



Pax Indica - Imagining the Possibilities New era Of Global Leadership in The era of Global Uncertainties

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Abstract

With the world's largest population and aspirations to great power status, India may be the most important of the world's emerging powers. New Delhi today is articulating its newly obtained voice on the global stage and is confidently able to steer through some of the evident contradictions in its approach. A more powerful & self-confident India would be looked at differently by the world is a given. India's unique weight in world diplomacy has been gradually added to by the country's economic capacities; however, the real impact on the world stage has come from India's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak, the Russia-Ukraine war, and Chinese aggressiveness. India has been successful in making it clear that, even in the face of the system's obvious dysfunctions, New Delhi will not back down from defending its interests and goals. India's fixation on Pakistan has given way to China's strategic management, which has helped the country—which has frequently been charged with strategic drift—clarify its strategic priorities. What many formerly considered to be a distinct possibility is now quickly turning into an undeniable fact that cannot be disregarded. Global politics are experiencing a dramatic shift in its tectonic plates, bringing forth long-awaited changes that many are holding out hope that they can avert. However, a China-Russia axis is probably going to have a radical impact on the global order. It is impossible to deny this.

Keywords: Steer, Contradictions, Dysfunctions, Strategic Management, Fixation

I. Introduction

Fragmentation of the global economic order accelerated as emerging technologies became the most important determinant of the international balance of power. A leadership void at the global level has also contributed to the inability of the extant international system to effectively make provisions for global public goods.

War is once again the main element of relations between states, as seen in the cases of Israel and Hamas and Russia and Ukraine. In addition to being evident as a fundamental component of the modern international order, force's instrumentality serves as a constant reminder that states' actions are still subject to the anarchic dynamics of international politics. The powerful continue to behave what they like, and the weak must continue to suffer as they must, with no relief provided by institutions, markets, or conventions. The ancient normal that the international system appears to have forgotten at its own peril is the new normal in today's globe.

Tensions in the Indo-Pacific region are at an all-time high precisely at the moment of the US-China dispute. There is no evidence of the collective leadership needed to address this global crisis. This implies that the world would greet 2024 with a unique sense of dread, as past assumptions might no longer be sufficient to predict future patterns. The impending danger presented by the anxiety around violence and interstate conflict. Nonetheless, the ferocity of hard power's assertion also mirrors the negligence with which certain actors handled international relations' global affairs. Asian nations like China and India are prime examples of this, as they are currently bolstering their hard power, but on the other side, institutions like the EU are dismantling their military apparatuses.

We could also see how the how US being the existing superpower and the existing American military machine which has its grip all across the world slowing losing its stature and finding it difficult to balance itself hard to balance on multiple theatres especially when it faces a looming threat posed by the aggressive rise of China which looks to replace the US.

Three powers – China, India, and Pakistan – hold the keys to the future of south Asia. As the West withdraws from Afghanistan and US influence in the region declines, this triangular



strategic relationship will become more complicated unless China and India – the two major powers – can define the parameters of a new regional order.

The emerging power that is reluctant to commit diplomatic or political resources to stabilize the region or even to maintain the status quo, the deeply dissatisfied revisionist power that is intent on redrawing the regional order with the tacit approval of the rising superpower, and the rising "superpower" with its commercially defined unilateral approach to the strategic fault lines of the region define the sub-region's strategic landscape.

A Wider Strategic Perspective

India is uncomfortably placed at the heart of a geopolitical landscape – the India–China–Pakistan strategic triangle – that is beset with multiple strategic challenges. The Indo-Pak rivalry in Afghanistan and the Sino-Pak partnership effectively keep India out of the Afghan reconciliation process, undermining New Delhi's regional ambitions, even if one were to read China's attempts to participate in the process as benign but driven by commercial interests.

