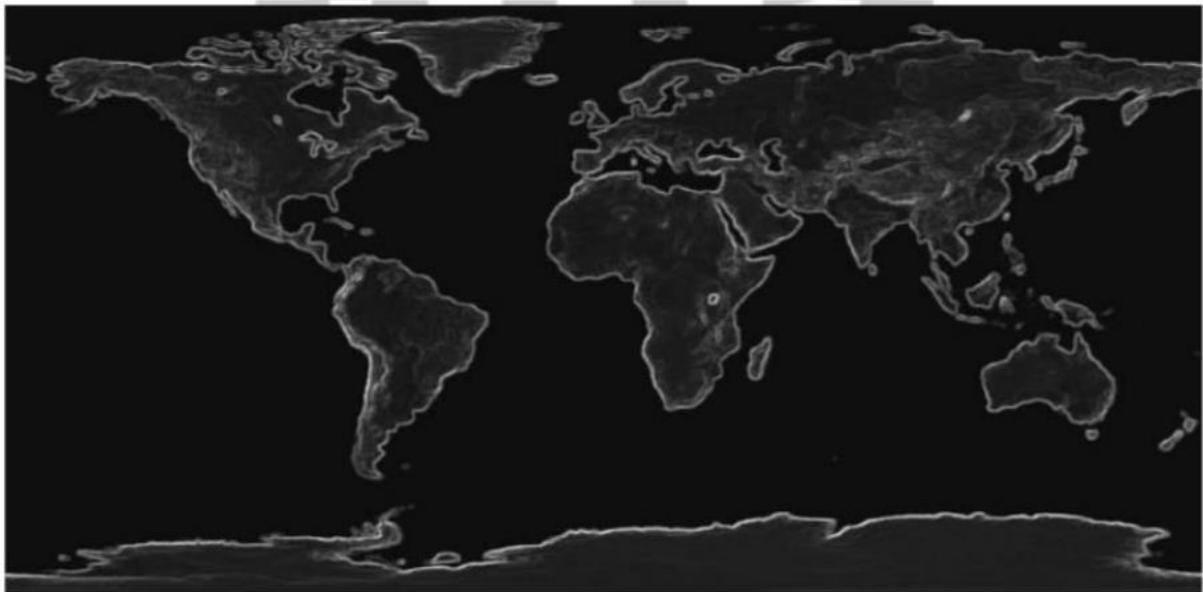




RISE OF INDIA IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

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Introduction

The Prime Minister was quick to suspend international and domestic travel, implement contact tracing and exposure, scale-up manufacture of medical equipment, and expand diagnostics. These measures were coupled with the most extensive lockdowns the world has ever witnessed. Yet, one cannot deny that, several factors, such as the migrant issues that were not considered before declaring the ‘lockdown.’

The COVID-19 situation has unsympathetically highlighted political and social shortcomings and failures of our country, especially when we pride ourselves on being the world’s largest democracy and the fifth-largest economy. The age-old fault lines of caste, class, and creed have been highlighted. These existing inequalities have resulted in many people getting severely affected because of the economic distress. Lockdown was necessary in order to put a pause on the spread of the COVID-19.

Unfortunately, the manner of its implementation, lack of planning, coordination with the states in advance, lack of foreseeing the consequences of the steps, or spelling out how it would affect millions of lives has resulted in very harsh conditions for the people. The brunt of this mismanagement had to be faced by the weaker sections of our population, especially the [migrants](#). It wouldn't be wrong to say that, unlike international outreach, domestic outreach was much less organized.

Nevertheless, if these steps were not taken on time, the situation would have been very different. There could have been an exponential increase in the number of cases in the early stage itself. The current situation of the medical infrastructure and the overall population would have made it even more challenging to deal with the situation in relative comparison to how India is facing it right now.

The world order is undoubtedly expected to change in the post-COVID-19 era. Currently, it is a US-led world order. However, it has been speculated by all academicians, scholars, policymakers, and even world leaders that it might be a China-led world order once the COVID-19 is over. The current crisis will result in a review of the foreign policy by each country. The question now lies as to what will be the international standing of India in the geopolitics, once the pandemic is over. However, before India’s upcoming position in the new world order is [analysed](#), it is first essential to outline its steps during the COVID-19 crisis.

India's Diplomatic Outreach

The COVID-19 response is two-fold – first, the government focuses on the domestic front and second, is the international front. India has supplied hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), a commonly used drug to cure COVID-19, to not just its neighbours but also to around 85 countries owing to which it has earned the title of “the drugstore of the world.” There are several steps that are being taken by the government as part of its efforts on the international front.”

