

INDIA'S GEOSTRATEGIC REALIGNMENT – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

NEWS: **Scholars urging** India must adapt **its foreign policy** to the rapidly evolving global landscape moving **beyond Cold War strategies and romanticized historical narratives to embrace a pragmatic, multidirectional approach.**

- Recently, External Affairs Minister **S Jaishankar** also said the **world order a western myth**, saying it was **outdated and global rules** should evolve to reflect today's realities.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Shifting World Order

- **Geopolitical Shifts in Eurasia:** Recent major conflicts in Eurasia, such as the **Russia-Ukraine war, Israel-Gaza operations, and the Israel-Iran-US conflict**, are reshaping global geopolitics.
 - These conflicts are **realigning alliances, disrupting economies, shifting global power dynamics, and reinforcing a multipolar world order.**
- **Rise of China and Global Realignment:** China has emerged as a dominant economic and technological superpower, leading to the rebalancing of global power.
 - In 2023, **China's trade** with the EU surpassed **\$1 trillion**, while **India's trade** with ASEAN stands at **\$120 billion**
- **Western Decline: US under Trump (2025)** signals a **withdrawal from multilateralism**, with a focus on **"America First"** policies, creating uncertainty in global governance.
 - The **European Union** is facing **economic stagnation**, with **growth around 1%**, limiting its global influence and ability to counter China.
- **Deglobalisation:** The forces that are leading to deglobalization are becoming stronger **manifesting itself in more nationalist and inward-looking policies** adopted by the western world.
 - **Example:** The US President announced a **tariff trade war on a number of countries**, including India (facing a 26 percent tariff).
- **Multipolarity:** The emerging world order is a **multi-polar world order with multiple power centers asserting** their autonomy and influence.
 - The rise of regional powers and the **formation of blocs like BRICS, African Union, ASEAN etc.**

About World Order

- It refers to the **arrangement of power & authority** that provides the framework for managing the global commons, such as **the environment, trade, security, and human rights** and the conduct of diplomacy and world politics on a global scale.
- It encompasses **the norms, rules, institutions, and power dynamics that shape the behaviour and interactions** of countries and other entities on the world stage.
- **Example of World Orders in MModern History:**

- Westphalian World Order; Inter-World Wars Global order; Post WW-2 World Order; Post-Cold War World Order

- **Rise of Minilateralism:** It is a **diplomatic approach where a small group of countries collaborate on specific issues or challenges**, focusing on shared interests and goals allowing for faster decision-making and more efficient outcomes.
 - India **collaborating with western powers in QUAD** and with the **rival Asian powers in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**
- **Focus on Regional Geopolitics:** The emerging world order emphasizes **on the growth of regional geopolitics, securing regional gains.**
 - The success of the **African Union and ASEAN in enhancing regional cooperation** and connectivity enabling overall growth.
- **Polycrisis:** Shared global challenges like **climate change, pandemics, terrorism, wars and conflicts and economic crises will** be the defining feature necessitating greater cooperation and collaboration among nations.
- **Self Reliance:** Every country and region will need to **rely on themselves for food, fuel, fertilizer, technologies, vaccines or speedy disaster response etc.**
 - India secured Russian crude oil at a cheaper rate defying US and EU sanctions.

Opportunities for India

- **Economic Growth and Diversification:** India's economic rise (projected to be the **third-largest economy by 2030**) provides a major opportunity to assert itself in global trade.
 - **FDI in India reached \$81 billion** in 2024, highlighting growing investor confidence.
 - India can **expand its economic footprint** globally by enhancing trade with **ASEAN, Africa, and the Global South.**
 - With **China's trade share in ASEAN at \$1 trillion**, India's growth in this area remains a challenge but also a major opportunity.
- **Regional Leadership and Global South Advocacy:** India's leadership role in the **Global South** positions it as the voice of developing nations, advocating for more **inclusive global governance.**
 - India's ability to navigate global issues like **climate change, trade equity, and sustainability** can increase its influence in global forums.
 - **IMEC** offers new trade routes between **South Asia, the Gulf, and Europe.**
- **Strategic Partnerships and Defense Cooperation:** India's growing defense ties with the **US**, exemplified by **technology transfers and military cooperation** (e.g., **F-35 jets, Predator drones**), will strengthen its defense capabilities and enhance its strategic autonomy.
 - India can leverage these relationships to secure a stronger **military-industrial base**, reducing dependence on any single supplier and enhancing its national security.

- **Technological and Digital Leadership:** India is emerging as a **leader in digital governance**, with initiatives like **UPI, Aadhaar, and CoWIN**.
 - India can export these **digital solutions** globally, especially to **developing countries** that seek scalable solutions for governance and technology.
 - India's focus on **artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, and space exploration** offers opportunities to be a technological powerhouse and a key player in global innovation.
- **Reasserting Itself on the Global Stage:** India can assert itself in **global forums** like the **G20 and BRICS**.
 - India's historical commitment to **non-alignment** and **strategic autonomy** allows it to navigate tensions between major powers and carve out its own space as a global leader.

India's Geostrategic Challenges

- **Tensions with China:** **Border disputes** with China, particularly in **Ladakh** and the **Arunachal Pradesh** region, remain **unresolved**, leading to military confrontations.
 - **China's growing influence** in the Indian Ocean, through projects like the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, poses a direct threat to **India's regional security**.
- **Unstable Neighborhood:** India faces political instability in **Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar** and **Sri Lanka**, affecting its security and regional influence.
 - **Cross-border terrorism from Pakistan (e.g. 2025 Pahalgam attack)** and the ongoing tensions in Kashmir add to India's security concerns.
- **Balancing Relations with Major Powers:** India must navigate complex relationships with **the US, Russia, and China**. It faces a delicate balance between **strategic autonomy** and aligning with powers like the **US** for defense cooperation.
 - **Russia's declining influence** and India's need to diversify its defense supply chains also complicate relations.
- **Global Economic Shifts:** India's **economic growth** is challenged by **China's dominance** in global trade, particularly in **ASEAN and Europe**.
 - **Protectionist policies** in the West, including **tariff wars**, further **limit India's access to global markets**.
- **Instability in Eurasia and Middle East:** **Eurasian conflicts**, such as the **Russia-Ukraine crisis** and tensions in the **Middle East**, impact India's energy security and diplomatic relations.
 - The **Iran-Saudi rivalry** and **US-Middle East dynamics** force India to balance its relations with both sides, while securing energy supplies from **Iran and Saudi Arabia**.
 - In 2025, India navigated **Israel-Iran conflict-driven energy market disruptions** by diversifying oil imports and leveraging strategic reserves to ensure supply stability.

- **Climate Change and Security:** Climate change poses a significant challenge, with India facing natural disasters, **water scarcity**, and **food security** concerns that affect regional stability.
 - India must also lead in global **climate change negotiations** while ensuring its own **development goals**.
- **Cybersecurity and Technological Challenges:** Increasing **cyber threats** and the **race for technological supremacy** (particularly in **AI**, **5G**, and **cybersecurity**) require India to strengthen its **digital infrastructure** and **national security**.

Criticism of Old-World Thinking in Indian Foreign Policy

- **Outdated Cold War Alignments:** India's foreign policy often clings to **Cold War-era alliances** and ideologies, despite the changing global order.
 - These old alignments limit India's flexibility in responding to new geopolitical realities.
- **Over-Reliance on Historical Relationships:** India's historical ties, like those with **Russia** and **Europe**, are sometimes overemphasized, even when they no longer align with current global dynamics.
 - For instance, **India's focus on Russia** can hinder engagement with **the West** and **China**.
- **Romanticizing Past Trade Routes:** Some scholars romanticize **ancient trade routes** like those through the **Gulf** and **Europe**, without considering modern **geopolitical realities**.
 - The past does not align with the present, where countries like **China** dominate key markets.
- **Failure to Adapt to Multipolarity:** India often fails to recognize the importance of **multipolarity** in the new global order, which requires **reconfiguring its diplomacy**.
 - There is an ongoing need to rethink India's role in a world with multiple power centers, beyond just **US** or **Russian influence**.
- **Lack of Regional Integration:** India's traditional policies, like **Look East** and **Act East**, have not fully translated into meaningful engagement with **ASEAN** and **East Asia**, while **China** has surged ahead in the region.
 - India must move beyond outdated **strategic formulations** to effectively integrate itself into **regional architectures**.
- **Underestimating Global Economic Shifts:** Old-world thinking sometimes underestimates the **economic shifts** brought about by the rise of **China** and the **Global South**.
 - India needs to focus on **economic diversification** and **global partnerships** that reflect the current global power structures.

Underperformance of Past Initiatives

- **North-South Corridor (INSTC):** Launched in **2000**, the **North-South Transport Corridor** aimed to connect **India**, **Russia**, and **Iran** to facilitate trade between South Asia and Europe.
 - Despite the formal signing of the agreement in **2000**, the project has slow progress.

- **China** quickly capitalized on this space, strengthening its influence over **Russia** and **Iran**.
- **Look East Policy:** India's **Look East Policy** (1990s) aimed to build stronger ties with **ASEAN** and **East Asia**. This evolved into the **Act East Policy** under PM Modi.
 - However, India's trade with **ASEAN** stands at **\$120 billion**, while **China's trade** with **ASEAN** reached **\$1 trillion**, leaving India behind in terms of regional influence.
- **IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor):** IMEC, launched in **2023**, aimed to connect **South Asia** with the **Middle East** and **Europe**, offering a new trade route bypassing the Suez Canal.
 - Despite initial enthusiasm, the initiative faces significant **logistical challenges** and **geopolitical hurdles** due to the instability in **Eurasia** and **conflicting interests** of countries involved.
- **Trade and Infrastructure Projects in Africa:** India launched multiple **trade initiatives** in Africa under "Act Africa", but these projects have largely underperformed due to competition from **China's BRI** and challenges in **infrastructure development**.
- **Regional Connectivity Projects (SAARC, BIMSTEC):** India's efforts to integrate **South Asia** through **SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) have largely stalled due to **regional tensions** (especially with **Pakistan**).
 - **BIMSTEC** has made some progress, but the lack of full **regional cooperation** hampers its effectiveness.
 - **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Motor Vehicle Agreement (IMT-TMVA)** faced challenges from inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic hurdles and security concerns.

India's Global Engagements in Shifting World Order

- **Strategic Partnerships:**
 - **US-India Relations:** India's partnership with the **US** has strengthened, with key agreements on **defense** (e.g., **Predator drones**) and **technology transfers**.
 - The two countries also collaborate on **maritime security**, **space exploration**, and **counterterrorism**.
 - **Russia-India Relations:** Despite tensions with the **US** over India's continued engagement with **Russia**, India maintains strong defense and energy ties.
 - India is a significant importer of **Russian arms** and **energy**.
 - **China:** While the two countries engage through platforms like **BRICS** and **SCO**, tensions over **border disputes** and **China's influence in South Asia** complicate the relationship.
- **Regional Engagements:**

