



India in Changing World Order

This editorial is based on [“India’s Watchwords In A Not So Bright 2022”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 18/01/2022. It talks about the changing geopolitical dynamics of the world and the approach that India can follow to balance its relations with different nations.

For Prelims: Indo-Pacific Region, Central and West Asia, Uighur Muslims, Xinjiang region, NATO, Russia-Ukraine Conflict, China’s Belt and Road Initiative, Line of Actual Control, New QUAD.

For Mains: Impact on India by the on-going conflicts in India’s strategically important regions, Countering China’s dominance, Need for changes in India’s foreign policies.

The years 2020 and 2021 experienced globally transformational events. In fact, nowhere more than in the geopolitics of the [Indo-Pacific](#), which is changing at multiple gears and levels.

The view is that a **rules based international order is a remote possibility** even in this upcoming year. Instead, **uncertainty and impermanence** are likely to be the **dominant aspect in world affairs**.

With internal conflicts going on in the strategically important regions for India and on-going stand-offs between India and China, the right approach for India is to bring more flexibility in India’s diplomatic approach along with leveraging the pre-existing groupings and excellent bilateral relations against China.

Challenges of the Changing World Order

- **Rise of Authoritarianism:** Admittedly, the world has recently seen the rise of authoritarian rulers in many countries. However, this can hardly be viewed as a new phenomenon.
 - **China has abandoned the ‘one country two systems’** policy, stripping [Hong Kong](#) of its freedom and inviting international opprobrium.
 - Moreover, the [human rights violation of Uighur Muslims](#) in [Xinjiang](#) and [China’s aggressive posture towards Taiwan](#) could well become one of the flash points of conflict.
 - The other major risk of a war in 2022, stems from the [ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine](#) — the latter being backed by the U.S. and [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation \(NATO\)](#) forces.
 - The current [unrest in Kazakhstan](#) further bodes ill for a world already wracked by a series of **coups or internecine strife as in Ethiopia, Libya and certain regions of West Asia and North Africa**.
 - [Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan](#) has led to a **material shift in the balance of power** in an already troubled region on India’s periphery.
 - Developments in Afghanistan have fuelled the ambitions of quite a few **‘anti-state militant groups’** across the region.

- Adding to such concerns is new evidence that on India's eastern flank, viz. **Indonesia, a resurgence of radical Islamist activities** is taking place.
- **Expanding Chinese Dominance:** The role of China is possibly the most disrupting one, given the challenge it poses to the existing international order.
 - Militarily, China is openly challenging U.S. supremacy in many areas, including **'state-of-the-art weaponry'** such as [hyper-sonic technology](#).
 - The dip in China's economic profile in the past year and more could also lead to new tensions in the Asia-Pacific region in 2022.
 - Moreover, **China's expansionist policies** via its [Belt and Road Initiative](#) is also being seen as a threat by other global powers such as the US, EU, the G7 Countries as well as by India.
- **India's Border Issues:** The persistent **two-front threat from Pakistan and China** set the stage for a tough continental dimension of India's security. There has been increased **militarisation of the borders with Pakistan and China**.
 - The **transgressions across the [Line of Actual Control](#)** in different sectors in Ladakh could well be expanded in 2022.
 - Hence, the year is **unlikely to witness any reduction in tensions** across Ladakh or in any other conflicted areas.
- **Challenges for India in West and Central Asia:** In [Central Asia](#), India will be challenged on **how best to manage its traditional friendship with Russia** with the pronounced tilt seen more recently in India-U.S. relations.
 - In [West Asia](#), the challenge for India is **how to manage its membership of the [Second Quad](#)** (India, Israel, the UAE and the U.S.) with the conflicting interests of different players in the region.
 - Indian diplomacy will be under severe test to manage the extant situation in both regions.

Way Forward

- **Flexibility in India's Foreign Policy:** What India and India's foreign policy need to do is to **demonstrate more flexibility to manage the contradictions that exist**.
 - It is important that India **finds rational answers to a rash of problems** that it cannot keep on the back burner for much longer.
 - India must **avoid blind spots** that arise due to **cognitive bias** and take care to read the signals properly.
 - India's leaders and diplomats must not only take stock of the dangers that exist but also be ready on how to **manage the risks that are well evident**.
- **Countering China's Military Strengths:** India will need to determine how best to respond to **China's sabre-rattling**.
 - India would need to **strengthen its military posture**, both as a means to deter China and also to **convince India's neighbours that it can stand up to China**.
 - Simultaneously, India should focus on **deterring China's naval force projection** in the [Indian Ocean Region](#). In the battle of wits and strength, much will depend on how India responds to the situation.
- **Leveraging Bilateral/Multilateral Links:** India should do what China simply cannot, i.e. **build regional links, open its markets, schools and services to the neighbours** and become a source of economic and political stability in the sub-continent.
 - Partnerships like [Quad](#) can also be expanded to include **Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam**. This will certainly strengthen its capacity to counter China in the Indo-Pacific.
 - The eastern and southern planks of **Africa and the Indian Ocean island states** need continued **high policy attention** and financial resources.
 - A clear economic and trade agenda, involving and incentivising corporate India to follow the flag in these vital regions, is certain to yield long-term dividends.
- **Role of EU and ASEAN:** The [European Union's](#) Indo-Pacific strategy aims at increasing its economic and security profile in, and linkages with, the region. By **being more candid and assertive with China**, and **more cooperative with partners such as India**, the EU as well as the EU and the UK can hope to become vital players in the Indo-Pacific.
 - The [ASEAN nations](#) face the heat of China's aggression and the sharpening great power rivalry, and hence, have the most work to do. **Multilateral talks by the Quad powers with ASEAN governments is necessary**.

- At an **individual level** too, India must enhance **cooperation with key Southeast Asian partners** Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand.

Conclusion

India has done well by fulfilling its humanitarian duties during the pandemic. Learning how to convert them smartly into economic and strategic opportunities in its periphery is the focused task for the nation in 2022.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the foreign policy approaches that India can adopt in the changing world order.

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