

**Ambassador Sanjay Panda's Address at the International School of
Diplomacy & Institute of Strategic Thinking (SDE)
(Ankara, 28 June 2021)**

Post-pandemic International Order - Challenges & Opportunities

Speaking Notes

Prologue:

- Salutation: **SDE President Prof. Güray ALPAR**
- **61 trainees, including 50 Masters and PhD students from 40 countries and 4 continents.** Many aspiring diplomats, budding think-tankers, academics, researchers and geo-political analysts.
- Imparting training in the **art of Diplomacy**, of which **communication techniques** assume particular significance. Gone are those days when diplomatic communication was defined as *asking someone to go to hell in such a way that he or she looked forward to the journey*. Today, **a successful diplomat is one who communicates clearly, unambiguously with substantive content, while matching national interest with a “global good” intent.** One who recognises that **we live today in an interdependent and interconnected world, where if you sneeze in Wuhan, someone catches a cold in Wyoming.**
- In a globalised world, the so-called **“splendid isolation” is not an option.** We can **no longer think of the 19th century Monroe Doctrine or the post-Great Depression isolationist approach pursued by the United States.** If anyone had any doubts, the **Covid-19 messaging is loud and clear.**

It is indeed **topical** that we brainstorm today on the **post-pandemic international order**, or more particularly, the **nature and extent of multilateral cooperation** that we should ideally envisage for global recovery from the shock. Having said that, we should also brace ourselves to face the fact that the **ideal may fall short of the actual** given the **global uncertainties** that we are contending with.

2. The COVID pandemic is the **greatest shock to the international system since the 2nd World War.** We are also confronted with an **unprecedented universal economic slowdown.** The contraction of global output has been most severe since the Great Depression of the 1920s/30s. The **human cost of the pandemic** has been substantial. Lives & livelihoods have been lost. Since the primary cause of the disruption is the pandemic, speed of **resumption of economic activity is critical** in preventing what is already a recession from growing into a depression.

3. **Recessions are usually managed by fiscal stimuli with expansionist budgets and interest rate cuts.** This formula was developed during and after the

Great Depression of the 1920s & 30s. In response to the 2008 crisis, G20 had also coordinated an unprecedented fiscal stimulus package. The aggregated stimulus presently envisaged is much larger. The **difference** – today it's not a coordinated move with nations announcing **individual recovery plans**.

4. As for the slowdown, it has in fact **impacted all**. It has **exposed the vulnerability of developed countries including major economic powerhouses**. While there is some optimism now with the arrival of the vaccine, the economic gloom still looms large.

5. Having said that, I don't wish to make a doomsday prediction. There's always **light at the end of the tunnel**. History stands testimony that all crises are succeeded by periods of growth. The **Great Depression & World War II were followed by a period of sustained economic expansion**. Economic rebounds were observed after all the four major recessions in the post-World War II era. Major health crises have led to investments in medical science and public health that have transformed our lives. Similar **transformation and economic resurgence will undoubtedly happen** after we get through the present crisis.

6. **Economic thinking is likely to shift trajectories**. The most important current debate relates to the merits of **globalization vs. localization**. **"Decoupling" and "de-globalization" are advocated by many who would like to alter the current geometry of international supply chains**. **"Glocalization" is a possible compromise**. **Regional and plurilateral supply chains** are another halfway house.

7. The **Fourth Industrial Revolution is unlikely to be halted**. If anything, this crisis is demonstrating the **viability of ecommerce** and of the **expanding market for IT and IT enabled services**. Individual businesses will be hit but the **digital economy, and digital infrastructure, will grow**. The pandemic has made us to recognize is the real potential of the digital in governance, business, education, health, etc. But global economic slowdown may **affect venture capital availability** to fuel rapid growth.

8. All **crises alter geopolitics**. The international system we are familiar with owes some of its fundamental impulses to the Great Depression and to the Second World War. **Will the geopolitical impact of the current crisis be disruptive or will it be transformational?**

9. The pandemic has **left its mark on both China and the United States**. It began in one and killed the most in the other. Already embroiled in a **trade war**, it has **aggravated the strategic confrontation** between the two. It will be interesting to see how the **post-Brexit European Union** maintains its solidarity and cohesion to remain credible as a single entity.

