actors, including Canada, France and Germany have similarly laid out their engagement strategies for the Indo-Pacific. From 2023, Canada, France and the United Kingdom will become observers in the activities of the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups. These developments indicate the potential for middle-power countries to expand and deepen their roles in Indo-Pacific multilateralism, both through ASEAN and non-ASEAN channels.

Third, ASEAN's central role in the regional multilateral architecture would undoubtedly undergo some changes. The extent of those changes, however, remains unclear. Amid the recent establishment of non-ASEAN forums, it is perhaps a heartening sign that ASEAN continues to be a crucial partner for countries seeking to engage with the region. The interest of the United Kingdom, Canada and France to forge closer relations with ASEAN have been earlier mentioned. The litany of recent comprehensive strategic partnerships signed between ASEAN and Australia, China, India and the US, bears further testament to this. At the very least, these signal that dialogue partners and extra-regional countries are still keen to enhance relations with the organisation.

Compared to the non-ASEAN groupings, ASEAN and its suite of forums arguably remain the most acceptable channels to all the competing powers in the Indo-Pacific for multilateral dialogue and cooperation. Yet, one could not discount the possibility that ASEAN's partners—and even, perhaps, its own member states—would simply pay lip service to the idea of ASEAN centrality. After all, none of ASEAN's member states nor its external partners are compelled to continue engaging substantively with the organisation if they no longer regard it as being in their interests. Earlier worries over Indonesia's potential turn away from ASEAN as well as the downgrading of the US delegation to ASEAN-led meetings in 2019 offer examples of such scenarios.

Realistically speaking, the value that regional countries place on the ASEAN model of inclusive dialogue and cooperation would depend largely on broader geopolitical dynamics—much of which are beyond ASEAN's control. More importantly, in a period of downturn in relations, it is difficult to predict if the respective countries might still want to engage with one another via ASEAN-led multilateralism. In this context, it could be the case that the ASEAN model of cooperation will evolve more towards ASEAN+1 arrangements. This is because—as the aforementioned recent events demonstrate—

both ASEAN and the respective external partners continue to find value in engaging with each other. Such arrangements may also be more insulated from the fluctuations of global-power relations and regional power politics, as ASEAN only needs to deal with one partner at a time. In contrast, multilateral forums with a wider membership that incorporates competing powers, such as the ARF, ADMM-Plus and EAS, would be more susceptible to being affected by developments among the non-ASEAN countries. The abovementioned withdrawal of some dialogue partners from an ADMM-Plus working-level meeting is a case in point. The continuation of such a development is likely to lead to a drop in the utility of these larger ASEAN-led forums to its participants.

The Future: Evolving Multilateral Architecture in the Indo-Pacific

All three trends indicate that the regional multilateral architecture is expected to have more overlaps as it adjusts to pressures of both fragmentation and alignment. As medium-sized powers step up their involvement in the Indo-Pacific and cooperation becomes increasingly driven by shared political values, more multilateral and minilateral groupings are expected to emerge. This suggests a growing number of key stakeholders in the region, all with their own visions of an ideal Indo-Pacific architecture.

Given that ASEAN's value proposition has traditionally been premised on its convening power and an inclusive model of cooperation[9] based on mutual interests more than shared political values, these trends would have a bearing on ASEAN's role in the region. Indeed, the three trends discussed in this article point to a narrowing space for ASEAN centrality. Over time, ASEAN's 'hub' status in

the multilateral architecture could gradually decline. While the ASEAN+1 arrangements and bilateral ties may remain important, ASEAN may find itself struggling to retain interest in and make progress on the bigger multilateral forums that it convenes. This does not mean that the ASEAN-led forums would dissolve; they would in all likelihood continue to exist, but stagnate and eventually slide into irrelevance in regional decision-making. Should this happen, questions about the value of ASEAN itself may also arise as member states reassess whether and how the organisation serves their respective interests.

This is not intended to be alarmist—at present, with the exception of the Myanmar junta, none of the ASEAN member states have signalled in any concrete terms that ASEAN is becoming irrelevant to their interests. It is also important to recognise that ASEAN is not the be-all and end-all for the foreign policies of its member states. Rather, ASEAN exists alongside a range of other diplomatic avenues—bilateral, minilateral, multilateral—that its member states would rely on to secure their interests. The key is to ensure that ASEAN continues to offer value in ways that the other avenues are unlikely to do.

Viewed in this way, ASEAN would need to strengthen itself institutionally. This means finding ways to ensure that its internal problems and disagreements do not affect broader ASEAN-led cooperation, forging more equal partnerships with the dialogue partners, as well as taking the lead to facilitate region-wide responses towards shifting geopolitical dynamics. This would require, at the outset, ASEAN member states to be clear-eyed on the strategic challenges facing Southeast Asia and the importance of ASEAN to their foreign policies. It would also require ASEAN to adopt some form of measured decisiveness

when it comes to dealing with matters such as the Myanmar crisis. These aims are certainly demanding, but necessary for the preservation of ASEAN's role and relevance amid the evolution of the multilateral architecture in the Indo-Pacific.

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ANCIENT WISDOM FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW: INDIA'S PRESIDENCY OF THE G20

Amrita Narlikar

THE ORIGINS OF THE G20 lie in financial crises. Over the years, the leaders' level G20 has come to embrace a wider economic agenda (e.g. sustainable development, anti-corruption, agriculture) as well as other urgent problems (e.g. health and climate change). Its relatively informal nature (the group, for instance, does not have a Secretariat and operates with a rotating Presidency)[1] and the fact that it comprises a critical mass of the world's economies have contributed to the G20's effectiveness in addressing the 2008 financial crisis and other cognate issues. The world, however, now faces a new order of problems. And unlike the financial crises of 1998 (which prompted the creation of the G20 at the level of Finance Ministers and Central Bankers) and 2008 (which led to the formation of the G20 at

the level of heads of state/government), some of the challenges of today involve 'wickedly' zero-sum games and are thus deeply divisive. Two sets of problems are worth highlighting as indicative of the level of difficulty involved.