When all the countries were busy battling the COVID-19 pandemic, the [SAARC video conference](#) was a bold step that promoted regional cooperation, which was followed up with a conference. Prime Minister has also initiated the creation of *COVID 19 Emergency Fund*



and a *Rapid Response Team* and a contribution of \$10 million was initially made to this fund. The funds have been operationalized to ensure that the demands of urgent medical supplies and equipment are fulfilled. Also, an information exchange platform (IEP) of experts from various countries was organized to share and exchange their experiences concerning the pandemic. It was undoubtedly beneficial to the country as the COVID-19 outreach is stretching with each passing day. These kinds of gestures are essential to send out a message that India is there in times of need. It is these gestures that will lead to cooperation and mutual coordination in the future.

Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Bin Salman, hailed the Prime Minister for the SAARC video conference initiatives and the regional strategy. He also suggested that the G-20 be expanded to create broader consensus and expanded cooperation to tackle the crisis. A statement like this from the Prince has significant emphasis. There have been meager cross investments between India and the Gulf in the past. However, that has transformed now as the current Prime Minister built close ties with the monarchs of both Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia.

India has also sent out many medical pieces of equipment to countries like Iran and Malaysia, thereby mending its relationships. India also sent the C-17 Globemaster III - a heavy military transport aircraft with experts and medical equipment to set up a testing lab in Iran as the country did not have the necessary testing facility to test the Indian nationals. By donating these labs to Iran, India has shown friendship and cooperation in these unusual times. Such steps will further boost our vision of 'Link West Policy' in the region in the post-COVID-19 era. However, matters are not going smoothly with regards to the ties with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), especially after issuing travel bans a couple of weeks ago in some countries in West Asia. Nevertheless, India has been keen to create new ties and strengthen the old ones with the Gulf region countries.

Through Iran's Chabahar port, India has also sent wheat consignments to Afghanistan. India has also agreed to supply anti-malarial drugs to Malaysia, indicating an improvement in bilateral relations with the country after the recent controversy about the country's prime minister's statements and the subsequent ban on palm oil imports.

It is essential for India to reach out in this region as it hosts an immense economic significance. Building cooperation at this juncture is a prerequisite for India's standing in the region in the long term in the post-COVID 19 world.

Apart from these, one of the major steps taken by India was to evacuate citizens of different countries along with its citizens. Under the [Vande Bharat](#) mission, the Indian government repatriated about 360,000 Indians. Overall, 513,000 people have registered to be repatriated. Air India Flights and even the Indian Navy was involved in the evacuation program [Samudra Setu](#) to bring back Indian. Currently, the 3rd phase is ongoing, and the 4th phase would commence in the next month.

India has also repatriated nationals of other Indian Ocean Region (IOR) countries such as Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the Maldives, to name a few. The required arrangements for quarantine have also been made as a precautionary measure before sending them back. In terms of humanitarian or disaster relief assistance (HA/DR), these are unique but much-



required actions. However, these actions are mainly restricted to the Indo Pacific Region, thereby highlighting India's 'Indo-Pacific vision' and its 'Neighbourhood First Policy.'

In times of crisis, the world generally used to look up to the United States for leadership. However, currently, the USA is itself not in a position to lead the world as it has now become the epicenter for the virus with the maximum number of cases, surpassing China, where the virus originated. So far, Western Europe, including the UK, has not been able to handle their domestic situation properly resulting in the loss of any leadership in times of crisis from the West.

We cannot rely on international organizations anymore. World Health Organization, the international organization responsible for 'attainment by all people of the highest possible level of health,' is itself under scanner for all the wrong [reasons](#). The WHO did not declare it COVID-19 as a pandemic until 4 March 2020. By then, already about 114 countries got affected by it, hence proving that WHO could not even live up to its own definition of 'pandemic.'

This situation made India seem like a responsible stakeholder against the relative backdrop of significant countries. This is because India has taken small yet significant steps to help multiple countries, whether it is the neighbours or the allies.

So far, countries are unsurprisingly focussing on just the domestic front while on the other hand, India is also focussing on dealing with the virus on the international front as well. Unfortunately, since most of the major powers are preoccupied with containing the virus, a global engagement may not seem like a priority to anybody. This scenario led to the creation of a leaderless void that India has tried to fill by providing medical and humanitarian assistance to several parts of the world. India has been able to take up this leadership role primarily because it is in a better position for containing the virus in comparison to other countries.

However, one cannot deny that even China is trying to establish a leadership role through medical assistance. However, with its mishandling of the COVID-19, it is currently facing immense backlash from the world.

