

# A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD ORDER

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India's Foreign Policy evolution and changes

A technician prepares COVID-19 coronavirus patient samples for testing at a laboratory in New York's Long Island on March 11, 2020. | Photo Credit: [AP](#)

As the world starts recovering from the debilitating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, nations will draw on all their reserves to ensure that their place in the global pecking order is largely maintained. Among many factors, dogma, ideology and notions of power merit serious attention as non-quantifiable national characteristics that could either impede or accelerate the recovery process.

Dogma has traditionally been linked to religious beliefs. Since World War II, however, it has incorporated several strains of ideological and enduring civilisational beliefs. Take the case of China, for example, which is attempting to upstage, or at least match, the U.S. as the principal global hegemon. Realising that mere ideology was not enough to propel it to that position, Mao Zedong's successors have drawn on two civilisational markers from Chinese history that have troubled the Chinese people for centuries: the 'Middle Kingdom' syndrome and 'the Century of Humiliation'. While the first marker builds on the glory of the Ming Dynasty (late 14th century to mid-17th century) and the centrality of the Han people in a world order that saw China as the most prosperous nation in the world, it also reminds the Chinese people of the dangers that lurk around its periphery. Chinese leaders often draw attention to the Mongol rule (late 13th century to mid-14th century) and over two centuries of misrule by the Manchus and the Qing Dynasty (mid-17th century to early 20th century) as examples of this. The second marker draws on the stripping of China of its honour and resources by multiple colonial powers during the 'Century of Humiliation' from the mid-19th century to the time of the emergence of the People's Republic of China in 1949. These markers from Chinese history have gradually become dogma and seen as a blot on Chinese history that need resolution.

Realising in the 1980s that Maoist ideology no longer appealed to the Chinese people, Deng reintroduced Confucianism as a much-needed intellectual and ethical prop to China's push for 'great power' status. Sun Tzu re-emerged as China's answer to Clausewitz and for a few decades it appeared that these would soften traditional Chinese dogma. It also raised hopes that China would largely play by the existing rules and bide its time.

Xi Jinping, however, has been a leader in a hurry. In the process, he has perpetuated the deepened hurt of the Chinese people to an extent that it has become embedded dogma. He has abandoned Confucianism and the ethical pursuit of power, and fallen back on hard-core communist ideology. Hard power and muscular nationalism coupled with a neo-colonial and mercantilist attitude towards vulnerable nations seems to be the new strategy to compete with the U.S. While this strategy seemed to be working at a time when the U.S. appeared to be looking inwards and showing signs of strategic fatigue, President Xi's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative demonstrated an overreach that had the potential to backfire as it created a sense of fear of, rather than respect for, China. Then came the pandemic and it is worth pondering over whether holding on to historical dogma, ideology and notions of power will hold the same potential in the accumulation of power, or whether nations which are willing to live in the moment and be sensitive to the global environment will fare better. China will be worse off should it prefer the former course. Its continued aggressive posture along the Line of Actual Control only confirms this rigid position.

The U.S.'s recovery will be impeded by embedded notions of power which have resulted in a

strategic oversight and fatigue of sorts. The pandemic has tested the U.S. state's capacity, capability and competency. However, the U.S.'s economic resilience, restless people, institutional robustness and intellectual reserves will help it pull through.

India is neither afflicted by unreasonable expectations of power, ideological dogma, or haunted by accentuated perceptions of historical hurt. Despite its own centuries of conquest and exploitation by invaders and colonial powers, it has demonstrated resilience, learnt to let go and embraced the good that emerged from the centuries of darkness. That is a demonstration of flexibility, which is good in troubled times such as these. Yes, it does have societal fissures and serious issues of compliance, but those can be mended with national resilience and improved public discipline and good leadership. If India weathers the entire pandemic cycle as it has coped with the initial storm, it should be better placed than the two leading powers to recover. It will be a fascinating global strategic landscape to observe as a post-COVID-19 world order emerges, and for sure, India could play an important role in its possible transformation.

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