First, and in contrast to the previous genre of economic challenges that the G20 managed to address with varying degrees of success over the last 15 years, today's problems derive from an entanglement of security and economics (or 'geoeconomics'). Under current production patterns, a few states occupy key positions on network hubs, and can 'weaponise' the very ties of interdependence that had previously contributed to prosperity and peace.[2] Trying to keep markets open, trade flows uninterrupted, and the old model of

globalisation largely unchanged—a standard G20 type of solution—will now not only *not* suffice, but could worsen the problem. The old model of globalisation needs to be overhauled, but there is fundamental disagreement among countries (and diverse actors within them, e.g. even between large businesses versus small and medium-sized enterprises) on if and how this should happen.

Second, and again in contrast to the context in which the old G20 could enable technocratic solution-building, fundamental political differences have emerged between countries. One key fault-line is between democracies and authoritarian states.[3] And authoritarian states are rapidly advancing. This is the case not only via their tightening grip domestically, but also in their respective regions and globally. We see this in Europe via Russia's war on Ukraine, or China's adventurism on its borders with India (or indeed, with regard to Hong Kong and other actors in the region). This authoritarian advance takes place not only through overt military means. Surveillance technologies are an example. Usually more readily developed and accepted by authoritarian regimes, these technologies are making their invidious presence also felt in democratic states due to digital over-dependence. In the absence of clear multilateral rules on data protection and privacy, and few accessible alternatives available to users, core liberal values—and democratic ways of life—are coming under threat.

Old mantras of multilateralism, such as "global problems need global solutions", will not be able to rid the world of these problems, even as the planet burns and biodiversity declines. Global order—as all countries (ranging from Russia and China to the US and EU) agree—is under threat, but a gamut of competing views exists on what shape a new global order should take. A fresh approach is needed.

India, with an increasingly confident assertiveness of its long-standing traditions, may be well-placed to develop such an approach. Its Presidency of the G20 in 2022-23 provides it with a timely opportunity to do so—for itself, and for the world at large. This essay draws on key tenets of India's ancient wisdom,[4] and highlights five arenas where India's G20 Presidency could make an important and unique contribution on the global stage.

A Distinctive Leadership for the G20 from India

First and foremost, we can safely assume that India will show its *own* leadership—in style and in content. The verse below is an example of the strong roots that enable it to exercise such leadership:

> निन्दन्तु नीतिनिपुणा यदि वा स्तुवन्तु ।
> लक्ष्मी: समाविशतु गच्छतु वा यथेष्टम् ।।
> अधैव वा मरणमस्तु युगान्तरे वा ।
> न्याय्यात्पथ: प्रविचलन्ति पदं न धीरा: ।।

> Irrespective of whether the great and the good of this world showers them
> Whether wealth accrues to them or leaves them of its own accord
> Whether they have to meet death today or centuries later
> Wise people do not let their feet stray from the path of truth and righteousness.

> Bhartrihari, *Nitishatakam,* 84.[5]

We have seen India standing up for its beliefs with a consistency that dates back to the time that it secured its independence, and persists firmly today.[6] It has done so amidst changes in the global balance of power, and in spite of external pressures. This was evident in the face of the opprobrium that India encountered over its nuclear tests in 1998; it has persisted in the

World Trade Organization over decades on several issues; and we saw it come to the fore again over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

We can be certain that India will not shy away from leaving its mark on the G20 with its unique style of global leadership. It will engage with partners, it will respond to feedback (internal and external), it will adapt its strategy accordingly—but it will always be true to itself. This involves standing true to both its values and its interests.

Values and Interests

India's tendency in recent years has been to speak the language of pragmatism. In an agenda-setting speech in 2019, Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar speaks of "multi-alignment", "India First", and "hedging" as part of a "strong and pragmatic policy outlook".[7] But it would be a mistake to read this pragmatism as a willingness on India's part to surrender its values at the altar of interests. The *Mahabharat*—India's famous epic that is first and foremost about the brutal business of politics—shows how values and interests go hand-in-hand:

> धर्म एव हतो हन्ति धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः।

> When Dharm (duty/ values) is destroyed, it also destroys; Dharm protects those who guard it.

> *Mahabharat, III.313.128*

The above quote comes from the famous Yaksh Prashn episode of the *Mahabharat*, and suggests that by protecting values, one can also safeguard and promote one's interests. This nuanced conceptualisation of values and interests as being reflexive and mutually-constitutive stands in contrast to the dichotomy (of interests *versus* values) that is sometimes assumed in public and academic debates. In practice, the fact that India is seen to be a tough negotiator derives not from a shallow understanding of values; rather, its strong positions come from a deep understanding of interests that are firmly rooted in values (and evolve accordingly).

What does this mean in terms of India's G20 Presidency? Despite now being in the club of major powers (e.g. courted by the US and Russia, a member of the Quad, and predicted to be the world's fastest growing economy), expect India to still adhere to its commitment for a more inclusive and participatory global order. We are already seeing this in action in the Think-20 (T20) processes that India is hosting. For instance, participants in the T20 task forces have been chosen from a global pool and work together at an eye-to-eye level as co-chairs; a wide range of topics is covered by the seven task forces; a diversity of views is represented; attention is being paid to the obvious interests of not only G20 members but the many marginalised voices of the Global South. In the same vein, we can expect to see a further push for reforming multilateral governance under the Indian Presidency, including the membership of the UN Security Council.

> **"**Global order is under threat, but a gamut of competing views exists on what shape a new global order should take. A fresh approach is needed.

Global Justice and Sustainable Development

India, when it was not a major economy, understandably advanced the cause of development and distributive justice: it was in its interest to do so. But linked to the previous point and also taking into account its (still) low per-capita income, India's attachment to these issues has not declined even as its power has risen. Such position aligns well with its ancient wisdom:

> दरिद्रान्भर कौन्तेय मा प्रयच्छेश्वरे धनम्।
> व्याधितस्यौषधं पथ्यं नीरुजस्तु किमौषधैः॥

> Share your wealth with the poor, O Son of Kunti, do not give riches to the already rich!
> Medicine is useful to the sick, what use does a healthy person have for medicine?

