

# India's National Security Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Chintamani Mahapatra

Last time the world was so badly affected by a global pandemic—known as the Spanish Flu—was about a hundred years ago. It was an era of colonialism and imperialism, and India at that time was a British colony. About 11 million Indians fell victim to the viral attack and lost their lives but the government of the time was hardly confronted by the people for its failures to contain the impact on their lives. There was no question or any discussion of the role of the government in containing or confronting the virus at that time, as the colonial population had no voice in governance. India was not worried about any foreign invasion or loss of its territorial integrity. There was no powerful country in the neighbourhood that posed a challenge to the jewel of the British Crown and there was no fear of cross-border terrorism.

The situation today is drastically different. India is a vibrant democracy with multiple political parties with diverse ideological convictions. The political system and the governing structure are federal in character with a division of powers between the central government and the various states. The two adversarial countries bordering India—Pakistan and China—have posed difficult challenges for decades and have unresolved territorial disputes with India. As and when an opportunity appears, these two countries—often allied with each other—try to alter the borders, promote destabilization through sponsored terror attacks, or interfere in the internal affairs of India in different ways. India maintains 24/7-watch on these two countries and their activities along its international borders.

Significantly, neither Pakistan nor China has been able to confine India's engagement and attention to within South Asia. India over the years has evolved into one of the major players in global affairs. Its role during the Cold War was different when India was a leader of the non-aligned movement consisting of about a hundred countries seeking transformation of an iniquitous global order. But India's strategy altered with the end of the Cold War. Soviet disintegration distanced Moscow and New Delhi from each other on all major global issues, and a novel development was the emergence of India's slow but steady and robust strategic partnership with the United States. The walls of discord and differences separating India and the United States on all major geopolitical issues collapsed—although it was less dramatic than the fall of the Berlin Wall.

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As the Indian economy liberalized and grew at a much higher pace than the so-called “Hindu rate of growth,” the Indian middle class expanded the domestic consumer bazaar and Indian foreign policy took a more pragmatic turn than previously, India looked beyond South Asia. Its vision extended to a much larger region—the Indo-Pacific region—to make its presence, expand its foothold and seek a constructive order. This is where the convergence of Indian and American interests peaked, and Japan and Australia subsequently joined in a Quadrilateral Initiative in the face of disruptive activities by a rising China aspiring to shape a Sino-centric regional order.

However, when the COVID-19 pandemic spread to India, the country faced both internal security gaps and external strategic challenges. Like perhaps every other country in the world, the first major challenge to India came from an inadequate health infrastructure in the country. Having been aware of the outcome of COVID-19 outbreaks in China, Europe, and the United States, the Indian government took a timely step and announced a national lockdown. It was an abrupt announcement giving little time to people, businessmen, companies, and others to prepare for a lockdown even mentally.

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic was handled deftly despite an unprepared and inadequate health infrastructure and India was able to develop two vaccines, one indigenous and the other with a foreign collaboration, to protect its citizens. The economic consequences were handled by an impressive stimulus package and food subsidy with the expectation that there would be a V-shaped economic recovery after the pandemic.

As life began to return to normalcy, complacency in all sections of the society, including the political class, resulted in a second wave of the viral infection that had a devastating impact on lives, livelihood, and economic prospects, and threatened to

undermine the national self-confidence of the country as a major global player. The largest producer of vaccines in the world became a net importer of vaccines. The largest producer of oxygen in the world had the most acute shortage of oxygen in the hospitals to meet the unprecedented demand for it from COVID-19 patients. The political instability potentially arising from farmers’ agitation, the invisible insecurity of the masses resulting from the mass media coverage of the infected, the rising number of unreported crimes, and the psychological impact of the negative economic consequences does not appear to have impacted the country’s position as a vibrant democracy, influential international actor, and a country destined to overcome the economic and financial difficulties sooner rather than later.

## Domestic Fallout

While India observed the lockdown and the spread of the virus was contained to an extent, its impact on the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of labourers in the informal sector was severe. As the dilemma of life versus livelihood exploded, reverse migration of these labourers from cities to their respective homes in small towns and villages multiplied both the health conditions of the masses and job insecurity of millions of labourers in the unorganised sector of the economy. The migrant labourers were potential carriers of the virus to their respective hometowns or villages and at the same time their loss of jobs endangered the economic sustainability of their families.

