

Democracies in the Wake of Geo-Political Competitions

Outline

Thesis Statement

Great power competitions are challenging democracy and its essentials. It is necessary to take immediate steps: cooperation, democratic norms renewal, and consensus. Collective effort is needed amidst geo-political competitions.

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→ Recommendations to Strengthen Democracies in midst of Geo-Political Competitions:

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Geo-political rivalries are presenting formidable challenges to democracy and democratic norms.

Recent surge of competition between China and the United States in trade, chips export and on land and sea routes is posing different issues to democracies.

A rapid growth of democracy after the dissolution of the USSR led to democratisation of the world.

According to Democracy Index Report 2016, almost 128 countries have complete to partial democracy, a great rise from 60 states in 1990.

However, geo-political tensions are sending ripples to democratic world. Rise of polarisation, militarisation, rightwing politics, camp politics, etc are a few challenges to democracies.

They cause effects on politics, economy and social level. Therefore it is an opportune to reinforce democratic essential in midst of geo-political rivalries.

The world is in between geo-political tensions where great powers are locking their horns at various levels. Each side tries to increase its political clout, economic power and military might. Recently, China and the US are at loggerheads over various areas. Similarly, Russia and the European region have draggers drawn. Trade war, chips war, technological competition, political alignments are a few competing areas where the US and China are contesting (Source: The Economist). Moreover, Russia and the European region are competing over ideological, political and economic front. Russian inv UK invasion in Ukraine in Feb, 2022 is a recent example they have come to exert pressure on each other. Also, there are different flashpoints between the US and China like Taiwan, South China Sea, Indo-Pacific region etc.

Lately, a new front, much broader than previous ones, has opened among different parties in the World. Rise of East-West tensions where the former is increasing its power and the latter is feeling threatening. According to Fareed Zakaria,

"It is the rise of East not the decline of the West."

(F. Zakaria Foreign Affairs)

India, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, Indonesia have increasing their political and economic power. It is challenging to the status-quo maintained by the West for years. Such rise is not without conflicts and competitions.

Such growing competitions are posing great challenges to democracies in the world. To begin with; the rise of populism in the world is

making a fertile ground to open front against democracy.

Populism is a political ideology in which authoritarian form of government is prevailed. Recently in Turkey, India, Brazil, Hungary, the US, Philippines, and Egypt

Populism is on the rise. Political leaders are undermining democratic norms like freedom of speech, movement and association. Clampdown on opposition leaders in the populist states is common. For

example, in India, opposition party Congress is being marginalized in different union states by changing laws and constituencies by the ruling party - BJP (Source: Azadi by Arundhati Roy).

Rise of Populism along with weaken democratic norms are challenging democracies in the world. Due to world politics and great-power competitions, democratic norms are bypassed by

has states. For example in Russia-Ukraine War, a surge in rightwing politics has been observed in Europe. Whenever states entangle with each other, economic upheavals are witnessed. This situation creates a fertile ground for extreme politics. Countries which are in competitions float democratic norms in the air. Bounded up with weakened democratic norms, authoritarian politics increases. Italy has right-wing party in power under the leadership of Geogria meloni.

Domestic political and economic institutions are not immune to international changes. Amidst political competitions, the states realign themselves in order to maximise their dividends on global chessboard. China-Saudia Arabia are increasing their friendship. Both states have authoritarian and power leaders. Such realignment comes during the severe

competition

Trump in the White House

Competition between the US-China. Both states are trying to increase their allies with like-minded countries. During conflicts between major world powers, states ignore democratic norms and values like human rights, freedom of speech, etc. Beijing and Washington are exerting pressures on each other's area of influence in the world.

China's engagement with South American states and the US alignment with East Asian states are harbingers of great-power competitions.

