

# A Decade of Wars, Crises and Rises

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In international politics, decades are important tools that help us understand and interpret history better. The major developments in the past often come to our mind with tags of decades – the economic crisis of 1920's, the wars of 1930's, the reconstruction of 1950's, the Lost Decade, and so on. Now, standing at the starting point of a new decade, how do we analyse the bygone one (2000-10)?

According to British historian Andrew Roberts, the first ten years of the new century, or the Noughties, were full of troubles. It witnessed two major wars, one of the gravest financial crises in decades, a number of natural disasters including Tsunami, and changes in global power dynamics. At the beginning of the century, not many might have forecast such a troublesome first decade.

The Noughties followed a decade that saw the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent emergence of the US as the sole superpower in the world. The successful tests of American hard power in the Balkans and the Middle East in the late 1990's underscored the opinion that the new century would be an American century. President George W. Bush, who assumed office in 2001, vowed to accelerate American style free market capitalism and expand the military capabilities of the country. Everything looked set for paving the way for the US to reshape and lead the global order without major hindrances. But the path of history often lies beyond the scope of prediction.

## Wars

The beginning of sweeping changes of the decade started on September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Centre, the tall symbols of America's economic might, was attacked by a few terrorists. The attack became a reference point of the decade, if not of the century. In the same month, president Bush declared America's "war on terror" and the US started this war on October 7 by bombing Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

The US could drive the Taliban out of Kabul within weeks of bombing, and set up a puppet government of Hamid Karzai in the capital city. But the war did have a ripple effect across the Muslim Middle East. The war on terror was interpreted by many political Islamists as an "imperial crusade" of the West against Islam. This notion gained currency when Bush opened another war front in the Islamic world in 2003. Accusing the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq of supporting al-Qaeda in the region and mobilising weapons of mass destruction, the US declared war on the Baathist country in March 2003.

Two months later, President Bush declared victory in Iraq. Saddam Hussein went absconding, the regime was toppled and a provincial government was established, which

was followed by a bloody resistance by Iraqis against the occupation. Saddam was captured in December 2003 and hanged on December 30, 2006.

According to many reports, the neoconservatives in the Bush administration wanted to expand the war to Iran, and further to Syria as part of their plans to reinforce America's hegemony on the entire Middle East. But the Iraqi resistance bogged America down for years. When things started returning to a new normal in Iraq, the economic catastrophe limited America's military possibilities.

### Crisis

If America's hard power faced fresh challenges in the first half of the decade, its unique economic model was nearly destroyed in the second half. The unregulated capitalism, which the US championed for years, drew flak from all corners when Wall Street investment banking giants like Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008, plunging the entire world into an unprecedented liquidity crisis. The woes of the financial sector soon expanded to the real economy, leaving most of the advanced developed countries in recession.

The new president of the US, Barack Obama, in complete realisation that his country was not in an advanced position to cope with the world's problems, came forward to formulate a new cooperation mechanism with the emerging economies including China and India. Many countries, including the US, put caps on the flow of capital, implemented fresh regulations and expanded the scope the government to fight the crisis.

### The Rise of China

Another major twist of the decade is the rise of emerging powers, including China, India and Brazil, onto the global stage. Of these, China stands out. According to many analysts, the this century is China's. British academic Martin Jacques says the stage is set for China to rise as a counter power to the US and radically overhaul the international system. China's escape from the global slowdown nearly unhurt has forced many analysts to take a more positive view vis-à-vis the Asian giant. China is the fastest growing economy in the world and is set to overtake Japan as the second largest economy in 2010. It is also a fast rising military power and a regional hegemonic state in Asia.

The new decade will see China further expanding its economic influence and making efforts to convert that into political clout. According to Goldman Sachs, China will move past the US as the largest economy by 2027. If the trend of Noughties continues in the new decade, it will have radical effect on the existing global order, so far dominated by the West. So, gear up to live in a rapidly changing world.

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