

Interwoven Realities: Logistics and the Reshaping of Global Governance

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This paper is extremely well sourced and empirically rich in content. Its thesis of how logistics are increasingly defining the nature of inter-state connections and how led by Belt and Road Initiative these are gradually making China the epicentre of emerging world order were especially commendable given that these have been very convincingly argued by the author. Detailed analysis of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic corridor also support the main thesis of this paper as it talks of multiple kinds of corridors evolving into their current shape of becoming economic corridors determining these as empowered channels for global flows of commodities, services and ideas across the globe. However, discussants talks goes beyond complimenting the good work and attempt few constructive suggestions to further streamline and sharpen the given presentation and to strengthen its arguments. With that responsibility in mind this discussant would like to make following suggestions for author's consideration.

Most important part of proposing such an alternative explanation to logistics reshaping the interwoven realities of global governance perhaps lies in setting the stage or front loading its context. To varying degrees, some of these issues have been mentioned as reference point at various sections yet underlining the fluidity of the context would help in highlighting the drift in global governance structures and processes where logistics of connectivity gain much traction in influencing evolving trajectories and trends much beyond their expected influence in existing structures. It is some of these generic drifts that need to be highlighted and examined as the backdrop that maximizing this increasingly deterministic nature of evolving logistics redefining the nature and pace of human affairs in general. Without doubt this drift is also reshaping the globe governance processes and structures. It is this larger backdrop that also helps better explain why China's Belt and Road Initiatives represents this clear understanding where China seeks to make logistics of connectivity its innovative new tool for expanding its global access and influence and how it has already begun to show its results.

Among the cross currents of this fluid backdrop one notices a clear drift where emerging economies are fast replacing conventional 'great' powers in being the focus point for both conceptualization and operationalization of global governance processes and structures. Rising economies -- whether BRICS, BASIC, IBSA -- have been coopted into G20 and are increasingly seen as synonymous with emerging powers. As the paper also argues here geo-economics seems to be replacing geo-politics or geo-strategy through later remains still significant. Second, element of this drift is the one from inter-state to inter-societal linkages becoming increasingly far too influential in determining the nature of regional and/or global initiatives and interactions. In field of disarmament for instance, the last major convention negotiated by inter-State deliberations was one on Chemical Weapons in 1993. Since then several initiatives have been results of civil society actors and this is true of most other sectors. Third, is the drift that flows from exponential infusion of technologies that are empowering citizens making them sovereign citizens of Gandhiji which are global citizens and their work space and its influence can no longer be to their immediate social context within their nation. Technology has revolutionized transport, communications and string of information. States find it increasingly difficult to keep tab, forget control, their access, outreach, connectivity and communications.

As a result of these systemic drifts one can notice drifts in processes and actual operations. Increasingly one notices drift from top-down to bottom up approach to all policy making around the world. The essential character of all human organisations is fast shifting from hierarchical to flat structures. There is greater stress on accountability to social audit and transparency and inclusiveness are becoming the norm for good governance. This has empowered civil society and individual actors and enhanced citizen's awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Legitimacy of States has become dependent on its grievance redressal mechanisms and regular reporting on their efficacy has come to be the new norm. Drift is also visible in building of logistical infrastructures where physical is making way for social infrastructure which is prioritized as also enabled by tools of cyberspace and e-governance. This is where China-India dichotomy of approach also makes that at loggerheads about building logistics. From its ITEC from 1964, India has focused on skill and capacity building which will lead to groundswell of demands for what would be seen as appropriate infrastructure. China's BRI, on the other hand, believes in creating mega structures at speed hoping these will facilitate human interactions and community building over period of time.

It is with this backdrop that this paper can also explain the reality of both China and India being at variance and India being seen only selectively participating in China's BRI. Indeed, in the backdrop of India having absented from China's BRI Forum last May, India is seen launching several parallel economic corridors though most of these have been old initiatives that have been activated in recent times. It is also important to highlight that in view of their fundamentally different approach to building logistics, these parallel corridors of China and India carry potential of becoming competitive as well. It is that potential of contestation that can undo the thesis of this paper namely, logistics of economic corridors making China epicentre of world order. If anything these initiatives building logistics at variance can indeed reinforce geo-politics exactly as European contestations had resulted in making industrial revolution unleash wars of colonial expansion resulting in two worlds wars. Vested interests of State will do everything to defend their privileged position in distribution of power and it would be important to adapt to these drift as also sustain an optimal level of these drift to ensure their piecemeal evolution rather than unleashing a force of change that will prove to be counterproductive which seems to be the case when it comes to China-led logistics infrastructure and economic corridors being guided their thesis of achieving an "early harvest" that makes their mega projects not only commercially unviable but also politically undesirable turning debt-into-equity and creating debt-traps for vulnerable nations that remain vulnerable to China's offers as they suffer from enormous infrastructure deficit.