



India And Present Global Order

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This editorial is based on **A strategy for India in a world that is adrift** which was published in The Hindu on 07/10/2021. It talks about the current status of global order and the way forward for India to utilise it.

Like any other country, India's foreign policy envisages to widen its sphere of influence, enhance its role across nations, and make its presence felt like an emerging power.

The year 2021 presents a bunch of challenges and opportunities in pursuit of fulfilling foreign policy objectives. New situations require fresh thinking. Changing dynamics of the present global order requires India to take calculated actions.

Present Global Order

- The world is adrift today. We are neither in a bipolar Cold War nor in a multipolar world, though perhaps tending towards a world of several power centres. We are in a world between orders.
- The lack of a coherent international response to the **Covid-19 pandemic** is proof of an absence of international order and of the ineffectiveness of multilateral institutions. So is the ineffective international response to climate change and other transnational threats.
- A retreat from globalisation, the regionalisation of trade, a shifting balance of power, the rise of China and others, and structural China-United States strategic rivalry have shifted the geopolitical and economic centres of gravity from the Atlantic to Asia.
- Inequality between and within states has bred a narrow nationalism and parochialism. We are entering a new polarised information age, and face ecological crises of the Anthropocene, making climate change an existential threat.

Asian Century

- Over the next decade it is expected that Asia will remain the cockpit of geopolitical rivalries, and that the US remains the most formidable power, though its relative power is declining.

- China sees a window of opportunity but acts in a hurry, suggesting that it believes that window may close or is already closing due to pushback from the West and others.
- China's crowded geography constrains it both on land and at sea. It is expected that her profile and power will continue expanding, particularly in our periphery.
- The result is likely continued friction, some cooperation, and quasi-adversarial relations between India and China, which others will take advantage of. As neighbours and in the present situation, a mix of confrontation and cooperation is likely to continue to mark India's relations with China.
- Overall, conventional conflict between the great powers in Asia may not be a reality but other forms and levels of violence and contention in the international system will rise.

Challenges For India

- **A Stronger China:** China is the only major country that had a positive growth rate at the end of 2020, and its economy is poised to grow even faster in 2021.
 - Militarily, China has further strengthened itself and now seeks to dominate the Indo-Pacific Ocean with its announcement of its third aircraft carrier's launch in 2021.
 - In this context, any breakthrough in Sino-Indian relations is unlikely to occur, and the confrontation between Indian and Chinese armed forces is expected to continue.
- **Growing Russia-China Axis:** Russia is beginning to display more significant interest in its periphery's affairs. Moreover, the sanctions imposed on Russia after Crimea's annexation in 2014 has pushed Russia towards a tighter embrace of China.
 - This seems to signal reduced interest in countries such as India.
 - Also, India's closeness to the U.S. has weakened its links with traditional friends such as Russia and Iran.
- **Changing Middle East Equations:** The US-brokered rapprochement between Israel and four Arab countries — the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan — reflected the changing landscape in the region.
 - However, despite the hype surrounding **Abraham Accords**, the situation remains fluid and has not reduced the risk of a confrontation between Iran and Israel.
 - Given the region's strategic flux, Iran could well be tempted to use its nuclear capability to enhance its position.
 - This does pose problems for India since both have relations with it.
- **Self-Imposed Isolation of India:** Currently, India remains isolated from two important supranational bodies of which it used to be a founding member, viz., the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** and the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**.
 - Moreover, India has opted out of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**.
 - This self-imposed isolation doesn't synergise with India's aspiration of becoming a global power.

- **Weakening Ties with Neighbors:** A more worrying concern for Indian foreign policy is weakening ties with the neighbours.
This can be seen from instances like China's Cheque Book Diplomacy vis-a-vis Srilanka, strain in relation with Bangladesh on NRC issue and recent border controversy with Nepal due to the release of the new map.

Way Forward

- The **uncertainty and changing geopolitical environment** clearly pose considerable challenges to Indian policy but also throw up certain opportunities, enhancing our strategic options and diplomatic space, if we adjust policies internally and externally, particularly in the subcontinent.
We should aim for multipolarity in Asia.
- **Issue-based Coalitions:** India must adjust to changing circumstances. It has no choice but to engage with this uncertain and more volatile world. One productive way to do so would be through issue-based coalitions including different actors, depending on who has an interest and capability.
- **Increasing security congruence** with the U.S. could enable growing cooperation in fields significant for India's transformation: energy, trade, investment, education and health.
Other areas in which India and the U.S. could increase cooperation are: climate change and energy, on tech solutions for renewable energy, and on digital cooperation.
- **Revive SAARC:** India could be the primary source of both prosperity and security in the neighbourhood — the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean Region. The over securitisation of policy towards our neighbours has driven trade underground, criminalised our borders, and enabled large-scale entry of Chinese goods destroying local industry in the northeast.
 - While lessening dependence on China, and seeking external balancing, our primary effort has to concentrate on self-strengthening.
 - If there is one country which in terms of its size, population, economic potential, scientific and technological capabilities can match or even surpass China, it is India.
- **Self-strength is key:** Several steps that India can take in ensuring its role and influence abroad continue to serve the task of transforming India. Economic policy must match political and strategic engagement.
 - Globalisation has been central to India's growth. A more active regional and international role for India is incompatible with a position on the margins of the global economy.
 - Self-reliance in today's world and technologies can only be realised as part of the global economy. We should not imitate China's claims to being a civilisational state and its adoption of victimhood. Instead we should affirm our own strength and historic national identity.

- **External Aid in Adequate Measure:** The current standoff with China has reinforced JL Nehru's belief in 1963 that India needs "external aid in adequate measure".
 - In this context, India will need continuing support from the US, Japan, Australia, besides European leaders such as France, Germany and the UK.
 - India should appreciate European entry into Indo-pacific narrative, as France and Germany have already come up with their Indo-Pacific strategy.

Conclusion

In sum, self-strengthening is an absolutely essential precondition as also safeguarding the foundational sources of India's international influence. We cannot separate our domestic trajectory from the external course we need to pursue to transform India into a strong, secure and prosperous country

Drishti Mains Question

India's foreign policy envisages to widen its sphere of influence, enhance its role across nations, and make its presence felt like an emerging power in the present global order. Discuss.