> *Hitopdesh, The Story of the Tiger and the Traveller.*

We can be certain that under India's Presidency, the G20 will prioritise the cause of global justice across issue-areas—climate, economy, health, and more. Expect reinforced demands for green financing, driven by public-private partnerships, and firm reminders on the low per-capita energy and CO_2 consumption in the Global South that serve as warnings against inequitable burden-sharing of mitigation and adaptation. We might also see demands for the reform of trade multilateralism but with clear carve-outs for Special and Differential Treatment. Within the framework of the WTO, India will likely be joined by several other G20 members and guests from the Global South to demand vaccine equity to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic as well as access to other medical supplies, equipment and treatments. All these will provide useful business opportunities, and are likely to resonate across a range of the G20 outreach processes that have been set up.

Food Security and Globalisation

Even while the Modi government has increased India's business-friendliness, there are some vital continuities in India's foreign economic policy that include some scepticism towards trade liberalisation. The notion of '*Atmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliant India)' is an example of this. Delve into India's ancient philosophy, and we see that strains of this thinking are not new. When asked the question, "Who is truly happy?", Yudhishthir—a hero of the Mahabharat—responds with the following:

पञ्चमेऽहनि षष्ठे वा शाकं पचति स्वे गृहे।
अनृणी चाप्रवासी च स वारिचर मोदते ॥

He who has the reliability of even scant food to cook at home, and is not in debt, he is happy.

Mahabharat, III.313.115

Throughout the (now failed) negotiations over the Doha Development Agenda in the WTO, India had held a firm line on food security concerns, and attracted considerable criticism as a result. Today amidst conditions of weaponised interdependence, its concerns about over-dependence on trade flows in key areas—including food—appear to be well-justified. Medical supplies were held hostage in the early stages of the pandemic; export bans on rare-earth minerals in the past have shown the vulnerability of global supply chains; the sanctions against and counter-responses from Russia have resulted in increased food and energy prices that are having an adverse impact on some of the poorest countries, as well as the poor in rich countries.

India would be well-served to highlight issues of food security—and indeed of other strategic supplies—to push for an alternative model of globalisation in the G20 setting. Rather than accept trade as an end goal in its own right, or limit the discussion to standard-setting, India could be at the forefront of advancing a rebooted globalisation that recognises the trade-offs between market opening and national security. In doing so, it would find willing partners in the United States, parts of the European Union, and elsewhere— not only to support this agenda *per se* but potentially also for closer and deeper trade links ('friendshoring', if you will) among like-minded allies.

Animal Rights and Environmentalism

Much is made of family and society-oriented 'Asian values' as being different from individual-oriented 'universal' values. Traditional India, however, offers quite a different, indeed more 'liberal' perspective on this issue than even Western variants by according individual personality and rights to all creatures:[8]

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघु चेतसाम् ।
उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

This is mine, this is yours – only mean-minded people indulge in such bean-counting,
For the generous-minded, the entire earth is one family.

Mahopnishad, 6.71[9]

The second line of the verse quoted above— which many translate roughly as "the world is one family"—has found international take-up, with global leaders such as Obama also embracing it. At first glance, this inclusive approach seems to bring together all *peoples* of the planet. In fact, however, India's approach is even more inclusive: note that the actual translation of *'vasudha'* is not 'world' but 'earth' and extends to not only humans, but all the non-human beings with which we share this planet. India's motto for G20 seems to recognise this subtle but crucially important difference, and thus works with the wording of "One earth, one family, one future".

A non-anthropocentric appreciation of family, welfare, justice, and rights is deeply enshrined in ancient Indian texts. It flourishes to this day in the verses we are taught (e.g. as part of

learning at home but also in formal Sanskrit classes in a convent school in Delhi, this author imbibed the idea of आत्मवत् सर्वभूतेषु यः पश्यति सः पण्डितः– he who looks upon all beings as he looks upon himself, he is the truly wise one). The *Bhagavad Gita* similarly states:

समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन्तं परमेश्वरम्।
विनश्यत्स्वविनश्यन्तं यः पश्यति स पश्यति।।

He who sees the divine in all creatures,
And in all mortal bodies sees the immortal soul, he is the one who truly understands.

Bhagavad Gita, 13.28

This non-anthropocentric perspective is very different from *Fridays for Future* demonstrations prompted by Greta Thunberg's climate activism. In contrast to children in the West demanding that the planet be saved for their future, or adults appealing to inter-generational justice on behalf of their children and their children's children, the Indian approach highlighted here seeks trans-species justice. It applies to the cause of biodiversity, and not only for the sake of the preservation of particular species but to save the lives of individual animals within species. It has relevance for a variety of concerns involving animal welfare and rights— such as multilateral bans on trophy-hunting, and tough regulations on live animal markets and imports.

It remains to be seen whether India will seize this opportunity provided by the G20 to advance a non-anthropocentric agenda. This will not be an easy task, given the tough political economy of entrenched economic interests in the above areas. It is to the credit of PM Modi that of India's Think-20 task forces, Task Force 3 is uniquely focused on "LiFE: Lifestyle for the Environment, Resilience, and Values for Well-Being" where there may be an opportunity to develop these ideas further.[10]

Introducing a less anthropocentric perspective into the G20 would not only help alleviate the suffering of our animal friends and kin globally; it would also have a positive impact on multiple, cognate human concerns including public health and sustainable development. Additionally, it could also serve India's own interests. For instance, in their negotiations over the EU-India Free Trade Agreement, labour and environmental standards have proven to be a long-standing stumbling block. India's more holistic, less anthropocentric perspective could help re-shape the debate and find a way out of this deadlock.

Conclusion

In each of the above areas, India may be able to leave its unique and constructive imprint on the G20. It will be able to do this via the formal meetings, as well as agenda-setting bilateral and minilateral exchanges throughout the G20 process and around the summit. But it is important to not overestimate the capacity of the G20 as a grouping, and also to recognise the limits on the powers of the Presidency.

The G20 brings together a motley crowd of countries, some in direct or indirect conflict with each other. Consensus documents mean that global summitry can tend towards "cheap talk" and lowest common denominator solutions. The G20's mandate does not cover security issues; attempts to curtail the abuses of weaponised interdependence and build a new model of globalisation will likely meet resistance on the part of China as well as some other actors. There is a further risk: if the West does not respond to some of the opportunities that India tries to create, others will step in. China is an example of this, with its offers of not only cheap infrastructure that large parts of the Global South—and indeed the Global North—desperately need, but also an alternative

development model that is at loggerheads with liberal values and poses further security threats.