Therefore, the question is whether the Chinese leadership can manage its relations with India cooperatively and see the region as a security complex—that is, recognize that each state's security cannot be considered separately from the others—beyond the false necessities imposed by its partnership with Pakistan. China might suffer as a result of Beijing's unspoken support for Pakistan's revisionist ambition, which might potentially impede its development. While pursuing its global aspirations, the Chinese leadership cannot disregard the necessity of stabilising relations with India and pacifying the area.

India, for its part, must view the region from a wider, long-term strategic perspective and avoid getting tied down in petty fights with Pakistan – for its own sake and for the sake of promoting a stable regional order. Such an order could lead to peaceful coexistence between India and China and conciliatory management of the region's problems. It could even produce the first signs of a peaceful Asian superpower on the rise.

In conclusion, Pakistan must modify its strategic objectives due to its increasing incapacity to function as a contemporary nation. If Pakistan hopes to regain its footing as a functional nation state and contribute to a stable regional order, it must give up its long-standing fixation with India and stop using non-state actors as an instrument of statecraft.

In the past, India was predominantly perceived as a developing nation. However, its recent trajectory over the last decade indicates that India is charting a new course for itself in the regional and global economic and political landscape. As a leader of the Global South, India has strategically positioned itself as a trailblazer and frontrunner, with diverse achievements attributed to itself across varied spheres. To elaborate, India's foreign policy strategies are guided by its interests to advance its potential to influence the international order.

India currently has a number of chances to participate in a new multilateral global order and support the stability and development of developing nations. India, one of the world's biggest democracies, has long served as a global leader in the Global South. Since gaining its independence, India's foreign policy has been distinguished by its dedication to promoting and advancing "Third Worldism" and the sovereignty of the developing nations.

In contrast to China, the other Asian leader, India did not side with any bloc during the Cold War and was instrumental in the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) inception. It promoted the primacy of the UN above specialised institutions like the World Bank and IMF and emphasised the UN's significance as the premier organisation. Furthermore, indicating different approaches to integration with the world economy, Beijing joined the WTO later than New Delhi, which joined the GATT, the IMF, and the World Bank earlier.

India's current position in the global geopolitical landscape holds immense significance. The ongoing century is often touted as the "Asian Century," within this narrative, India, alongside China and Russia, assumes a pivotal role. China's economic might and initiatives like the One Belt, One Road project have raised concerns about its hegemonic intentions. At the same time, India's refusal to participate and its independent stance have led to territorial tensions along the Line of Actual Control. Amid this backdrop, India's role in the Global South gains prominence as it seeks to balance geopolitical complexities while pursuing its developmental goals.

Geopolitical Landscape

India actively engages in South-South cooperation initiatives, promoting cooperation and the sharing of best practices among Global South countries. It provides its expertise and experiences in a range of fields, such as renewable energy,



healthcare, and agriculture. India promotes sustainable development and helps other countries in the Global South overcome shared challenges by means of platforms like the South-South Cooperation Fund. New Delhi offers development assistance to countries in the Global South through programs like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC). These initiatives seek to strengthen capabilities, share expertise, and cultivate skills while leveraging India's development aid to uplift other nations and encourage self-sufficiency.

Moreover, India's vaccine diplomacy, dubbed the "Vaccine Maitri," shifted its emphasis from South Asia to the Global South's underdeveloped and least developed countries. Through donations and commercial exports, this strategy seeks to strengthen ties with countries in the global South in order to offset the hegemonic Chinese influence and increased investments.

Using the Global South as leverage, India attempted to justify its supremacy in the region and legitimise its geopolitical influence by utilising vaccine diplomacy as a soft power tactic. Furthermore, India's cultural diplomacy is essential for building relationships with nations in the Global South. India facilitates cultural exchanges, understanding, and collaboration through programs such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and cultural festivals. These initiatives contribute to strengthening India's soft power in the Global South and fostering stronger people-to-people ties.

India Path in Global Geopolitics

India's Relentless Ambiguity in the recent conflict whether it is the Russia- Ukraine Conflict or the Israel - Palestine war is genuinely upsetting and frustrating to the western world order as India has abstained from voting on almost all UN resolutions denouncing Russian aggression. New Delhi declines to condemn or even name Moscow in other multilateral fora, like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad), which is attended by Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. Moreover, India has not ratified the financial and economic sanctions against Russia.