- **ASEAN:** India's **Act East Policy** focuses on deepening ties with ASEAN, but India's **trade with ASEAN** is still far behind **China's**.
 - However, initiatives like the **India-ASEAN Free Trade Area** (signed in 2009) aim to increase economic cooperation.
- **Middle East:** India has enhanced its relationship with the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**, particularly **Saudi Arabia** and the UAE. India has also played a significant role in the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**.
- **Multilateral Engagements:**
 - **G20:** India plays a crucial role in the **G20**, advocating for reforms in global financial institutions and sustainable development. The **G20 summit in 2023** focused on India's **leadership in global climate action** and **economic reforms**.
 - **BRICS:** India is an active member of **BRICS**, working towards greater **economic cooperation** and addressing issues like **trade barriers** and **security threats** within the group.
 - **UN:** India continues to push for **reform of the UN Security Council** and greater representation for emerging economies. India advocates for **peace** and **security** in **Africa** and **the Global South**.
- **Economic Diplomacy:**
 - **Trade Agreements:** India has signed **free trade agreements (FTAs)** with countries like **the UAE**, **Australia**, and **several African nations** to enhance economic ties.
 - It is also working on joining **regional groupings** like **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)**.
 - **Energy Diplomacy:** India is diversifying its energy sources, securing **discounted Russian oil** amidst the **Russia-Ukraine conflict** and enhancing energy partnerships with **Saudi Arabia** and **the UAE**.
- **Technology and Digital Diplomacy:**
 - **Digital Governance:** India is leading in **digital platforms** like **UPI**, **Aadhaar**, and **CoWIN**, positioning itself as a **global leader in digital governance**.
 - India is sharing its **digital innovations** with countries in **Africa**, **South Asia**, and **Latin America**.
 - **Technology Cooperation:** India's partnership with the **US** and other Western nations in the field of **artificial intelligence (AI)**, **5G technology**, and **semiconductors** is a critical aspect of its future global engagements.
- **Security and Peacekeeping:**
 - **Peacekeeping Role:** India has contributed significantly to **UN peacekeeping operations** and is increasingly seen as a leader in global peace and security.
 - **Maritime Security:** India's leadership in **the Indian Ocean** region, through **naval cooperation** with the **US** and **ASEAN** nations, is key to securing global trade routes and countering piracy.

Way Forward for India

- **Strengthening Regional Security:** Ensure stability in South Asia by deepening **diplomatic and economic ties** with neighbors.
 - Focusing on resolving **border disputes** and fostering cooperation through the **Neighborhood First Policy** and **SAARC**.
 - Actively pursue **security cooperation** with **Afghanistan** and **Sri Lanka** to ensure the region does not become a haven for **terrorist organizations**.
- **Managing Relations with Major Powers:** India must navigate the delicate balance between the **US, China, and Russia**.
 - Continuing to build strong ties with the **US** for defense and **trade** while maintaining **strategic relations with Russia** for energy and defense needs is critical.
- **Addressing Underperformance of Past Initiatives:**
 - **Revive the North-South Corridor:** Focus on **infrastructure development** and **trade efficiency**.
 - **Rework IMEC:** Overcome **geopolitical issues** and **logistical challenges** to make the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** a success.
- **Economic Modernization and Energy Security:** Diversify energy sources by continuing to secure **discounted Russian oil** amidst **global tensions**, while deepening energy partnerships with **Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other Gulf countries**.
 - Continue pushing forward with **Make in India** to reduce **dependency on Chinese manufacturing** and focus on becoming a global **manufacturing hub** through **supply chain diversification**.
- **Global Governance and Multilateral Engagement:** Reform the **UN Security Council (UNSC)** to reflect **modern geopolitical realities** and ensure the **Global South** has better representation.
 - Increase participation in **multilateral forums** like **G20, BRICS, and the QUAD** to assert India's role in **global governance**.
- **Geopolitical Strategy and Containment of China:** Strengthen defense ties with **Japan, Vietnam, and Australia** to counter China's **maritime expansion** and **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.
 - Increase presence and influence in the **Indian Ocean** to secure **shipping lanes** and **strategic choke points**, ensuring **freedom of navigation** and **regional stability**.
- **Climate Change and Sustainable Development:** India must continue to lead in **climate negotiations**.
 - Focusing on **climate justice** and advocating for **fair burden-sharing** for developing countries facing the effects of climate change.
 - **Sustainable development** should be prioritized, with India investing in **green technologies, smart cities, and renewable energy**.

- **Breaking Free from Old-Mindsets:** During China's Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong called for the abolition of the **"Four Olds": old ideology, old culture, old habits, and old customs**.
 - It is crucial to **rethink and redefine strategies** to align with the evolving global geopolitical and economic landscape.