Will the world look dramatically different after India completes its Presidency of the G20? Probably not. But if India successfully manages to plant the seeds of some of the ideas outlined in this essay, and embed them in the narratives of global governance, multilateralism, and globalisation, we could be on the way to building a more sustainable, equitable, and secure world.

Endnotes

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2   Daniel Drezner, Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, *The Uses and Abuses of Weaponised Interdependence,* Washington DC: Brookings, 2021.

3   Amrita Narlikar, "Three External Risks to Democracy and How to Address Them," *World Economic Forum,* October 20, 2021, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/10/three-external-risks-to-democracy-and-how-to-address-them/.

4   Note that the verses that this essay cites constitute India's living tradition. Several of them derive from India's epic, the Mahabharat, while a couple of others form a part of the *Subhashitani* (helpful quotations/ teachings) that form a part of textbooks that schoolchildren grow up with. All translations in this essay are by the author herself.

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5   Open access at https://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_z_misc_major_works/niiti.pdf ; for a recitation of this verse and its interpretation, see https://twitter.com/AmritaNarlikar/status/1448896104112734208 .

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7   S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister's Speech at the 4th Ramnath Goenka Lecture, November 14, 2019, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32038 .

8   Raimundo Panikkar, 'Is the Notion of Human Rights a western concept?' *Diogenes*, (30) 120, 1982, pp. 75- 102 .

9   For a recitation of this verse and its application to the present day, see https://twitter.com/AmritaNarlikar/status/1448896100212121603 .

10 The author serves on TF3 as a co-chair.

STATECRAFT AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: CONTEMPORARY LESSONS FROM ANCIENT INDIA

Kajari Kamal

THE DISCIPLINE OF International Relations (IR) has been broadly Eurocentric since its inception about a century ago. Its primary engagement with great-power rivalry, and universalisation of realist ideas of power, order, security, and national interests—primarily built on Western Christian foundations of state and statecraft—have marginalised the significance of knowledge production in non-Western societies. Yet, contemporary international politics driven by globalisation, rebalancing, and multipolarity has amplified the salience of other geographies, in turn underlining the need of a truly 'global' IR. The rise of China and India in particular, has occasioned a study of their strategic cultures, anchored in their ancient past, to reveal cultural explanations of state behaviour.

These homegrown philosophies, while sharing certain universal, realist ideas, exhibit unique characteristics.

Ancient Indian thinker, Kautilya's theory of *rajamandala* (concentric, geopolitical conception of the interstate realm), *saptanga* (seven organs) theory of power, and *matsya-nyaya* (law of the fish) predate and broadly allude to Machiavelli's '*Prince*' (1513), Hobbes' 'state of nature' (1651), Hans J. Morgenthau's 'national power' (1948), or Kenneth Waltz's 'anarchy' (1959), albeit with a culturally embedded nuance. The need to spell out both the coalescences and the divides has become more relevant at a time when India is intensely engaging with the world. It is at the heart of both, addressing the world's stark challenges, and harnessing the promise of

opportunities for global cooperation; and it has significant capacity and will to do so.

Regionally, India is faced with the most threatening of security environments in recent times, with an aggressive China and a turbulent neighbourhood, causing crucial overlaps in global concerns and its own in the region. Despite the convergences, India offers a unique set of measures—seemingly contradictory and often unaligned with the stance of its partners—to manage the challenges. Why has it been difficult to predict contemporary India's characteristic non-alignment, bargaining behaviour, strategic restraint, and its ready acceptance of 'grey' in its relationships? How do its civilisational moorings set it apart from the political culture of the geographies to which Thucydides, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, and Morgenthau belonged?

This article unravels the prism through which India sees the world. It investigates the foundational principles of ancient Indian strategic thinking, and what it augurs for a world ridden with both opportunities and challenges, through an examination of Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, an ancient classic on statecraft widely seen as the foundational text of Indic political thought.

Holistic Statecraft

Statecraft in ancient India subsumes international relations. The primary end goal and the 'conceptual hook' in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is *yogakshema*, where '*yoga*' means action or acquisition of things, and '*kshema*' is consolidation or secure possession. Together this umbrella concept ensures *raksha* (security) and *palana* (well-being) of the people. This dual task is performed through a political economic approach which meaningfully interweaves political science (*dandaniti*) and economics

(*vartta*); the domestic realm (*tantra*) and the interstate (*avapa*). The material well-being of the people upholds political legitimacy and sustains social cohesion, resulting in gainful economic production which, in turn, strengthens the rod (*danda*) wielded by the king in the international realm, and advances security of the kingdom. Kautilya invalidates the inside/outside frame of a modern Westphalian state system by the dictum – "the welfare of a state depends on an active foreign policy."[1]

The two interlinked domains pivot around the "seven constituent elements of the state", representing the seven organs (*saptanga*) of the *body politic:* (i) king (*swami*); (ii) council of ministers (*amatya*); (iii) countryside (*janapada*); (iv) fort (*durga*); (v) treasury (*kosha*); (vi) army (*danda*); and (vii) ally (*mitra*). These follow a hierarchy and together make a state's comprehensive national power. Notably, and flowing from the order of the constituent elements, state's power is determined more by the prudence of political leadership and the productivity and happiness of the people (*janapada*), rather than military might. The ruler is tasked to remain energetically active and engage in enterprises that bring material well-being (*artha*), which is the root of spiritual fulfilment (*dharma*) and sensual pleasures (*kama*).

In a globalised and interdependent contemporary state system, a state's prosperity and security is innately intertwined with that of the region and the world. India is, plausibly, committed towards *yogakshema* in its vision of the Indo-Pacific as "free, open and inclusive," and in endeavouring to achieve the "common pursuit of progress and prosperity" of all stakeholders in the region and beyond.[2] With the world's one-third flow of trade and energy flowing through the region, India's national development is critically tethered to

> **Why has it been difficult to predict contemporary India's characteristic non-alignment, bargaining behaviour, strategic restraint, and its ready acceptance of 'grey' in its relationships?**

secure Sea Lines of Communication for both economic growth and trade, and energy security. Approximately 95 percent of the country's trade by volume, and 68 percent by value, is moved through the seas and oceans.[3] India's cumulative "sea dependence" for oil is estimated at 93 percent.[4] Additionally, an externally secure environment is most conducive to augment domestic capacities. In this context, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or the Quad, serves as a productive mechanism to enhance security and prosperity.

