



## How the 9/11 wars changed the world

The war on terror strengthened Islamist and Islamophobic politics

### War on terror:

1. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the U.S. went to Afghanistan to defeat al-Qaeda and topple the Taliban regime. Twenty years later, when the U.S. exited Afghanistan, the Taliban, which never fully severed its ties with al-Qaeda, was back in power in Kabul and the country was emerging as the new base of the Islamic State.
2. U.S. President Joe Biden says the war on terror will continue. But the U.S.'s options are limited. It has lost its base in Afghanistan. Its alliance with Pakistan, which goes back to the Cold War, is over. Afghanistan's neighbouring countries refuse to host an American base.



### Regime change wars

1. After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. saw a global outpouring of support and sympathy. There was a legal and moral argument in favour of its military action against al-Qaeda. But the fundamental problem with the war that the U.S. launched was that it wasn't strategically focused on defeating al-Qaeda.
2. Instead, the U.S., driven by the neoconservative hubris of the Bush administration, launched regime change wars to remake the Muslim world. President Biden now says the U.S. went to Afghanistan to defeat al-Qaeda.
3. But facts on the ground tell a different story. In 2001, the U.S. brought down the Taliban regime and destroyed al-Qaeda's base in Afghanistan. But instead of going after al-Qaeda networks, the U.S. initiated the next regime change war in Iraq.
4. It did bring down regimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, but it remained clueless about how to tackle the instability that followed. Jihadists thrive amidst chaos and lawlessness.

20.09.2021

Monday

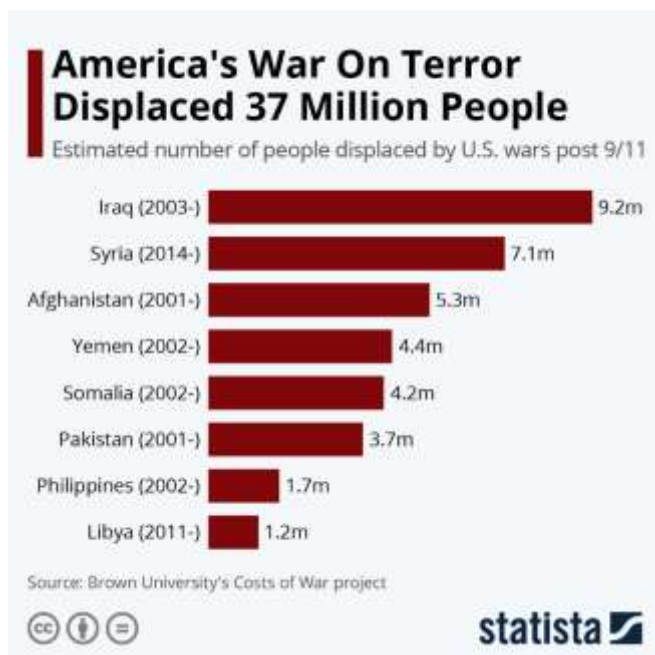


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5. If post-war Iraq provided a new base for al-Qaeda, Libya's collapse into anarchy, with different militias and governments fighting each other for control, allowed terrorists to spread to other parts of Africa.
6. In Syria, the U.S. stopped short of direct military intervention but backed armed rebels against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. It is from the ruins of Syria that the Islamic State rose.

### War on terror helped terrorists:

1. The regime change wars, which helped terrorist outfits proliferate in many countries, also led to the strengthening of both Islamist and Islamophobic politics across the world.
2. The repeated attacks on Muslim-majority countries and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of locals, mostly Muslims, in these wars helped strengthen the jihadist narrative that the 'Christian West' is launching 'a crusade' against Muslims.
3. Anti-Americanism emerged as a dominant political theme across Muslim-majority countries, which Islamist hardliners sought to cash in on.
4. The wars also triggered a massive outflow of refugees from the affected countries to neighbouring nations and the faraway West where the populist far-right, already on the ascent after the 2008 financial crisis, turned it into a political weapon.
5. During the 2011-15 Libyan and Syrian crises that saw hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers take the perilous boat journey across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, the far-right harped on Islamophobic rhetoric to drum up support.
6. The Islamic State-inspired terrorist attacks in the West during this period further strengthened this narrative. In the end, the regime change wars, which failed to defeat terrorists, came back to divide and haunt the West in a different form.





## Geopolitical setback

1. The most unexpected setback that the U.S. suffered was in geopolitics. When the U.S. was busy in the Muslim world, China was steadily rising. By the time the U.S. realised that China had become its greatest rival since the end of the Cold War, it was too late.
2. The U.S. had already lost the war in Afghanistan; al-Qaeda had split into different branches (what President Biden called a metastasised threat); divisive, ethno-nationalist and Islamophobic politics had become stronger at home; and the moment of unipolarity had passed.
3. In the face of these enormous challenges, President Biden decided to end the war in Afghanistan allowing the Taliban their victory. This left the war on terror uncertain and caused a shift in the U.S.'s strategic focus towards a resurgent China (policies followed by President Donald Trump).
4. Mr Biden said the era of wars to reshape the world was over, marking an official end of the neoconservative regime-change foreign policy.