India is the biggest democracy to forge its own route among the uncommitted. A weaker Russia would contradict India's desire for a multipolar world order in which it is an

independent and significant pole. Russia has been one of India's most dependable diplomatic and defence allies. India does not agree with Washington's inclination to classify China and Russia as members of an "authoritarian axis" that poses a danger to the international order. While the United States is opposed to both China and Russia, India views them as close friends.

Even so, whatever how annoying Delhi's actions have been, New Delhi is not giving up on the free international order in an effort to mend its ties with Russia. For instance, Modi chastised Russian aggressiveness in September at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting by saying, "I know that today's era is not an era of war, and I have spoken to you on the phone about this." Modi made this statement while facing Russian President Vladimir Putin. New Delhi is said to have stepped in and helped construct the agreement that allowed the G-20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, last month, when it seemed that the group would not agree on a unified statement due to differing views regarding the war in Ukraine. The group was able to publish language that mostly condemned Moscow.

In other respects as well, India has served as a guardian of the global system. For example, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has repeatedly advocated for a peaceful resolution to the situation in Ukraine, even at times when doing so would have been awkward from a diplomatic standpoint, as he did during a visit to Moscow in November. Jaishankar has not advocated for a peace settlement that would result in Kyiv's territory being lost, nor has any other member of the Indian administration done so.

Additionally, it has joined the Quad, a global group of democratic countries with similar goals. Even though New Delhi has been hesitant to promote democracy abroad, it has been doing so more and more, whether it is through South-South development cooperation centred on civil society and governance or by training officials from Asia and Africa in electoral and parliamentary systems.

Just because New Delhi supports the liberal international order does not, however, mean that it is entirely comfortable with the arrangement. That being said, New Delhi is by no means totally at ease with the system, even though it endorses the liberal international order. India, the most populous and possibly most dynamic post-colonial state in the world, will always doubt the usefulness



of that order and wonder if it is adhering too tightly to regulations that have once again been established by outsiders. India, on the other hand, hopes to integrate into the recently formed multipolar global environment. To the extent that Indian officials "inherently think of themselves as a pole in the international system," as remarked by Happony Jacob, a recent observer from India.

India appears to be making an effort to become a part of this new multipolar world by fully renouncing great-power competition and choosing to follow its own nonaligned path. Though many in Washington regard India's nonalignment as mere fence-sitting, it may actually be stabilising for the current international system: India's neutrality reduces the potential for conflict because no bloc can win the great strategic prize, which lessens each side's combined strength against the others. Additionally, there seems to be a net benefit for upholding the international system.

New Delhi has the ability to openly oppose US-led initiatives such as denouncing Russian aggression against Ukraine, in addition to refraining from doing them. One such example is India's opposition to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which sought to remove Saddam Hussein and destroy his alleged WMDs. Conversely, when US efforts in the international arena benefit India, there is a considerably higher likelihood of gaining support from New Delhi. The United States' decision to remove al Qaeda agents from Afghanistan following 9/11 serves as a great example of this, since India shared Western concerns about the potential for terrorist attacks to originate from Afghanistan.

In the event that India grows into a major power in the next several decades, it will be imperative to ascertain its level of commitment to upholding the free international system. Given that New Delhi has implicitly endorsed Western objectives against Moscow, one could argue that India will prioritize the framework moving ahead (while preserving its alliance with it).

The goal of India's G20 Presidency was to shift global attitudes from polarisation to a stronger sense of unity. Being a multicultural democracy itself had well-prepared it to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to discuss and take action on global issues. The theme of G20 India 2023—Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: One Earth, One Family, One Future—encapsulating India's conceptualisation of the global order and its own role in it.