Significantly, the pandemic not only affected labourers but also small and medium businesses as well as the corporate sectors. The lockdown led to a closure of restaurants, malls, travel and transportation, the entertainment industry, and industries producing mass consumer goods. Though the wealthy incurred unaccountable financial losses, the poor lost their sources of livelihood and, the income divide in the society widened. Millions, who had

once been above the poverty line were pushed below that line and those who were already below the poverty line fell into abject poverty.

The role of government becomes fundamental during health crisis of such gargantuan proportions as the entire economy is negatively affected. Diverse sets of data were reported in the media about the massive reduction in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate, an unprecedented rise in the unemployment rate, the plight of the homeless, huge industrial losses, and many more negative consequences. Whether the economy is going to have a V-shaped recovery or U-shaped recovery are matters of debate amidst inadequate data and rapidly changing scenarios. Prognostication of the future and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on current economic activity or the trajectory of the future recovery cannot be assessed accurately at this time or in this article. That is the realm of economists and statisticians to debate and deal with.

But the palpable and overwhelming impact of the pandemic on the production and sales of industries or service sectors, the cost of living for individuals, and the fall in revenues of the state governments and the central government are telling. The financial insecurity and anxiety over the future has taken a great psychological toll among the people making the mental health conditions of the masses perilous. The capitalist and managerial class, salaried class, and stock market traders too have been adversely affected by the pandemic, of course, in varying degrees and dimensions. The mere thought of the opportunity cost of the pandemic is chilling.

The impact on the Indian economy of the first wave of the pandemic in early 2020 was severe. The worst victims were the poor people who were provided minimum rations, free of cost, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a policy providing free food grains to about 800 million people until November 2020.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a stimulus

package of about \$266 billion was announced to assist small and medium companies and to help create employment and enhance consumer spending. However, analysts pointed out that this package of assistance was by and large liquidity support given to banks to provide credit, and the government's welfare programs were in fact quite limited. In any case, the fiscal deficit of the central government increased and has been estimated to be more than \$200 billion and is expected to rise further. In any case, the overall GDP decline during 2020-21 was to the tune of 7.3 per cent, which was the first such contraction of the economy in four decades.<sup>2</sup>

The severity of the impact of the economic contraction is reflected in the fact that about 32 million people lost their middle class ranking and 75 million descended below the poverty line.<sup>3</sup> The economic growth forecast after the second wave varies. According to the Reserve Bank of India, "The impact of the second wave on the real economy seems to be limited so far in comparison with the first wave" due to "the localised nature of lockdowns, better adaptation of people to work-from-home protocols, online delivery models, e-commerce and digital payments."<sup>4</sup> The government of India reportedly believes that the GDP in 2021-22 will grow at the rate of 10.5 percent, but the State Bank of India and a few foreign banks have lower expectations. The fact, however, remains that the calculation is based on the low base year of 2020-21.<sup>5</sup>

The financial insecurity of poor people and the rising income inequality between socio-economic classes in society has posed substantial challenges for the maintenance of social cohesion and domestic peace. People belonging to all social strata have been affected negatively to varying degrees and their physical, psychological, and social insecurity have no easy solution in the immediate to medium term. The psychological toll, especially during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, simply cannot be



A group of Indian people with face mask, falling in line for some food along a public road, distributing food packets and masks to the daily wagers and homeless. New Dheli, India. (Photo by PradeepGaur at Shutterstock ID: 1984587932. May 31, 2021)

imagined, even as hundreds of thousands of families around the country lost their near and dear ones for various reasons, including the shortage of oxygen, medicines, and ventilators. The cremation grounds in some cities could not accommodate the dead for weeks! Children lost their parents, older parents lost their young children, and the breadth and length of the social consequences of this pandemic cannot be fully assessed at present.

As India gripped the social, psychological, and economic insecurity, one concomitant outcome of the pandemic has been the rising crime rate in India. Thefts have increased as have domestic and gender violence. Cybercrime of various types, including phishing, bullying, and blackmailing has also increased. It is important to underline that academic

analysis of crime based on available data will not reflect the reality accurately. In fact, police and other security forces were so involved in helping combat the pandemic that data collection and collation have suffered. In addition, political violence by Maoist insurgents in interior India kept the security forces engaged at a time when their assistance in helping the COVID-19 patients was crucial.

The role of the security forces, particularly police and paramilitary forces, during the pandemic has been critical in ensuring that lock-down guidelines were not violated by people and order prevailed around hospitals, health centers, and even cremation grounds. By guarding the streets, railway stations, airports, and bus stands, the security forces contributed considerably in handling the pandemic.