Mr Biden's America, having suffered a crushing defeat in Afghanistan, might be reluctant to launch another direct military intervention in the near future. To be sure, America's withdrawal and the perception of its weakness will embolden its rivals like Iran, Russia and China. But the U.S., which is seeking to return to realism from neoconservatism, might wait for its rivals, especially China, to commit blunders — like the Soviets, emboldened by America's defeat in Vietnam, did in 1979 — or it might grab other strategic opportunities.

Afghanistan is not the end of American power; it's the beginning of the new U.S.-China cold war. Meanwhile, terrorist outfits will continue to operate from the havens they have already found.

## Empathy through education

India's National Education Policy (2020) mentions social and emotional learning (SEL) as an important facet of education. SEL is the process of learning to recognise and manage emotions and navigate social situations effectively. While the policy notes numeracy and literacy as its central aims, SEL should be an equally important goal as it supports skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.



20.09.2021

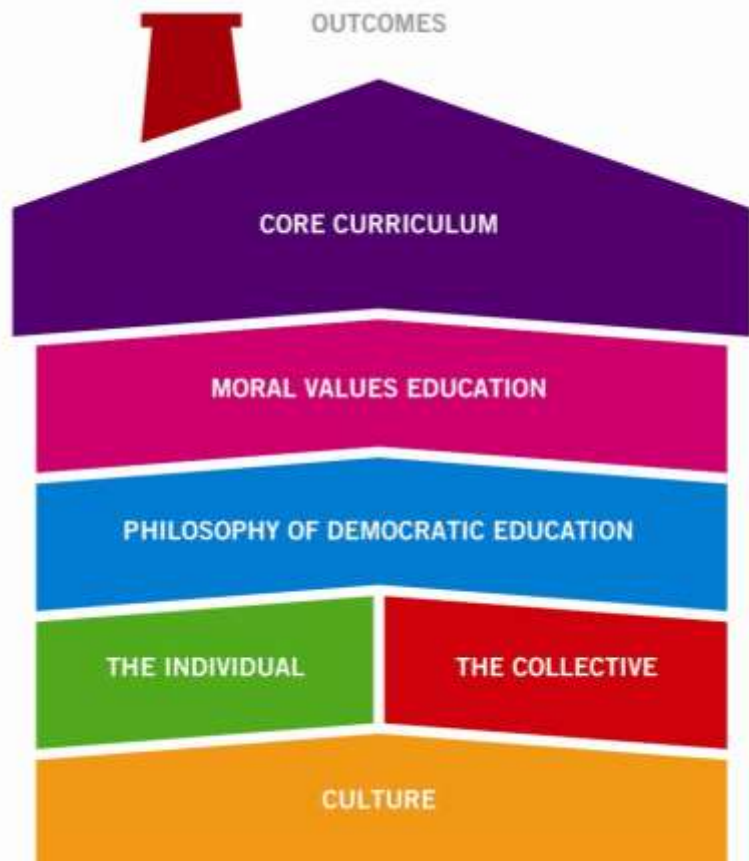
Monday



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## What is SEL?

1. SEL is foundational for human development, building healthy relationships, having self and social awareness, solving problems, making responsible decisions, and academic learning.
2. Key elements of SEL include cultivating empathy and theory of mind. 'Empathy' is the ability to understand another person's emotions and be aware of why they might be feeling those emotions from their perspective.
3. 'Theory of mind' is the ability to understand others' intentions, knowledge and beliefs and recognise that those might be different from your own. Research finds that students with greater social skills and emotional regulation are more likely to have success.
4. Despite its importance to life, SEL is often added as a chapter in a larger curriculum rather than being integrated in it. To overcome this challenge, it is vital to consider that the learning process is a social and emotional experience.



## Pandemic crisis and opportunity:

1. The pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges for SEL as school closures reduced opportunities for students to deepen social relationships and learn collaboratively in shared physical spaces.
2. Conversely, remote learning "gave parents the opportunity to discover their children's social and emotional lives," notes Jim Eagen, the head of

20.09.2021

Monday



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Synapse school in California, where SEL is a key strategic pillar of the school.

3. Even with parental involvement, the challenge of an inadequate support system for SEL remains.

### A way forward

1. Perhaps we can contextually adapt best practices from existing models. Synapse school seamlessly incorporates SEL into curricula through self-science classes and places SEL centrally within the school culture
2. In reality, individuals from underprivileged backgrounds have faced immense learning losses over the last one and a half years.
3. A starting point would be to consider insights from the Indian SEL framework: one, application of SEL practices should be based on students' socioeconomic backgrounds; two, SEL strategies of caretakers and educators must align with one another; three, long-term success requires SEL to be based on scientific evidence.

While policies provide guidelines, a big challenge in moving forward is unlearning old habits. The lockdowns provided an unintended reset which afforded an opportunity for positive change. As a sustainable development goal outlines, policymakers now have to ensure that future changes prioritise "inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Importantly, the onus lies on all of us to make individual contributions that will drive systemic change.

