

Globalisation and Pakistan's Security Environment

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Kofi Annan once said that 'globalisation is a fact of life, but I believe we have underestimated its fragility'. Nelson Mandela's reflection will perhaps define the notion further, that it is appropriate to take measures 'where globalisation means, as it so often does, that the rich and powerful now have new means to further enrich and empower themselves at the cost of the poorer and weaker'. It is hence important for the states to ensure that globalisation – by means of spreading 'products, technology, information, and jobs across national borders and cultures', as Investopedia defines it – becomes a source of peace, stability and development rather than spiralling into a nuisance for the developing world and millions of its marginalized populations.

Relevant enquiries at several levels of analysis in this regard would revolve around some basic postulates: Are the global and regional economies, societies, and cultures becoming integrated through a network of communication and trade? Or is the world becoming more polarised? How is the so-called globalisation affecting Pakistan's security environment? And so on and so forth.

An examination of globalisation at the systemic and regional levels can provide clearer answers to its impact on traditional and non-traditional elements of Pakistan's security environment. A sharp empirical evaluation brings forth various vicissitudes in globalisation. These factors affect Pakistan's integration into the global mainstream of trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration and the democratisation of emerging and disruptive technologies.

The process of globalisation has slowed down due to multitude of factors. Although it took root in the nineteenth century, the victors of Second World War could truly propel globalisation after former Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991. Just less than two decades later, West-led globalisation began losing vigour once China's thirty-year economic reformation begun maturing in 2007 and the 2008 financial crisis hit the world.

Covid-19 has further fragmented the world in terms of protectionism, nationalism, unilateralism, heightened barriers against migration, disruption of supply chains and

stiffening competition to gain competitive advantage in emerging technologies. Pakistan's economy has been affected by the pandemic in a comparable manner.

The ongoing economic transformations worldwide add another angle to this consideration. Beijing is one of globe's top bankers today, and its economic wellbeing is intrinsically linked to those of its competitors. In containing and confronting China, its competitors risk a common economic loss. The smaller economies like Pakistan must tread a fine line to remain afloat and rise amid this stiffening competition. The acme of Islamabad's diplomacy would be to avoid taking sides during the uncertain period of contestation between global players, especially between Washington and Beijing.

Except China and Pakistan, most of the governments of major and minor economies faced threats to their survival due to their inability to properly respond to economic challenges. China was most competent in rising to the economic challenge after pandemic and the country's economic heft increased. However, the American economy had to struggle. For instance, unemployment initially touched 51.5 percent. Interestingly, there were some pockets of opportunities as well – the profits of some online vendors soared to 220 percent.

Amongst myriad factors, the relations between China and the U.S. shall affect the future of globalisation and how it impacts Pakistan. The two giants have asymmetric policies if viewed from globalisation's vantage points. China's Belt and Road Initiative is an economic outreach for its 'peaceful rise' and 'common destiny'. Beijing so far believes that the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions are large enough to accommodate several competing economic interests. This paradigm almost overlaps with the goals set for so-called globalisation.

On the other hand, the U.S. seeks economic engagements with other states while keeping a keen eye on crucial contours of China's containment. It has a declared policy of 'cooperation, competition and even confrontation'. Washington is swiftly posturing towards a relationship based on confrontation with Beijing. Such bearing will have consequences for globalisation that the U.S. itself championed after 1991.

Although China's economic heft and partnerships have increased, the U.S. still leverages immense global influence mainly through its alliance system. The Indo-Pacific axis with India, Japan and Australia is one of the tools in American kit to maintain a 'rules-based order' that it shaped after winning the Second World War. This and Washington's strategic

partnership with New Delhi has accentuated Pakistan's security dilemma and its challenges to benefit from globalisation.

Some experts are of the view that China has risen and has the potential to reshape the West dominated world order. If the end or disruption of so-called Pax Americana is in sight, as recently discussed in a *Foreign Affairs* article, it will perceptibly not occur in an unassuming fashion. Anything pointed towards disturbing the American Century is likely to jolt the globalisation process it has led since the sunset of the twentieth century.

Another scholarly debate revolves around possible fallouts of U.S.-China competition. That instead of cultures becoming integrated through communication and trade networks, this competition shall force the world to take sides. In a more polarised world, globalisation is likely to be the first casualty.

The space, sea, air and cyber domains used to be the glue that held the prospects of globalising together. Now, these have become the most competitive domains. The space has been weaponised. The U.S., Russia, China and India have tested anti-satellite weapons and their competition on land is reaching space. Maritime contestation has increased amid growing threats to sea-lanes of communication and the competition to mine is depleting polar caps.

Likewise, the competition to excel in emerging technologies, such as the development of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWS) and offensive use of cyber space, is also a leading threat to globalisation. Pakistan is the only nuclear power that calls for a pre-emptive ban on development of LAWS. Likewise, a crisis between global powers in cyber domain can not only affect globalisation but can lead to a nuclear crisis with global consequences.

Pakistan is caught between several external and domestic odds and is deftly maintaining a delicate balance. The pragmatic foreign policy is focused on keeping a balance in relations instead of taking sides between the U.S. and China – Islamabad's relations with both are not hyphenated. Historically, Pakistan was instrumental in the rapprochement between the U.S. and China in 1970s.

The gravest challenge for Pakistan to globalise is financial. The latest blow has been Covid-19. For instance, the pandemic vitiated weak health sector of Pakistan. The prices spiked and the poor were the worst hit once there was shortage of medical supplies. The rich became richer, and their savings rates soared. The challenges increased in technological

domains, both due to the disruption of global supply chains and because Western restrictions on export of high-end technologies to Pakistan have increased.

Although Pakistan government's handling of Covid related crisis was exemplary, it faced some criticism even though it won accolades from West for reviving the economy. Forbes predicted that Pakistan's economy is expected to grow at 4 percent due to prudent policies of the government. Some estimates, however, forecast that almost PKR 1.1 trillion loss will be observed in FY 2021, affecting livelihoods of some 7.15 million workers. The internal circular and external debts are likely to increase. The economic situation alone can drastically affect Pakistan's prospects of managing pace within a fast changing and increasingly competitive world.

Given the intrinsic integration of traditional and non-traditional security sectors, a state needs to remain focused on its political stability, economic viability, and sociocultural affinity. The efficacy and sustainability of relevant governance structures and human capital is a must to complement this vision and gain a competitive edge. Joseph Stiglitz aptly pointed out in his book *Making Globalization Work* that 'development is about transforming the lives of people, not just transforming economies'. This direction will let any country benefit from globalisation while also being prepared to deal with its discontents.

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