Covid 19 Corona Virus 21 days lockdown in India. Police on duty to stop people from roaming in city and make them follow lockdown to prevent spread of Corona. Bharuch, Gujarat / India. (Photo by Kunal Mahto at Shutterstock ID: 1702650391. April 5, 2020)

In fact, while providing these critical services, many security personnel themselves got infected with the COVID-19 virus.

As if the plight of people infected with the virus and the health workers involved in treating them were not enough, persistent farmer agitation in north India through the pandemic period contributed to instability and the further spread of the virus. The central and a few state governments failed to judge the virulence with which a second wave of the pandemic would engulf India and indulged in open political campaigns, which in hindsight further spread the virus.

It was on 30 January 2020 that reports first appeared of a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection in India. A student from Kerala who returned

home from Wuhan University for vacation tested positive. Thereafter the number of positive cases increased rapidly and on 24 March 2020, the Prime Minister Modi announced a national lockdown of three weeks duration. As the first wave of the pandemic decelerated, the relaxation of restrictions gave way to complacency; wedding parties, political rallies, and religious gatherings resumed. By the second week of March, it had become clear that the rising number of positive cases was assuming the proportion of a wave, and the worst phase of the second wave caused enormous loss of lives during April-May 2021. At the height of the second wave, the number of new cases rose to more than 400,000 per day. At the time of writing, there is a decline of the second wave and the daily new cases have come

down to about 60,000. This is not a small number, although in the global tally of daily new cases India's number one ranking has yielded to Brazil—and as a percentage of the population India's number may be smaller than that of other countries.

The daily talk of a forthcoming third wave of the pandemic has generated fear among sections of the public, even as large-scale violations of COVID-19 guidelines in marketplaces and public transport persist. Preparations by health departments in different parts of India are moving ahead to avoid a second wave type disaster, but the responsibility also lies on the masses and their behaviour.

Many analysts believed that if elections were to be conducted, the political leadership could have restricted political rallies and should have campaigned through the audio-visual media and social media. Future historians systematically researching the COVID-19 pandemic in India will surely blame the political leadership, political activists and agitators, and even the mass religious functions and celebrations for contributing to the rapid spread of the virus and contributing to the woes of the people in terms of loss of lives and livelihoods.

While India certainly felt insecure during the pandemic, due to the developments described above, credit should be given to the government for ensuring overall social stability. All essential goods were available, industrial and agricultural activities resumed in a measured way, there was no communal strife, class conflicts, mass hunger, or severe law and order breakdown that could have threatened the internal cohesion of the country. The economic stimulus package provided by the government to various sectors of the economy through its budgetary allocations and the provision of free rations to the downtrodden were admirable steps. The central and state governments quickly learned from their mistakes while tackling the pandemic and the federal structure of the political system remained intact. There was an exchange of words between the

ruling party and the opposition, with accusations and counter accusations regarding the way the pandemic was handled. But these are part and parcel of democratic societies.

Given India's size, and public health being an issue handled primarily by state governments, there were several variations in the implementation of measures to tackle the pandemic. Maharashtra state had the highest number of COVID-19 cases. Surprisingly, four South Indian States were also severely affected by the rising cases of the pandemic—Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Significantly, states that held elections for their legislative assemblies and allowed mass political rallies, such as Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Assam, experienced a rapid rise of COVID-19 cases. The worst hit was the national capital, Delhi, where shortages of intensive care units (ICU), hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, and medicines made headlines around the world. At the peak of the wave new cases exceeded 27,000 per day. The plight of the patients, desperation of their family members, shortages of space even in cremation ground dominated the media and spread fear across the country. However, as the second wave began to recede, governments appeared wiser and began preparations to handle a possible third wave.

## External Security

At nearly the time the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in India, a major test to India's territorial integrity came from China actions along the Sino-Indian border (known as the Line of Actual Control or LAC). Chinese troops approached the LAC with the possible intention of occupying territory and altering the border to their advantage. This action took place when China had reportedly managed to control the pandemic at home while other countries—including India—were weakened by the ongoing pandemic.

That China had occupied disputed islands and

claimed sovereignty over almost 90 percent of the South China Sea was well-known. The outlandish Chinese claims though had no takers. Philippines took a case to the International Court of Arbitration, but China openly defied the verdict of the court decision rejecting China's claim. Still not many in India or in the international community anticipated China's move along the Indian border while the Indian government was seriously engaged in battling the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also unexpected because Prime Minister Modi had significantly expanded cooperative ties with China and had interacted with Chinese President Xi Jinping more frequently than any other world leader during his tenure in office.

China's actions along the LAC coincided with the preoccupation of the United States and Europe with the lethal pandemic that originated in China. They also coincided with India's growing role in world affairs and rising U.S.-India cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Wary of a new concept of the Indo-Pacific that brings the United States, Japan, India, and Australia together and India's rising profile in the emerging Asian power balance, China appears to have adopted a strategy that engages, confronts, and tests India by enlarging its troop presence along the LAC. Beijing was infuriated by India's ability to prevent China from grabbing the territory of Bhutan at Doklam in 2017. A failure now to prevent Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) incursions into Indian territory would deal a blow to India's ambition to be a major international power, damage the U.S. strategy of partnering with India to contain China, and simultaneously kill the QUAD initiative in its bud. No time was more propitious in Chinese calculations for realising this goal than the preoccupation of the United States, Europe, and India with the pandemic.

The Modi government's robust response to the Chinese troop movements along the LAC—deploying Indian troops, acquiring material hardware

through arms purchases, showing the country's readiness to fight a war if required, proactive diplomacy to expose Chinese intentions, and taking all steps necessary to strengthen the evolving Quad mechanism—are worthy of note. From occasional brawls between PLA soldiers and Indian forces, to the construction and dismantling of temporary structures on land claimed by India, to violent physical fights in the Galwan Valley causing casualties on both the sides, China was apparently testing how far India would go to protect its territorial integrity. At the time of writing the situation remains a stalemate and China has not refrained from tactical moves to increase control over the disputed territory along the Sino-Indian border. But India has both shown maturity in handling the situation and demonstrated its ability to prevent any kind of repeat of the experience of the Sino-Indian war of 1962.

While China did pose an immediate danger to India's national security amidst the pandemic, Pakistan failed to destabilize Kashmir, a priority of its foreign policy in South Asia. The change of Kashmir's status instituted by India in August 2019 was highly resented by Pakistan which made every effort to accrue political and diplomatic capital from India's action. But the pandemic apparently had a sobering impact on Pakistan. The difficulty encountered by the much-advertised China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, a downturn in its national economy leading to an urgent need of foreign assistance to sustain its economy, the prospects of Western troop withdrawals from Afghanistan and its concomitant uncertainties could be the reasons Pakistan did little to affect the ground realities in Kashmir.

### **Gaining Soft Power**

A country's positive global image is key to diplomatic and even perhaps economic success. The national security apparatus of every country seeks to build and ensure a positive image. It also works

as an important soft power element that attracts others and helps foster constructive ties. The Modi Government was remarkably successful in portraying a positive image of India by providing millions of vaccines to many countries during the first wave of the pandemic, including free vaccines to neighbouring countries. This projected both India's ability to handle a health crisis of such colossal proportions at home as well as India's growing role in global affairs and management of the global commons.

There is no doubt that the mere virulence and speed of transmission of COVID-19 during the second wave not only surprised India but also raised questions about the export of vaccines that could have been used first to save lives within India. As television screens telecast the plight of the patients infected with the virus due to shortages of hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, ventilators, and some precious medicines, opposition parties and the public at large questioned the government's vaccine diplomacy. The country that produced the largest amount of oxygen became a net importer of it. The country that provided COVID-19 related assistance to even a rich and powerful country like the United States had to ask for foreign assistance.

However, while India's vaccine diplomacy faced loud criticism on the domestic front it was successful in projecting a positive image of India abroad. It also helped India receive pandemic-related assistance later. When President Joe Biden made a statement that India stood by the United States at the time of its need and now it was America's turn to help India, the statement exemplified the success of the government's efforts to promote India's soft power. India proved itself to be one of a relatively small number of nations able to develop a vaccine in the midst of a major public health challenge. When vaccine nationalism gripped the world, India sought to promote vaccine internationalism. This was in keeping with India's national security interests.

In fact, China had an image problem vis-à-vis

India's vaccine diplomacy. Being under international scrutiny for its unwillingness to inform the international community of the discovery and spread of COVID-19 in a timely manner, India's vaccine donations and exports to multiple countries were a bitter pill for China to swallow. It appeared as though China was responsible for the pandemic and India was one of the saviours. China did eventually extend its support to other countries in their efforts to combat the pandemic by supplying personal, protective equipment, medicines, and its own vaccines, but public anger toward China was palpable. Beijing's alleged non-cooperation into the origin of the virus, and its alleged interference and pressure within the World Health Organization as well as retaliation against countries proposing an international investigation further fuelled anger against China.