10. As any developing country **India** also has its shares of the problems created by pandemic. In recent months, we in India have gone through a particularly difficult situation. As the **second most populous country, planning for and**

managing such a pandemic has been a challenge for the Government. In spite of the best efforts towards prevention, spread and management of pandemic related complications, the **sudden surge** in in Covid cases at times **required whole hearted support of the world community**. We are deeply **touched by the friendship and solidarity demonstrated by Turkey** in extending a helping hand to India during these challenging times. Yes, these are difficult times, but I am confident, **India like the rest of the world will bounce back**.

11. This brings us to the question of the **post COVID world order**. The **current international system, underwritten ideologically, politically and financially since the end of World War II, is in trouble**. It was **found wanting in its response to the pandemic**, the gravest global challenge since the Great War.

12. Today, **we live in an uncertain world**. The pandemic, and its consequences, immediate and future, merely illustrate the level of uncertainty that we must live with. We are **faced with new and uncertain challenges even as we struggle with existing threats to international peace and security**.

13. It may sound somewhat clichéd, but the fact remains that the virus has clearly shown us that it **respects no borders**. Consequently, it's a **global challenge**, which all countries irrespective of their level of development **have to face collectively**. No wonder, the global nature of the crisis **calls for strengthening international cooperation**. We do not know how a post-pandemic world will look like. However, what we do know is that **substantive international cooperation is fundamental for dealing with existing and emerging global challenges**. The **lines dividing countries on the basis of their development matrix are getting progressively blurred in this future cooperation paradigm**.

14. Speaking of international cooperation, I am reminded of a recent initiative, the **International Solar Alliance**, jointly launched by India and France on the sidelines of COP-21 in Paris, and which today has over 90 member countries. Another initiative with wide-ranging global ramifications is the **Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure or CDRI**, launched by the Indian Prime Minister at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York in September 2019. Similarly, **in vaccine development, the triple-helix model that combines pharma companies, academic research institutions and contracted manufacturers** demonstrates what the French call "*collaboration sans frontières*" or collaboration without borders. The British-Swedish firm Astra Zeneca joining hands with Oxford and the Serum Institute of India illustrates the point.

15. The **Indian ethos of "Vasudaiva Kutumbakam"** or "the world is one family" is more relevant today than ever before. Our initial supply of made-in-India vaccines to our friends and partners around the world, of **over 66 million doses to 94 countries** including contribution to **COVAX** besides the **UN Peacekeepers**, is an expression of this approach.

16. Today, we are facing **three main prospects** when we reflect on the **post-COVID-19 world order and the international cooperation landscape**.

First, with the crisis acquiring global dimensions, COVID-19 is a **game-changer in international relations**, including development partnership.

Second, **in a globalised world, everything is interlinked and interdependent**. While there has been a lot of criticism of multilateral institutions, these are here to stay. **Strengthening multilateralism** bypassing ideological differences or narrow nationalistic positions will help bridge the gaps in international cooperation.

17. And, finally, in the face of serious global economic downturn, we are **caught in a Catch-22 situation** – whether to look for a **“quick fix” or a somewhat protracted “smart recovery”** that is sustainable and addresses our SDG commitments including climate change concerns. It is the latter that envisages international collaboration to **“Build Back Better”**, suggesting a **cleaner technology driven green recovery**.

18. All said and done, the **pandemic has shown us the limitations of the existing international system**. A purely economic agenda has defined globalization so far, and we have cooperated more to balance competing individual interests, rather than **advance the collective interests** of all. **We need a new template of globalization, based on fairness and equity in the post-COVID world**.

19. And in this template, the political content of a **more multipolar global conversation will be the new normal**. It will require to **address new faultlines** such as those between **digital “haves” and “have-nots”**. **While strengthened multilateralism holds the key to international cooperation across a wide spectrum, bilateralism and plurilateralism may also move on parallel track and have to be accommodated in diplomatic equations**.

20. Clearly, **new ideas, new synergies and new energies** are called for as we reconfigure the post-pandemic world order. And in that sense, the pandemic is **both disruptive and transformational** in shaping a post-covid world.

21. I would like to end with these beautiful words of **Mevlana Rumi**, **“There is hope after despair; there are many suns after darkness”**. This aptly sums up the current state of play and the likely scenario in the post-covid world.