India has a multi-faceted approach in dealing with the crisis. Providing medical assistance to countries beyond its neighbouring countries is known as India's 'medical diplomacy.' Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently, stated, "If you help someone when they need it to face a crisis, the gesture will not be forgotten easily."

It points out that these diplomatic outreaches can turn favourable for India in the future as these gestures establish India as a reliable friend and an ally to depend upon during hardship. India's diplomatic outreach can prove beneficial for India to attain a global leadership position in the world as this display of soft power can help increase its established dominance at the global level.

Nevertheless, only if India sets an example on the domestic and international fronts, can it play the leadership role. As India wishes to play a leadership role, mere global cooperation and establishing ties on the bilateral and multilateral fronts is not enough. It would have to present a vision for a more inclusive world defined by international cooperation. The global



outreach project can only be successful if the virus is effectively contained domestically. It will help India to portray it as a flawless role model as well as help in terms of outreach.

The whole South Asian region has been severely affected by the novel coronavirus. Although the numbers are far better than the West, the COVID-19 has led to an economic downturn. China will eventually use this situation to take advantage of the economic woes of the country and increase its influence in the Indian Ocean region like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Mauritius, to name a few.

The post-COVID-19 world could witness significant political and strategic shifts in the region. China has much influence in the South Asia countries, which are not only neighbouring countries of India, but also holding strategic locations in the Indian Ocean region.

“Hence, once the COVID-19 is over, India’s main priority should be to tackle the Chinese influence in the region and revise its foreign policies with particular emphasis on its neighbours – Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, China, and Pakistan.”

It will have to bring about a major [change](#) in its foreign policy.

CONCLUSION

Before the COVID-19, China, for long, had been showcasing its supremacy through its lucrative idea of Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Afghanistan, and Nepal.

China was already investing in various infrastructure projects, including seaport development, energy, and road construction, across multiple among many neighbouring countries. In this manner, it has become one of the most prominent investors in the region.

COVID-19 has resulted in a global economic slowdown which has significantly threatened the livelihoods in South Asia. In the post-COVID era, it could be possible that China would further make inroads and strengthen its position in the Indian Ocean by deepening ties with countries that are already witnessing heavy influence in their respective regions and could potentially cause significant political and strategic shifts in the region.

Many economies would fall to dust, and China is bound to take advantage of this situation by acting as a friend by bailing out South Asia’s indebted governments. Although they can go to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), it will likely not take long for them to turn to China for help. With this expansion, China will also become one of the largest lenders in the region. If the respective governments are unable to pay back the debts and fall into the trap and turn them into “economic colonies” of China, it would not be surprising. These developments are a matter of India’s political, cultural, economic, and security concerns.



To counter this, India took the initiative to develop a regional response to the threat posed by COVID-19. Nonetheless, that is not enough. The Indian economy is one-fifth to that of the Chinese economy. India cannot win the numbers games with China. So, India would have to align with the West to counter China's influence. Even the Europeans and the Americans are concerned with the rising power of China. There is already an rising “anti-China” sentiment that currently prevails across the world.

So, the only country in the region that can oppose China in India. However, these developments would land India in significant crossroads. At some point, it would be pressed to make decisions in many affairs that are contrary to one or the other power.

For long, India has had the option to stay away from converting its slogans into foreign policies. There are many international issues, where India has remained silent or has not taken a firm stance. That has to change now. India has been busy making alliances with both big and small, weak, and powerful countries. It will, nonetheless, only increase the duties and responsibilities with regards to ensuring order and security in the neighborhood. Not only that, it will inevitably drag the country in the various international rivalries existing in several regions of the world. In this manner, India's freedom to remain silent or have an unclear position on several international issues will be reduced..

Hence, India needs to look inwards and rely on itself as much as possible. Only an independent country can be considered as a rising power in the global order. India has the potential to do the same. It has a massive labor force of over 500 million people, the fourth largest military in the world, and a formidable consumer market. The people are ready to work to ensure the betterment of the country.

“With the rising “anti-China” sentiments among the general public, it is the right time for creating public reforms and moving ahead on in the path of “vocal for local.”

Major [economic reforms](#) need to take place. Since the economic slowdown in 2016, not much has been done in this regard. Even the domestic manufacturing setup is not sufficient to meet the demands of the country. The Chinese giants are currently dominating the fields of almost all daily goods and services. Similarly, the defence sector is heavily dependent on imports from other countries. If these factors are taken care of by providing infrastructural growth, then one can state that India is on the path of becoming one of the most influential global actors. All of these elements would take time. There is no doubt about it that it is a long road ahead. Nevertheless, future India and the West alliance can guarantee India the glory that it deserved for a long time.

KEYWORDS –



India, COVID-19, Foreign Policy, Neighbours, China, South Asia

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