### Why India needs 'good' urbanisation

Covid reinforces that good urbanisation is our most powerful technology for poverty reduction

**Cities are a technology for poverty reduction**

1. Cities are a technology for poverty reduction; New York City's GDP equals that of Russia with 6 per cent of the people and 0.00005 per cent of the land.



2. Covid has catalysed a naive or hypocritical romanticism of villages that believes cities are undesirable technology because of their hostility to

20.09.2021

Monday



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migrants, infection hotspot tendency, and diminished centrality to the future of work due to digitisation.

3. On the contrary: Covid is an opportunity to catalyse good urbanisation by empowering our cities with more power and funds.
4. Cutting back on urbanisation would hurt the three transitions — farm to non-farm, informal to formal, and school to work — that are raising per capita incomes. India's problem is not land (if we had Singapore's density all our people could fit into Kerala), labour or capital (we are the world's largest receiver of diaspora remittances and FDI).
5. Our challenge is the productivity upside of good urbanisation. And if 50 per cent of our population in rural areas generate only 18 per cent of the GDP, they are condemned to poverty.

### Drawbacks of urban governance:

The golden rule in government is those with the gold rule; the annual spend of our central government is about Rs 34 lakh crore and of 28 state governments is about Rs 40 lakh crore. But the 15th Finance Commission estimates our 2.5 lakh plus local government bodies only spend Rs 3.7 lakh crore annually. This apartheid has many reasons.

1. First is power; local government is curtailed by state government departments in water, power, schools, healthcare, etc (property tax collection would be 100 per cent if municipal bodies supplied water).
2. The second is independence — only 13 per cent and 44 per cent of the budget of rural and urban bodies was raised themselves.
3. The third is structure — a Union ministry controlling finance and governance of the states would be unacceptable at the Centre but the Department of Local Self Government in the states has almost unlimited powers (suspension/removal of mayors and other elected representatives or supersession of elected local bodies is almost routine in most states).
4. Fourth, having separate central rural and urban ministries distorts policy. Finally, the lack of power and resources sets off a vicious cycle of decline because ambitious and talented individuals aren't attracted to city leadership.
5. But most Chinese premiers since 1978 apprenticed as mayors just like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Chittaranjan Das did in 1924.



## **A fundamental challenge to empowering the local governments:**

1. India's local government challenge reflects what historians call path dependence; unlike others, our democracy didn't evolve bottom-up with local government rolling up into state governments that came together as a nation.
2. India inherited a nationally centralised structure (a must for a colonial power) and princely states (with legitimacy, structures and resources) got strong powers in the constitution.
3. Consequently, empowering local governments has been seen as a "favour" that involves "sacrifice", and city leadership is either unelected with power (bureaucrats) or elected with limited power and unreasonable conditions (candidates are only eligible for one term in 30 years because of the six-category reservation-by-rotation policy for SC man, SC woman, ST man, ST woman, General man, General woman).

## **Need of Urban areas:**

1. Urbanisation gets a bad name in rich and poor countries because megacities — 10 million-plus populations — are unpleasant places to live for people who are not rich or powerful.
2. Twenty-six of the world's 33 megacities are in developing countries because their rural areas lack rule of law, infrastructure and productive commerce.
3. Migrants that left our cities during the first lockdown last year are back because they were not running towards cities, but running away from sub-scale economic wastelands — estimates suggest that 2 lakh of our 6 lakh villages have less than 200 people.
4. But there is no denying that even our non-megacities have inadequate planning, non-scalable infrastructure, unaffordable housing, and poor public transport.

## **Why does India need Good urbanisation?**

1. Good urbanisation is also crucial to delivering economic justice for women, children and Dalits. Poor quality urbanisation has meant men-only migration, leaving the women with all the hard labour of farm work, raising the children, and looking after in-laws, while having virtually no recourse to health services, or to even emotional support of the spouse.
2. Village children going to abysmal-quality government schools without bilingual possibilities places them at a disadvantage in English-dominated entrance tests for professional courses and civil services.

20.09.2021

Monday



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3. Though not great by any standards, the quality of both healthcare and education in cities remains better than villages by miles. Most painfully, Dalits in villages are often denied the dignity that urban anonymity provides.
4. Good urbanisation — getting power and funds to cities — needs chief ministers to sacrifice self-interest. Their reward will be the undying blessing of millions waiting for high-quality jobs and opportunities.

### Background:

### Best Practices across the world:

1. Megacities are not cursed. Tokyo has a third of Japan's population but planning and investments have ensured that essential workers like teachers, nurses, and policemen don't commute two hours.
2. The most insightful metric for city quality came from Italian physicist Cesare Marchetti who suggests that 30 minutes has been the most acceptable — or shall we say civilised — commute through history (even as the method changed from walking to horses to bicycles to trains to cars).
3. The Marchetti constant is almost impossible in Bengaluru where taxi and auto speeds average 8 km/hour.