New Delhi has shown that it is willing to do more than just talk the talk. When COVID-19 first began to spread in 2020, it made clear how crucial it was for everyone in the community to band together and help those who most needed it, even as wealthier nations withheld aid and some amassed enough vaccines to vaccinate every adult five times. New Delhi has expertly used all the resources and platforms available to it to argue that, in the face of a severe global crisis, nations ought to be more globally involved rather than retreating.

There are political minefields ahead for India and its friends. If consideration is given to Sweden's and Finland's requests for membership in NATO, tensions between those countries and Russia would surely rise. India might have to choose between Russia and its Quad friends if the situation between Russia and Ukraine gets worse. India's previous objective of attaining multipolarity through the BRICS will become even less feasible if ties between China and Russia strengthen.

Without incurring any strategic or financial sacrifices, India has solidified its strategic independence. As India is essential to the "Indo-Pacific," its Quad partners seem tolerant of diversity. In the present geopolitical configuration, New Delhi has been able to dictate the conditions of international involvement. However, India may need to grudgingly adjust its idea of the kind of international order that protects its strategic autonomy, contingent on the result of the war in Ukraine.

India's (in)security perceptions

India's main security concern for more than thirty years has been Pakistan's attempts of destabilisation, whether they take place in Kashmir, Punjab, or other regions of the nation. The ongoing sense of security in New Delhi is largely shaped by Pakistan's inconclusive and unsatisfactory prosecution of the individuals responsible for the 2008 Mumbai terror assault, as well as the periodic violations of the ceasefire along the border.

The issue of post-NATO Afghanistan, where Pakistan is seeking to subjugate the Kabul regime through proxies and where the Taliban is gaining power, is another of India's top security worries that is also connected to Pakistan. New Delhi is reminded of the 1999 hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC-814 by a Pakistani Islamist group, which forced the Indian government to free high-ranking terrorists in exchange for the passengers' release from Taliban-controlled



Kandahar province. This is because the Taliban are expected to return to Kabul in one form or another. Today, another BJP government led by the more determined Narendra Modi is in charge, and it has repeatedly declared that New Delhi will respond to Pakistani aggression with far more vigour.

Thirdly, India still experiences instability as a result of its contested borders with China and Pakistan. Despite eighteen rounds of border talks with China, no comprehensive solution appears to be imminent, and occasional Chinese military incursions into Indian-controlled territory have heightened political tensions between the two capitals.

The border with Pakistan is far more complicated because of historical disagreements about sovereignty over an entire state (Jammu and Kashmir, or J&K). Though Pakistan has not been able to successfully seize J&K from India, it is not obvious that the Pakistani army has given up on its aggressive Kashmir policy. Lastly, because Islamic extremism and radicalization, particularly that of terrorist groups like the Islamic State, have the ability to forge an ideological foundation and serve as a unifying force for disgruntled but diverse groups, they could represent a threat to India.

India has been concerned for many years about China and Pakistan's covert strategic relationship, which has seen Beijing heavily supporting Pakistan's nuclear and missile development projects. These days, New Delhi is concerned about the increasing Chinese presence in the Pakistani half of J&K, especially in Gilgit-Baltistan. China no longer fully supports Pakistan's Kashmir stance, which is good news for India. Most notably, during the 1999 Kargil crisis between India and Pakistan, it did not offer its "all-weather friend" any material or political help.

The developing three-way relationship between China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan is one issue that alarms India. With its creative "New Silk Road" policy and its provision of economic and development support to Pakistan, China is progressively consolidating its position in the region. Additionally, Beijing is becoming more involved in regional efforts aimed at "conflict management," mediating disputes between Kabul and the Taliban and setting up trilateral strategic meetings with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

India's Approach To An Aggressive China

Even if Washington is uncomfortable, it has acknowledged India's stance on Russia and shifted its focus to India's relationship with China, as New Delhi and Washington naturally have

stronger links to China. As Chinese influence grows over India's maritime and continental borders, New Delhi has extended its outreach to China's neighbours in an effort to forge alliances with Southeast and East Asian nations. A deeper strategic alliance between New Delhi and Washington has resulted from growing Sino-Indian conflict in the continental and maritime domains as well as the global power struggle between China and the US. Beijing engages India in various forums, including Brazil, Russia, India, China, Russia, South Africa (BRICS), Russia-India-China (RIC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and bilateral top leadership summits, in an attempt to persuade New Delhi not to fully align with the United States against China. However, Beijing uses contentious initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the centrepiece of its massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to strengthen its strategic outreach to Pakistan, which naturally separates India. Because the U.S. strategy in the region is inextricably linked to the interlocking threat perceptions and responses in the triangle, the strategic chain serves as a useful addition to help understand the geopolitics of Southern Asia.