The jettisoning of the rigid friend-foe pattern characteristic of Kautilya's continental *rajamandala* for a more collaborative framework in an age of connectivity and shared prosperity, underlines the primacy of domestic drivers of India's foreign policy. India's oil imports from Russia amid the Ukraine conflict, for instance, is viewed by the government as a "sensible policy to go where we get the best deal in the interests of the Indian people."[5]

Realpolitik and Moralpolitik

India's 'internationalist nationalist' conduct arguably is testimony to the ancient 'Realist' roots of state survival along with the 'extra-Political Realist' goals of the abstract universal ideals of *lokasamgraha* (social wealth).[6] Survival and power in a zero-sum world is balanced by an organic approach of preservation of humanity seen through a variable sum format.

The worldview, perhaps, stems from a meta-theoretical understanding of ancient Indian cosmological tradition of *dharma* which is embedded in the concept of 'relational existence.'[7] This dilutes the boundaries of 'self' and 'other' and upholds the many-sidedness of life and its diversity. In addition, the depiction of *Bharatvarsa* as one of the *varsas* of *Jambudvipa* (described as a four-petalled lotus) in Puranic cosmography tells an Indian story of harmonious international co-existence, quite unlike the 'middle kingdom complex' of ancient China. In this context, India's presidency of the G20 places it uniquely to achieve the theme of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—One Earth, One Family, One Future.

The contrasting yet intertwined strains of *realpolitik* and *moralpolitik* have characterised India's foreign policy since independence. The conceptualisation of non-alignment crystallised the belief of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—the world as one people in the post-Second World War context[8] on one end, and on the other, catered to realist considerations of capability building and national security. In Jawaharlal

Nehru's words, "Every nation places its own interests first in developing foreign policy. Fortunately, India's interests coincide with peaceful foreign policy and cooperation with all progressive nations."[9]

As a revisionist text, Kautilya advocated political unification of the Indian subcontinent which was a sacred geo-cultural space defended by natural barriers. However, he did not harbour any imperialist tendencies beyond this *chakravartinkshetra* (region of the sovereign)—a good illustration of *realpolitik* and *moralpolitik*.

Conception of 'Power'

Kautilya's conception of power too, connects the inside with the outside and coalesces rationality and normativity; power is relative and only a means rather than an end. The *saptanga* theory of Kautilyan statecraft lists the constituent elements which together comprise a state's national power. There are four important deductions that can be drawn from the components and their order. One, the unique amalgamation of material (economic and military might) and non-material factors (political performance of the leadership, loyalty and efficiency of the ministers, productivity of the citizens, morale of the armed forces), provide an insight into a state's capability and will.

Two, with *swami* (ruler) and *amatya* (council of ministers) as the top two, Kautilya lays a premium on political leadership and decision-making at the highest level; *mantrashakti* (power of counsel) scores over *prabhavshakti* (power of the treasury and army) and *utsahshakti* (power of valour). Third, the inclusion of *mitra* (external ally) is indeed novel, and its place in the hierarchy suggests that external help may be important but should

be resorted to when internal balancing through the first six fail to achieve the desired results.

Fourth, there is a domino effect among the state factors. The *swami* on top is supreme and selects the *amatya* who carry out the undertakings in the *janapada*. Success of undertakings lead to material prosperity which strengthens the political legitimacy of the state, enhances defensiveness, and contributes to a copious treasury, which in turn helps keep the army well-trained, and enhances its deterrent value which adds to the state's bargaining power in interstate conduct. This is particularly important in the context of a global expansion of authoritarian rule.

However, a state's power is dynamic and relative to other states in the *rajamandala*. Relative strength, in conjunction with disposition (*bhavin*) of the state helps preselect, if not predetermine foreign policy action and dilutes the geographical determinism associated with the *rajamandala*. The *sadgunyas* (six measures of foreign policy) include policies of accommodation or peace pact (*samdhi*), seeking shelter (*samshraya*) and dual policy (*dvaidhibhava*) generally prescribed for the weaker; hostility (*vigraha*) and marching (*yana*) for the stronger; and neutrality (*asana*) for equals.

To be sure, there are many exceptions to the rule based on nature and extent of state calamities (*vyasanas*) and its impact in the short and long run, justness of the ruler, and mutuality of interests. With a generalised desire for mutual peace, two equal powers too, could adopt accommodation like India and China did through the Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement of 1993. But *samdhi* also underpins a competitive state structure and is a transient phase to augment capacities and switch policies. China, after a long period of consolidation,

leveraged strategic advantage vis-à-vis India and switched from *samdhi* to *samdhayayana* (marching after entering a pact) through its Ladakh incursion in the summer of 2020.[10]

The *Arthashastra* puts forth a layered understanding of the interstate realm and the most optimal means of addressing external threat is nuanced yet flexible based on a continuous cost-benefit analysis. The criticality of arriving at correct estimates, therefore, makes knowledge the bedrock of statecraft. The categorisation of friends and enemies emanating from geographical, material, dispositional and situational considerations sharpens strategic assessments and makes policy measures effective.[11] The distinction it draws between an 'innate' enemy (in front, devoid of exemplary qualities and constantly doing harm) and a 'contingent' enemy (one who is hostile or acts with hostility, at least for the time being) is useful, for instance, in identifying the characteristic difference between how India potentially looks at China and Pakistan.[12] The *upaya* cluster which pivots on the four methods of politics—conciliation, gift-giving, dissension, and use of force—provides a tool box of options to be used in either singular, alternating, or combined manner.[13]

Most importantly, Kautilya understood power as possession of strength which was used as a means (rather than an end) to achieve success defined in terms of "happiness of the people."

Strategic Autonomy

Arguably, the single most enduring factor of post-independence India's foreign policy framework, and perhaps the most puzzling for the West, that can credibly be traced back to Kautilyan statecraft is that of independence of judgment and the concomitant idea of self-reliance. Prime ministers as far apart as

Jawaharlal Nehru and Narendra Modi find common ground in a self-reliant India.[14]

Kautilyan statecraft (through its *saptanga* theory) categorically identifies the ally (*mitra*) as the last and only external element. While internal balancing through the first six domestic elements was preferred, states could use external aid in the form of strategic partnerships (*samavaya*) to increase one's own power; through dual policy (*dvaidhibhava*) by allying with one to fight the other; and by seeking shelter (*samshraya*) in an imminent threat from a stronger power. Between the last two, preference is given to dual policy because of one's own political interest being served rather than risking decisional autonomy in case of seeking shelter.

Importantly, the deliberation on strategic partnerships in the text is abundantly relevant in an age which has witnessed its proliferation, owing to a greater incentive to cooperate "when balance of power meets globalization."[15] These ancient arrangements offered a wide array of possibilities to states of various relative strengths to navigate an international environment ridden with both incentives for collaboration and competition. While a pact between stronger and weaker states consistently resulted in the former's domination over the latter, Kautilya advised considering both immediate gain and potential future gain. The clear principles of entering partnerships are strength, reliability, and convergence of interest.

Qualities of a good ally include constancy, being under control, quickly mobilising, hereditary, strength, and reliability. Among these, one under control though inconstant was preferable; constant though giving small help was preferable; and small mobilising quickly was preferable to big mobilising slowly. Kautilya advises forming partnerships with two equals

rather than one stronger, and two weaker rather than one equal, to accomplish tasks without risking control. This is arguably the strategic-cultural roots of India's plurilateral approach at the world stage, through its participation in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), and the Quad.

The nuanced understanding of forming partnerships and entering alliances is reverberated in the study of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* too. There is a culturally conditioned opposition to bandwagoning and proclivity towards balancing when faced with a third power. Rama in his fight against Ravana sought the friendship of ousted and weak Sugriva instead of bandwagoning with the mighty Vali. Further, Duryodhana's choice of the presumably weak Karna who had fallen out with Arjuna recounts the importance of the loyalty and resoluteness of a weak and aggrieved ally. "By assisting the rival of a rival, Duryodhana was effectively assisting a friend" echoes the Kautilyan dictum "trouble produces firmness in friendship."[16]

In several ways, India's relations with the United States and its slow but steady upward trajectory since the turn of the century has been largely circumscribed by these inclinations. From an uncertain incipient stage of the bilateral relations in the 1990s to the increasingly pivotal roles the two countries have come to play for each other to attain their national interests, highlight the salience of factors like convergence of interest, overlapping perceptions of the external threat, and relative power. On India's part, this is equally matched by the deep scepticism about partnering, and strong resistance to aligning with a stronger power, and therefore tendencies to diversify, display mixed strategy of accommodation and resistance, alongside internal capacity building to mitigate risks. The US, despite "its peculiar and particular synonymity between partnership and alliance" is slowly coming to terms with India's "own way"[17] of upholding the rules-based international order, and the nuanced understanding of 'partnership' shaped by the idea to "align without being aligned."[18]

Conclusion

The world is between orders, and the increased competition and mistrust, shrinking global assurances, improved participation by previously less active players amid fractured multilateralism, ought to be addressed with nuance and vision. When all the major actors are changing course belying their long-held foreign policy fundamentals, India is securely tethered to its unchanging national character, broadly shaped by its historical legacy, through a matrix of three factors—perception, principle, and pragmatism—alluding to independence of judgment and pursuit of self-reliance, mutuality of respect, and no desire to impose our model on others, respectively.[19]

Its civilisational identity places it in a unique position to stimulate cooperation, moderate competition, emphasise inclusivity, shun bloc approaches, and herald a democratic and rules-based order. This is not solely because India seeks a responsible international role, but because it is simultaneously aligned with its core national interests and multicentre worldview.

Endnotes

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GOOD DEMOCRACY, BAD DEMOCRACY, AND THE QUEST FOR PROGRESS

Bibek Debroy

INDIA IS OFTEN DESCRIBED as the largest democracy in the world. The contours of that democracy, in its current form, are defined through the framework set by the Constitution. India is also one of the world's oldest democracies, with its democratic traditions being rooted thousands of years ago,[1] personified in the *sabha*s and *samiti*s which had parallels in ancient Greece and Rome, too. The difference between these two entities, and their respective roles, evolved over time and, accordingly, the description varies across texts. Stated simply, however, the *samiti* was like a general assembly, with representation from every household; the *sabha,* meanwhile, was a smaller group akin to an executive committee, which also had judicial functions.[2] The *sabha* was a sub-set of the *samiti*.

As modern states do, these ancient collective bodies took various decisions that involved participation, discussions, and trade-offs. These decisions lead to consequences and rare is the situation where a decision benefits everyone concerned. If situation X leads to an outcome that is better than situation Y for everyone, economists describe X as being 'Pareto superior' to Y. In most instances, however, Pareto superiority will be hard to come by. A decision leads to gains for some and losses for others. Those need to be traded off against each other and the overall gains (or losses) to society gauged. Therefore, in welfare economics, there is a body of theoretical work on compensation principles. Regardless of whether or not compensation can be implemented, there is a need for inter-personal (or inter-household)

comparisons of gains or losses. This is virtually impossible, as one needs not only inter-personal comparisons but cardinal measurement as well. With ordinal measurement alone and a reasonable set of assumptions, one meets with problems discussed in social choice theory, spawned by Kenneth Arrow's initial work.[3]

Arrow's initial possibility/impossibility theorem, defined by those reasonable sets of axioms, led to the existence of a dictator. Relaxation of the Arrow assumptions have led to hierarchies and oligarchies, without getting away from the basic problem—i.e., aggregating individual preferences into a preference by the collective body. That is what democracy is made of.

Some decisions are, by nature, more complicated than others. As collective bodies grow in size, decisions become more complicated. In contemporary jargon, a *sabha* typified representative democracy, and a *samiti* typified direct democracy. Except for purely local decisions, direct democracy rarely works. The collective body becomes too large for participation, discussion, and trade-offs. Modern States have thus moved away from direct democracy, even in the oft-cited Swiss canons. An extreme example of direct democracy is a referendum. But a referendum works when the choice is a binary of either accepting or rejecting a specific proposal; the Brexit referendum is a case in point. Rare is the collective decision, where pros and cons have to be discussed, that is of such a binary nature.