## Concluding Observations

Prior to the pandemic India's defence and security policies had attracted attention because under Prime Minister Modi India had begun to play an augmented and active major power role in world affairs. During this time, in relative terms, China's image had taken a severe beating resulting from Beijing's aggressive island grabbing in the South China Sea, picking fights with or bullying Japan, Vietnam, and smaller Southeast Asian countries, its predatory economic practices including within the Belt and Road Initiative, associated debt trap lending, mistreatment of its Uighur minority described by some as "genocide," and unfair trade practices, among many other causes for global concern.

Pakistan, on the other hand, had failed in its decade-old policy of exporting, sponsoring, and equipping terrorists to destabilize India. As the Indian economy grew and was on the verge of transforming the country into an economic powerhouse, Pakistan's economy was sinking by the day. Competing with India by adopting unviable strategies had become too expensive for Pakistan—a

fact reflected by India's surgical strikes against anti-India terrorist camps inside Pakistani territory. Islamabad had been thoroughly discredited for making terrorism an instrument of state policy and its inability to mobilize the Islamic countries against India. Its persistent efforts to internationalize the Kashmir issue have also been fruitless.

India in the meantime was fast emerging as an active player in international affairs and its strategic partnership with the United States had solid bipartisan support in the American political community. The Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States, first unveiled by the Trump Administration and later endorsed by the Biden Administration, identified India as a key player in maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quadrilateral Strategic Initiative that had its ups and downs since its founding in 2007, was revitalized by the United

States, Japan, India, and Australia in the final months of the Trump Administration bringing it back to center stage in regional affairs. There is little doubt that China's push for a Beijing-centric international order marked by the aggressive policies of President Xi Jinping in the Indo-Pacific region made it imperative that the QUAD become proactive. The virtual QUAD summit early in the Biden Administration and the Malabar naval exercises of the QUAD navies contributed significantly to strategic convergence among the QUAD members.

India's national security during the pandemic got a boost from the activation of the QUAD; and apparently this had a sobering impact on China. As France, the United Kingdom, and Germany showed growing interest in the Indo-Pacific and increased their respective naval engagements, it became clear that the QUAD had acquired informal backing to



External Affairs Ministers at the Quad Foreign ministers meeting on sidelines of UNGA Summit. New York. (Photo by MEAphotogallery. September 26, 2019)

its goal of securing order in an Indo-Pacific region under threat from China's disruptive activities. China's agreement to a mutual troop pullback after eleven rounds of talks was due to India's well-rounded economic, military, and diplomatic responses. China had issues with Japan, Australia, the United States, and India simultaneously. When the QUAD members assumed a more proactive posture and the Biden Administration expressed the intent to host an in-person summit, Beijing understandably scaled back its offensive moves to prevent or delay further consolidation within the QUAD. The QUAD was beginning to be perceived as an Asian NATO; and it was clearly not in China's interest to push it further in that direction. While the QUAD is unlikely to become an Asian NATO, the QUAD virtual summit ended in a joint statement and a menu of cooperation going beyond military/ naval cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

As the pandemic appeared to slow in the United States and Europe in 2021 and demands for a thorough investigation into the origin of the virus grew louder, China was not idle. It used its reported success in taming the pandemic and developing a vaccine to reverse its negative image and simultaneously unleashed "wolf warrior" diplomacy. The Western discourse on the relative decline of the United States, continuing American COVID-19 deaths, American political and social polarization, and a slow economic recovery emboldened Beijing to try to advance its transformation of the global order. China continues to threaten American allies and strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Thus India continues to face a multi-dimensional strategic challenge from China.

While India has demonstrated the will and capability to repulse any Chinese incursion into Indian territory, China also threatens Indian interests in the immediate neighbourhood. As India faced increasing demand for vaccines during the second wave, China began to supply its own vaccines

to smaller South Asian countries. China-Pakistan collaboration is well understood, but China has persistently tried to undermine Indian influence and soft power in smaller countries of South Asia as well. Unfortunately, sovereign debt has increased China's grip over decision-making processes in such and more may follow the same path in the future. A cautionary example of this is Sri Lanka where the Port of Hambantota Port was built with a Chinese loan. When Colombo defaulted on debt servicing, Beijing pushed for an agreement giving China control of the Port under a 99-year lease.