Such competitions increase polarisation in the conflicting states and their allies. Political parties take extreme views on each issue. Fault lines in domestic politics are exploited. For example, in the US, amidst China-US competition at economic level, the ascent of Trump in the White House

is starkly evident of rise of polarisation in one of the matured democracies in the world. Trump during his presidential campaign focused on protectionism, white-supremacists ideologies, etc. Americans people voted for him. This made the situation worse. The US disengagement from Paris Climate Agreement, Joint Comprehensive Deal (Iran Nuclear Deal), Human Rights Council, etc was a clear signal to the world about the rise of protectionism, polarisation and populism. Trump explained people that how China was exploiting their economy. He pushed Congress to take extreme views on immigrants and border security by building Mexican Wall. Such policies further divided the world because the US was acting as a leading democratic force after the USSR dissolution.

Democracies in the world

are being challenged by world power competitions. As the states realign themselves according to the changing geo-political conditions, political and economic institutions are confronted with tough choices. In a threatening and competing environment, the states choose to increase their military prowess. The state's expenditures are mostly in militarisation amidst tight security conditions in the world. Such a shift from social development projects to militarisation at the expense of human development further weakens democratic essentials. For example, AUKUS — a nuclear deal between the US, the UK and Australia — would consume the national revenues at the expense of militarisation. Similar trend can be seen in rival camps like China which has seen a sharp riseⁱⁿ of military expenditures. During the great power competition, India's

has become the largest arms importer in 2020, according to IPRI report, 2020. Such militarisation comes at the expense of human development. As democracy focuses on human capital by empowering them in policy-making, change of states' priorities is an attack on democracy.

Amidst rise of militarisation, democracies are confronted with clampdown on media owing to great-power competition. As the states especially world major powers lock their horns, other countries try to join either side in the competition. During such camp politics, domestic politics face ripples. Media, being the fourth pillar of the state, comes under cloud of high-handedness of the states. For example in KSA, media is not allowed to speak against its allies. Clampdown and

Censoring of critical media outlets is the clear example that states don't feel comfortable under scrutiny. For example in Europe, amidst Russia-Ukraine war, no one is talking about racism and islamophobic in Europe because the countries need collective response against Russia. During such conflicts human rights, and democratic essentials are ignored for bigger picture. During cold war, the international institution the UN became a rubber-stamp. The grave human rights violations in Kashmir by India and in Palestine by Israel were ignored at UNSC due to great-power competitions. Same is the case in recent withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Various resolution on Kashmir issues were vetoed by the USSR being an ally of India. Self-determination is a basic right of a nation but

US-USSR rivalry couldn't allow it in Kashmir. Similarly, after the unilateral change of Kashmir status by India in August, 2019, no major power ~~sep~~ spoke for Kashmiris except Pakistan and its allies like China and Turkey.

European states see India as a strategic partner to contain China. Therefore, they didn't put pressure on New Delhi to revert the ~~the~~ illegal and unilateral change of Kashmir status.

It is said that US-China rivalry is a sign of Cold War 2.0 where camp politics ruined the development and growth of the states. Countries put all their energy to maximise their military power. Similar trend can be witnessed in 21st century. Also, the digital world has increased the challenge for democracies where social media is dividing the world. Although

Social media has its own benefits, but the rise of digital world where great powers are competing with each other, thefting, intellectual property issues, cyber-space intrusion, etc is posing threat to democracy.

Recently, world politics has become authoritarian where rival parties are not sparing any opportunity against each other to exploit and threaten.

Computing technologies have increased. States try to espionage against their competing party using modern technologies. The breach of privacy, and the digital sovereignty are a challenge for democracy in technological world.

However, there are far-reaching effects of these challenges to democracy. It includes the rise of political instability and economic upheavals. When democracy is replaced with by authoritarian regime, political instability rises in the country. For example, the rise of BJP

Party increased the clampdown on opposition, civil society, media, etc. Nationalist forces in India have gained an access to power corridors. During US's policy of containment, India finds itself beneficiary of this competition.

However, liberal forces are also protesting against the laws which are inspired by ultra-nationalist ideology. Such competing forces fight against each other at national level. Similarly, during Arab Spring, the Middle East had seen political instability because great powers were achieving their vested-interests in troubled-land of Arab.

Political instability is bounded up with economic instability. When the exclusive political policies are formulated, economic uncertainties increase.

