



Looking at the post-COVID World: The China Dimension

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CHAIR: Amb. Ashok K. Kantha

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The seminar focussed on how the post-COVID world, especially China, would look like in terms of the global political scenario. The speaker kicked off the seminar by giving a basic idea of the general outcomes, which are an extrapolated view of the current scenarios- there will be an acceleration of existing trends, new elements will be introduced into the picture as long as the pandemic lasts, and the constant blame-game will make relationships between the global powers much rougher in the future. The emphasis was on the fact that the longer the crisis, the more likely we are to stumble on newer elements which we would have to deal with.

He went on to point out that while one part of the world was busy fighting the crisis, another part has been relentless in diverting the blame onto others. This, he rightly pointed out, would cause serious cracks in relationships among countries in a manner that would have a huge impact in the post-COVID political scenario. China, which has been gradually winning the confidence of the rest of the world, was blamed for its incompetence in containing the virus as well as criticised for its shady approach towards revealing reliable data. He compared this scenario with that of the post 9/11 situation when the US allowed for an independent investigation into the matter, which helped the US to regain confidence and credibility. Such an action was not welcome in China, who not only dismissed the idea of an independent investigation but also commented that whatever may be the investigation, the result has already been decided by the West. This comment was not only hurtful for the West but also distorts

China's credibility among the rest of the world. However, he raised doubts about this strengthening or weakening China's political power in the future. The speaker attributes this blame-game to the fact that governments were sorely unprepared to face the situation. He highlights that governments are not supportive of each other and in fact, it has become a shouting game, pointing to the lack of solidarity between countries. The speaker added that countries are showing an "if you take on our enemy in public then you will be promoted" attitude; an attitude extremely toxic for the current situation and global cooperation. These could be very costly for the future of the global economic and political scenario. Therefore, he concluded that countries should focus on domestic support and social fabric to tackle this issue, given how the global political scenario has unfolded.

The speaker then drew insights from the post-global economic crisis period (2008-2009). He noted that unemployment will be soaring and global demand might slump. However, he pointed out that unlike the post-global economic crisis period, unfortunately, we will not be receiving any multilateral relief. This might be a huge blow for many economies, making recovery even tougher and longer. Hence, countries are advocating self-reliance. If the situation prolongs, then we will come out of our shrunken mind-set and alter the international multilateral system rather than scattering the efforts to deal with global issues. In that sense, the pandemic might teach us the importance of cooperation and integrated efforts.

Turning to India-China relationship, the speaker pointed out that the "you go your way I go mine" attitude will not work for India-China relations. India has a huge market and China is looking for markets. So, the post-crisis period sharing could push the relationship forward while also prove advantageous for both countries. He further added that India should have a better relationship with China and the US than they have with each other to meet the political and economic needs of India post the crisis.

The speaker then revisited the topic of China's credibility loss. He pointed out that the larger the nation the bigger the effects. Thus, for a large nation like China, the effects could be huge and that the reputation it has built over years as a competent partner is now ruptured. According to him, this might negatively affect India-China relations, about which we cannot yet make an educated guess.

To sum up, the speaker warned that the global political situation is deteriorating due to the breakdown of cooperation, the blame game, and China's loss of credibility. Amidst all these, unprepared world leaders, to their bewilderment, are facing newer elements in science, politics

and economics, each day. To effectively deal with all these and for a hopeful future and quick recovery, global cooperation is essential. The multilateral systems need more alterations in order to effectively function when dealing with issues of a global scale. The pandemic, if nothing, has at least taught us to be better prepared to deal with global issues effectively. This is a wake-up call for global leaders and nations in general to amend their ways of dealing with issues and to collectively act towards solving issues of global scale such as climate change that threaten everyone alike.

In the discussion that followed, the speaker touched upon the fact that the governments are currently in a pursuit to blame someone else to save their faces in their homes; on the other hand, China is unwilling to cooperate for a political investigation into the matter but is of the stance that a scientific investigation is necessary, just like the US in the post 9/11 attack. He pointed out that this political investigation will do no good to anybody and will not even ensure that such a crisis will not recur. Furthermore, he noted that India will not find itself in a position where it has to pick sides because India has been smart enough in the past to strategically place itself neutral. This could ensure that India's foreign relations will, at least comparatively, remain intact unlike that of other countries.

Report prepared by Karthik Satheesh, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi.

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