India's domestic security in the post-pandemic world will depend on its economic recovery. In the short run the enormous loss in gross domestic production, increase in unemployment due to job losses, and descent of many below the poverty line will impact the standard of living of millions, create further class division in society, and substantially increase the fiscal deficit of the government. Tax collection will also be a challenge. These factors will surely affect social security, income inequality, and may also lead to higher levels of minor and major crimes.

Projections of India's GDP in 2020-21 and 2021-22 by various international and national agencies, including credit rating agencies have caused popular confusion. Projections of India's negative economic outlook will impact business psychology abroad and the potential flow of direct foreign investment into or leaving India. Nonetheless, initiatives already taken by the Modi Government, such as "Make in India," "Doing Business Easy," co-production and co-development, liberalization of investment policies, etc. are going to be on the economic policy agenda even after the end of the pandemic. Arguably though it is too early for accurate damage assessment, nor are credible predictions of the future trajectory of the Indian economy yet possible.

However, it can still be safely assumed that India's position in the world is unlikely to be affected

to a degree sufficient to adversely affect its security. The pandemic has had a global impact and many countries, including the major powers, have been badly affected by it. Thus, the outcome of the pandemic will be “lose-lose” for almost every country. There will be no winners in the war against the COVID-19. To varying degrees, every country will suffer losses.

There will be no major change in the hierarchy of global power structures. Since the hard policy approach towards China adopted by the Trump Administration and an ongoing trade war, China's path to superpower status will experience major roadblocks. The United States will remain on the top of the global power hierarchy and China will be a mere competitor unlikely to overthrow the liberal world order and establish its own hegemonic order. Project European Union that had begun to falter before the pandemic, starting with the Eurozone crisis and moving on to BREXIT, will be a global player, but with systemic constraints.

Regardless of the outcome of the pandemic, the Indo-Pacific region will be the main center of economic activity and geopolitical tension in the world. While some analysts are of the opinion that the pandemic will shrink India's ability to be an effective player in world affairs due to the human and economic losses caused by the pandemic, such arguments are not convincing. In absolute terms, the death and negative impact of the pandemic on India is enormous. But such is the case with most of the major powers. How long India will take to reverse the economic losses is anybody's guess. Scholars and policymakers have been asking similar questions about their national economies in many capitals.

It is safe to predict that unlike the seismic shifts in the global order that occurred after the first and second world wars, or the cold war, there is little likelihood of a major systemic shift in the current global order once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. India will endure as one of the major players

in the Indo-Pacific region. China will continue to be the eye of the storm in a power struggle that has been unfolding in the Indo-Pacific region. Beijing has been trying to alter the status quo in the region and reduce, if not eliminate, American influence through its financial and military power and technological prowess. Many countries of the region have already found themselves in a dilemma if they have to choose between the United States and China. The Trump Administration took tough measures to counter China and the Biden Administration has pursued similar goals with minor modifications in methods and approaches.

Unlike in the past, India is slowly but persistently inching towards strategic understanding of if not full alignment with the United States. India's ambition to befriend China through a closer economic relationship to enable the peaceful resolution of border disputes has not borne fruit. Chinese geopolitical behaviour has awakened India to China's ulterior motives. Consequently, the strategic convergence of interests among the United States, India, Japan, and Australia—the QUAD—may define the future Indo-Pacific order. **PRISM**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/luxury-and-hunger-india-sees-two-faces-of-an-unequal-pandemic/articleshow/83477094.cms>

<sup>2</sup> [https://economictimes.india-times.com/news/economy/indicators/sharpening-income-inequalities-telling-story-of-uneven-economic-recovery-amid-pandemic-d-subbarao/articleshow/83479655.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.india-times.com/news/economy/indicators/sharpening-income-inequalities-telling-story-of-uneven-economic-recovery-amid-pandemic-d-subbarao/articleshow/83479655.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.livemint.com/economy/covid19-pandemic-relapse-spells-trouble-for-the-middle-class-in-india-11623582065443.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/covid-second-wave-indian-economy-rbi-7319301/>

<sup>5</sup>[https://economictimes.india-times.com/news/economy/indicators/sharpening-income-inequalities-telling-story-of-un-even-economic-recovery-amid-pandemic-d-subbarao/articleshow/83479655.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.india-times.com/news/economy/indicators/sharpening-income-inequalities-telling-story-of-un-even-economic-recovery-amid-pandemic-d-subbarao/articleshow/83479655.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

<sup>6</sup>An insightful article on the issue and Indo-US relations, see Amit Gupta, “India in Biden’s Global Views,” [www.geopolitics.in](http://www.geopolitics.in), April 2021.