Amid political instability, consensus can't be built up on economic

policies. Short-term economic policies are adopted to maximise political dividends at polls. Protectionism is adopted in the presence of rivalry. For example, the Biden administration put embargo on Chips export to China due to the latter technological rise. Such competition would decouple great-power economies which causes economic upheavals at large level.

During political instability and economic upheavals, social issues like poverty, illiteracy, climate change, modern slavery, health issues, food crisis, etc find little ground at political agendas. States entangle themselves in order to increase military and security rather focus on social problems. At this critical juncture, administrative challenges are increased. Sub-national movements within states they are swelled. To curtail those movements

States increase oppressive steps like censoring media, abrupt arresting of opposition leaders etc. Such political environment decreases democracy and its essentials like consensus, participation, rule of law etc.

Nevertheless, it is an opportune time to strengthen democracy and adopt necessary measures so that great-power competitions don't reverse the gains the world has achieved. Firstly, the states should focus not only constitutional bars but also adopt democratic norms. According to a book: *How Democracies Die*

'It is pertinent to have democratic norms and values along with constitutional norms and laws in order to achieve full democracy.'

Book

(*How Democracies Die*)

Sometimes democratic norms are practised like giving space to opposition in Cabinet, increase the size of limit of private bills etc. Such democratic essentials are safeguards and protectors of democracy at large. Compromise, and comf cooperation in politics is a need of an hour. According to a report of Freedom House, the recent rise of rigidity in politics has been observed especially after the ascent of Trump in politics. Such rigidity in politics leads to compromise democracy.

'Politics is the name of possibilities.'

(Bismark)

Finding ways and generating space for others may increase democratic culture in politics. countries which have democracy as a form of government ~~usually~~ are a version to sharing of

power, amidst great-power politics. However, strong economic condition is essential for democracy to grow in the country. The states which have democratic government should have to deliver on economic front. Otherwise, authoritarian forces are ready to exploit the fault lines. For example, sharp rise of authoritarian form of government in the world after financial crisis 2008, is a clear example of this. When people saw that democracies were not fulfilling their promises, they adopted authoritarian form of governments. According to Anatol Lieven in his book: Pakistan a Hard Country, the country has long bouts of military tenures because they delivered on certain grounds. On the other hand, civilian governments kept fighting with each other for power. Quick deliverance of military governments in Pakistan found

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Soft heart and legitimacy while failure of democracies on their promises increased aversion to democracy.

Although the notion of economic growth during military regimes is flawed. Mostly the economic institutions which publish growth and development indicators are under the control of government. Therefore, much-touted growth figures are malafide and flawed. However, democracies need to deliver on economic sector, social problems etc to gain legitimacy in the eyes of people. Democratic governments need to increase inclusivity of institutions. Devolution of power, economic and political to the lowest tier of government is necessary for complete and powerful democracy. They have to set an example for the world that democracy is the only solution to the world problems.

China is providing itself as an example to the world through its unprecedented economic growth in past decades. The world states are attracting in China's-model where centralisation of power ensures all the economic and political decisions of the state. Democracies need to deliver on social issues like poverty, illiteracy, corruption, etc. Long-term economic growth in the democratic countries should be seen. If the largest democracy in the world, India, and the champion of liberalism, the US, are flying human rights in the face, what else can be expected from others?

In a nutshell, democracies are confronting with unprecedented challenges in the presence of great-power politics. During geo-political competitions, states try to maximise their political and economic dividends and profits.

Amid confrontations, developing states do fishing in troubling waters.

In such fertile ground, polarisation and authoritarian notions increase. They

put stress on democracy. Therefore, economic instability and political uncertainty increase. Nevertheless,

the states need to strengthen democratic essentials like consensus,

political space for opposition, inclusive institutions and participation. In

this regard developed states like the US and Europe set an

example for the world not only on economic level but on social level as well. They must observe

democratic norms like human rights amidst geo-political competition.

Democracies are facing formidable challenges. However, with prudent

policies, political consensus, adopting true democratic norms, the world

can be saved from authoritarian and totalitarian form of government.

For Comments: