



Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities for India in 2023

For Prelims: G-20 Summit, Ukraine-Russia, Tavang Clash, Sri Lanka Crisis, Nepal.

For Mains: Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests

Why in News?

India is entering 2023 with challenges and opportunities staring at it on the diplomatic and military fronts with the [Russia-Ukraine](#) war and **China's belligerence** at India's doorstep.

- With a highly infectious **Covid-19 variant** spreading across China, a level of uncertainty has again gripped the world. And an economic downturn looms large on the horizon.
- As the [G20](#) Chair, India is looking forward to shaping conversations **on issues confronting the world**.
- As [UN Security Council](#)'s non-permanent member for 2 years, India sought to project its views and **contribute to the global conversations**.

What were the Major Concerns in 2022?

- **Russia-Ukraine War:**
 - The Russian invasion of Ukraine has **upended the global order in place since World War II**, impacted the world's [food and energy security](#), and is pushing the global economy towards a [recession](#).
 - The nuclear rhetoric from Russian leaders has caused anxiety, while the strategic embrace of **Russia and China is another worry**.
- **China's Aggression:**
 - The Ukraine war has also made the world sit up and look at China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific.
 - India too is facing that aggression on its border, with a **skirmish in Arunachal Pradesh after the [2020 Galwan clashes](#)** that killed 20 Indian soldiers.
 - China's belligerence can be seen in its recent activities in the [South China Sea](#), where it has been observed to carry out construction on an island.
- **Taliban Engagement:**
 - Less than a year after Taliban's recapturing of Afghanistan, India reopened its **operations in the Indian embassy in Kabul** and began the **process of re-engaging by sending humanitarian aid** in the form of food grains, vaccines, and essential medicines.
 - While India has made its red lines clear on the **Menace of Extremism and Rights of Minorities** and women, **it has also signalled a long-term commitment to Afghanistan's future**.
 - **India** has made a commitment of USD 80 million — over and above its USD 3 billion commitment in the last two decades — for improving the lives of Afghans.
 - This means India is looking at the Taliban as a political actor, although it is **influenced and even controlled by Pakistan's military establishment**.

▪ Neighborhood in Crisis:

- The **Lankan economic and political crisis** was a major challenge in the neighbourhood. India provided **humanitarian aid, fuel, medicines, more than any other country** in such a short period of time.
 - India is also helping Lanka negotiate an economic debt relief package from the **[International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#)**.
 - With China as a rival in Sri Lanka, India wants a **government that understands India's security and strategic interests**.
- **Engagement with Myanmar** has continued in **low-key visits and assistance to the military junta regime**.
 - The key impact has been the **influx of refugees from Myanmar** to the north-eastern states through the porous borders and concern about non-state actors fomenting trouble in the north-east.

What are the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead?

▪ Handling China:

- The recent **Tawang Clash** has shown that China is **challenging the status quo, not just in eastern Ladakh but in other sectors**.
- It is clear that China is the biggest adversary unlike in the past where some gave them the benefit of doubt.
- India's **strategic response has been guided** by a thinking that one has to stand up to the bully, but that has come at a cost, with **soldiers braving the harsh winter in eastern Ladakh** for the third year in a row.
- As China sees itself as a superpower and whose time has come, more clashes and competing interests with India are likely, which will have to be resolved through negotiations.

▪ Engaging with Russia:

- Russia has been a reliable supplier of defence equipment for the past seven decades, and despite diversification to the US, France and Israel among others, **it still dominates the field**.
- But it has been complicated by the Russia-Ukraine war, where the reliability of Russian equipment is **being questioned and the supply chain is under strain**.
- For India, China has been the biggest worry and what concerns India is that **Russia's ties with China influences some of its decisions**.
 - In the post **Cold War-era**, economic relations have formed the **"new strategic basis" for Sino-Russian relations**.
 - China is Russia's biggest trading partner and the **largest Asian investor in Russia**.
 - The West's approach towards Russia after the war has brought Moscow much closer to China. Delhi's effort will be to engage with both Russia and the West, and put its strategic defence and national security interests first.

▪ G20 as a Global Stage:

- The hosting of the **G20 summit will be one of the biggest portrayals of India's rise** at the global stage months ahead of the General Elections in 2024.
- India has already positioned itself as the **"voice of the Global South"**— a reference to the developing and the less-developed countries — and will seek to put its priorities on the global forum.
- In this context, India will also **seek to bring Russian and Western interlocutors and leaders together** and end the conflict in Europe.
- If India manages to do so, it will **claim a diplomatic win, which will go down well with its domestic constituency**.

▪ Ties with the West:

- With India buying cheap oil and not joining the West against Russia, India will have to work **to assuage the concerns of European and American partners**. In fact, the G20 preparations will give some opportunity to do that.

▪ Challenge in the Neighbourhood:

◦ Sri Lanka and Maldives:

- While Sri Lanka will continue to demand India's humanitarian, financial and political

attention in the new year, **India will also be part of political conversation in Maldives.**

- The Maldives is going to polls in September 2023, and an “India Out” campaign is likely to fire up the political debate. Delhi will be watching closely as political parties try to project India as the bully and a big brother.
- **Bangladesh:**
 - **Bangladesh** also goes into election mode in 2023, with polls scheduled for January 2024 after an iron-fisted reign of Sheikh Hasina.
 - India will be looking at her prospects **after a long and uninterrupted political journey that has brought security in India’s eastern states.**
- **Nepal:**
 - Nepal witnessed a dramatic turn of events, with rebel-turned-politician [Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ becoming the Prime Minister](#) and former **PM K P Oli** — a known India-baiter in recent years — holding the keys to the government.
 - This will pose a significant challenge for India, which has seen Beijing’s influence grow in Kathmandu in recent years.
- **Pakistan’s Crucial Year:**
 - Elections in Pakistan are scheduled for later in 2023. This will again be a contest to observe how the new civilian government and the Army chief will shape their attitude towards India.
 - In India, with Lok Sabha polls due in 2024, how the Pakistan puzzle is raked up and managed might hold the key to the next steps in the relationship.

Way Forward

- India’s domestic efforts will need to be **bolstered by smart partnerships with others.**
- While building new friends, India needs to **keep old partners like Russia by its side**, engage all countries **including China, and resolve outstanding matters with smaller neighbours** which have hobbled foreign policy for decades.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q1. In respect of India-Sri Lanka relations, discuss how domestic factors influence foreign policy. **(2013)**

Q2. At the international level, bilateral relations between most nations are governed on the policy of promoting one’s own national interest without any regard for the interest of other nations. This leads to conflicts and tension between nations. How can ethical consideration help resolve such tensions? Discuss with specific examples. **(2015)**

Q3. ‘The long-sustained image of India as a leader of the oppressed and marginalised nations has disappeared on account of its new found role in the emerging global order.’ Elaborate. **(2019)**

Source: IE