The *panchayati raj* structure illustrates the difference. The nomenclature varies slightly across the country, but there is a three-tier structure, with a *Zila Parishad* (district-level), *Panchayat Samiti* (block-level) and a *Gram Panchayat* (village-level). There is a completely separate argument about decision-making in India being too centralised, driven by pre-Independence colonial considerations and post-Independence planning priorities. A number of commissions and committees have flagged this and decentralisation of decision-making goes beyond fiscal devolution alone.[4] It is a matter of decentralising from Union to States, and within States, down to local bodies.[5] In India's governance structure, there is the Union government, State governments, and local government. For every collective decision, there is an optimal level at which it ought to be taken—Union, State, and Local. Both above and below are sub-optimal and there is a convincing argument that the present structure is excessively centralised and sub-optimal.[6] This still begs the question, though: Once the level at which a decision has to be taken is fixed, does the entire collective body assemble to take the decision, or is it an elected sub-set of the general body? At the level of the village, the Gram Sabha is the counterpart of the general body, but decisions will typically be taken by the elected Gram Panchayat, with subsequent information to the Gram Sabha.

In other words, democracy is per force representative, not direct. Taken somewhat out of context, this is nothing but Olson's paradox.[7] Large groups debate and dither. The United Nations (UN) General Assembly is an instance. Smaller groups are faster at decision-making. One reason is that efficient decision-making requires access to information, which cannot always be shared among larger groups. Would a referendum have been conceivable, for example, before either of the Pokhran tests in 1974 and 1998? Can one opt for a referendum when external and internal security are at stake? Etymologically, democracy means rule by the people. In complex societies, however, people do not rule directly but rather indirectly, through elected representatives.

Today it has become fashionable to rank countries across various indicators. Yet, these indicators often reflect value judgements. One classifies the indicators into heads, assigns weights to them, and obtains an index for each head. One then ascribes weights to the heads and obtains a value of the index for the country or the State concerned. They thus succeed in quantifying and measuring something that is often immeasurable and intangible, suggesting a robustness that does not exist. It becomes worse when objective data are not available. Regardless of the small size of the sample, one administers a perception-based questionnaire, asks respondents to score on a scale, adds those up, and obtains a score. This is done for many areas of public policy and the studies lack the transparency they themselves advocate. For democracy, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) is the organisation that attempts the impossible. In its 2022 ranking, India is described as a 'flawed democracy', as is France.[8] The United States is also described as a 'flawed democracy'. Britain is described as a 'full democracy', although the recent workings of its democracy have revealed certain flaws, evident to anyone who is not an insider. Canada is a 'full democracy'—a country where aboriginals (both men and women) did not have a right to vote until 1960. In India, following the promulgation of the Constitution, the first national elections were held in 1951-52, according all adults universal suffrage.

According to the EIU too, Australia is a 'full democracy'. Yet, it was only in 1962 when indigenous Australians were allowed to vote. Another country classified as a 'full democracy' is Switzerland, where until 1971, women could not vote in national elections.

Regardless of what such surveys tell us, some points are obvious. First, traditions of democracy in India go back thousands of years. This is perhaps why, in contrast to some of its immediate neighbours, India has had uninterrupted democracy—barring the aberration of the Emergency period between June 1975 and March 1977. Second, notwithstanding the cynicism and non-participation of the urban elite, voter turnout in India is remarkably high, across all tiers of elections. For instance, as a cross-country comparison, in the 2019 Parliamentary elections, voter turnout in India was 67.4 percent. In Britain—classified by EIU as a 'full democracy'—the voter turnout in the 2019 Parliamentary elections was 67.55 percent.[9]

Third, every citizen and every voter in every country will have complaints about the working of the democratic process and its flaws in their own country. But that is not an argument against democracy. Indeed, democracy is often compared to oxygen: it is appreciated only when it is absent. As Winston Churchill said in an oft-quoted speech in the House of Commons in November 1947: "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."[10]

> **"**Traditions of democracy in India go back thousands of years. In contrast to some of its neighbours, India has had uninterrupted democracy—barring the aberration of the Emergency period.

The question is perhaps whether there is a correlation between democracy and development. To begin with, both terms—'democracy' and 'development'—are subject to various interpretations and there is enough literature that has examined the cross-country correlations between them.

At one level, one can argue that democracy is an end in itself; that it is a value one ought to strive for and not merely a means towards the end of development. Assuming there is a positive correlation, however, the correlation does not imply causation. The efficient functioning of democracy can lead to superior development outcomes; superior development outcomes can then lead to pressures for a better functioning democracy. Indeed, across the world, there has been a transition from lack of democracy to democracy.

The correlation between the two can also be spurious, in the sense of being caused by something extraneous. Much the same can be said of a term allied to democracy—that of 'governance'. The World Bank's set of governance indicators is based on six dimensions of voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption.[11] Subject to what was said earlier about problems of cross-country comparisons, these dimensions

do overlap with notions of democracy. Having said this, the cross-country empirical literature suggests that democracy is neither a necessary, nor a sufficient, condition for development. Nor is it the case that authoritarian regimes are conducive to development. Selective evidence from East Asia, with China and Vietnam included, or authoritarian oil-rich countries, do not establish the proposition.

Admittedly, democratic processes are slower, compared to authoritarian ones. This does not mean an authoritarian decision is superior. Democracy may slow down the taking of a good decision, from the welfare point of view, but it also provides checks and limits the chances of taking a bad decision. Therefore, expressions like 'democracy tax' look at only one side. There is also an element of a 'democracy subsidy'.

In 2022, CUTS International examined the economic impact of select cases before the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal. Studying five cases, the study observed that between mid-2018 and mid-2021, around 75,000 persons in India were adversely impacted by those decisions, and some 16,000 workers lost their jobs. "The government did not receive revenues of around Rs. 8,000 crores, which, if were received and invested as capital expenditure, could have resulted in economic impact of more than Rs. 20,000 crores. The industry lost close to Rs. 15,000 crores in

revenues, and workers lost around Rs. 500 crores of income, during the aforementioned period."[12] To be sure, one can sympathise with the arguments against judicial over-reach and the failure of judiciary to undertake proper judicial impact assessments.[13]

In any democracy, what are the institutions that help build democracy? The Constitution describes three organs of State: legislature, executive, and judiciary, in both Union and State-level governments. Not all of these are elected. If the term 'governance' is used, as the World Bank's indicators also illustrate, *governance* must be broader than *government*. Indeed, governance and democracy involve citizens, civil society and media too, and the Constitution's Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 51A[14]) also spell out the fundamental duties of citizens.

India has a thriving civil society and media that can rival those in so-called full democracies. Citizens are right to point a finger towards the imperfect functioning of the organs of State. These act as countervailing pressures. In particular, one should mention the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)[15] and PRS Legislative Research.[16] Such exercises improve transparency and accountability and their focus has been on the functioning of Parliament.[17] There is relatively less scrutiny of executive and judiciary since they are not elected.

While the criticisms are in order, two points need to be mentioned. First, India, like many other countries, is an indirect and representative democracy. If one undermines faith in the institutions of governance, that undermines democracy, rather than strengthening it. Second, other than pointing a finger outwards, there is also the question of pointing inwards, at the extent to which individuals and enterprises help build democracy within their own ambits. After all, the Preamble to the Constitution begins with the words, "We the People".

Indeed, we the People have built democracy in India for thousands of years. *Per se*, that democracy is good and an end in itself. The pursuit of that democracy, and its perfection, is one pursuit of progress. The imperfections can be described as "bad". But for most Indians, democracy is non-negotiable.

Endnotes

1   Some of these strands are documented in *India: The Mother of Democracy*, Raghuvendra Tanwar and Umesh Ashok Kadam, eds. (Indian Council of Historical Research, 2022).

2   In *Rig Veda* descriptions, there is no evidence of a gender bias.

3   Kenneth J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (Yale University Press, 1951).

4   The First Administrative Reforms Commission (1966), Rajmannar Committee (1969), Sarkaria Commission (1983), the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2005) and the Punchhi Commission (2007) are examples. Reflecting the mindset, the Punchhi Commission was called the Commission on Centre State Relations, suggesting a Centre at the core and States at the periphery. The Constitution uses the word 'Union,' not 'Centre,' though 'Centre' is routinely used.

5   States have been reluctant to devolve downwards to Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies (ULBs). There is also a broader issue of revamping the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, based essentially on the Government of India Act of 1935.

6   There is the tangential but related argument of state formation. States have not been constituted on governance principles—not at the time of the States Reorganization Commission or subsequently.

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14 Inserted in 1977.

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17 For example, productivity, electoral affidavits, criminalisation of politics, and politicisation of criminals.
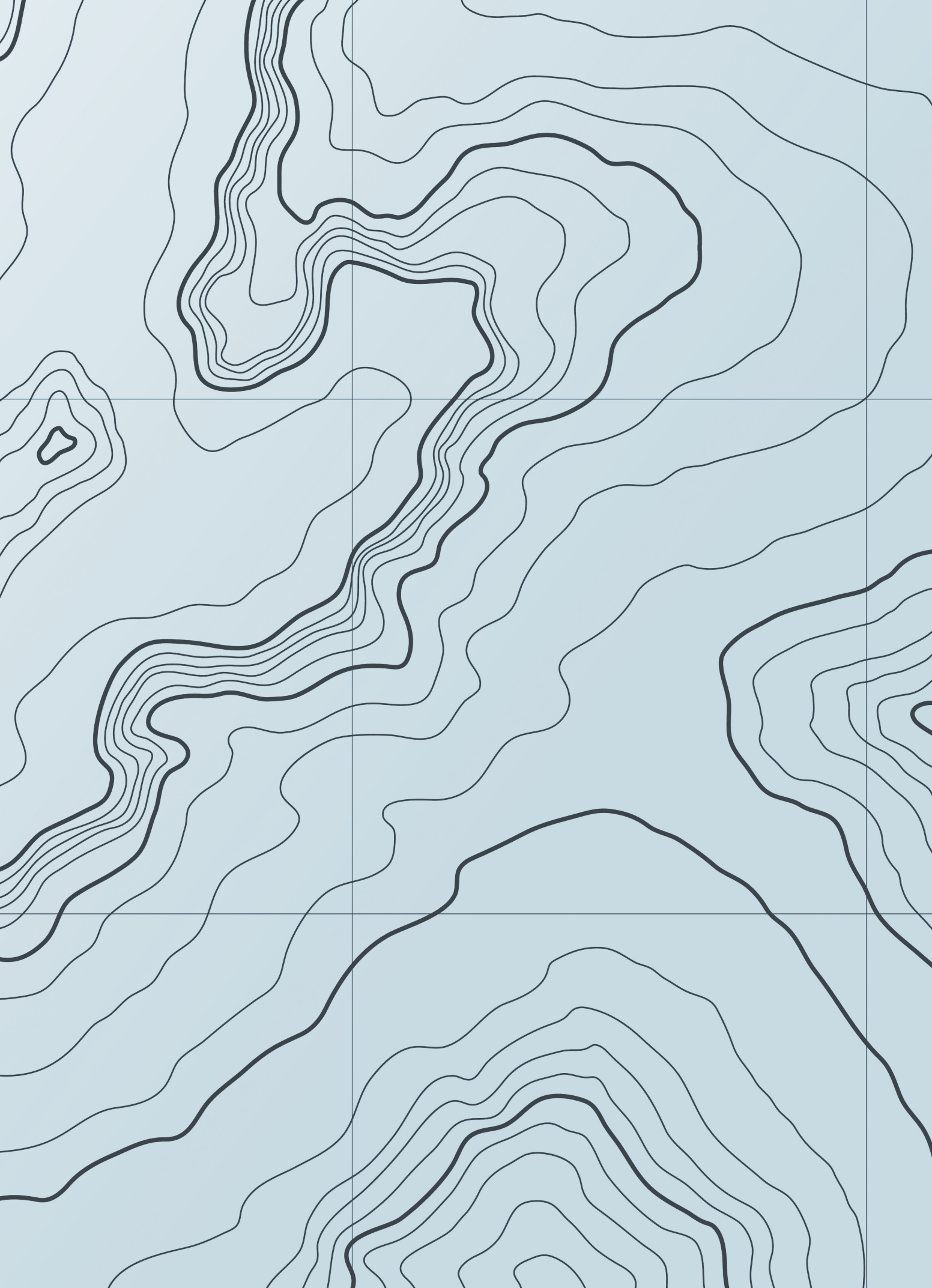
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