India has always harboured strategic misgivings about China's propensity to jeopardize its interests. China and India are the two most populous countries in the world and Asia from a geopolitical perspective, and tensions between them have increased recently. For instance, rival Chinese and Indian patrols entered disputed territory along their border in 2020, which led to hostilities between their armed forces.

If India can fulfil its promise as a manufacturing powerhouse and develop value chains that can compete with China's, it will stand to gain from efforts to "de-risk" its supply networks from China. Modi, more than his predecessors, has acted quickly to involve all of India's smaller neighbours, realising that subcontinental stability allows India to play a key role on the broader world arena. Pakistan has had the least amount of success, but the problems there are more related to Rawalpindi than to New Delhi. Pakistan's policy issues will probably never go away, but Modi has chosen not to let Pakistan's diversions get the better of him.

Instead, he has extended his reach ever more audaciously. India and Japan have developed a brilliant new alliance that is essential to reviving India's economy and establishing an intra-Asian balance of power against China. In addition, New Delhi has engaged Beijing in an effort to acquire



some degree of economic benefits and geostrategic stability, all the while trying to maintain cordial relations with Moscow in spite of Russia's increasing cooperation with China. Modi has not overlooked other crucial allies like France, Germany, Israel, or the United Kingdom throughout this deft balancing effort.

In other domains, India has also demonstrated striking strategic inventiveness. It has made impressive Middle East engagements with Iran and the United Arab Emirates at the same time, and plans are underway for a fresh push to Saudi Arabia. And while much more needs to be done in this area, the previous administration's Look East policy—which centered on mending relations with East and Southeast Asia—has been carried out to its logical Act East conclusion by the current administration.

In response to increased Chinese aggression, Modi's India has now started to have an impact in Southeast Asia, expressing its desire to protect freedom of passage in the South China Sea and strengthening its relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In addition to this renewed interest in India's eastern flanks, there is a determination to become the island states' go-to security provider in the Indian Ocean, even in the face of a growing Chinese presence in these waters. This policy is supported by significant domestic decisions to reinvest in developing naval capabilities for a longer presence and the projection of power around the Indian peninsula.

Modi's initiative to strengthen the ties with Washington is extremely significant. In addition to its own domestic policies, it suggests an acknowledgment that the United States—as a host for India's skilled labour, a source of capital, technology, and expertise, and the pivotal point of strategic support for India's global ambitions—holds the most significant keys to India's long-term success.

Conflict Scenarios

The regional postures of China, India, and Pakistan and the U.S. strategy in Southern Asia intend to maximise interest by capability enhancement, either through internal or external balancing. This makes the security dilemma in the region more acute and creates the possibility of conflict, some scenarios of which are explored below.

★ **Two-Front War**

India views any conflict with either China or Pakistan as heightening the possibility of a two-front war since the country's border conflicts with both countries remain unresolved and Beijing and Islamabad maintain a strong military and strategic alliance. The Indian military establishment makes no secret of acknowledging this possibility and indicating that it is prepared to deal with it.

India's military is getting ready for a war on two fronts by strengthening its overall deterrent power and credibility, making progress in the production and acquisition of military hardware, adjusting its military strategy, conducting pertinent training to address emergencies, and building border infrastructure. Building infrastructure along borders and the question of topography advantage have been important points of contention, as evidenced by the Doklam impasse and the ongoing fighting between Chinese and Indian soldiers in eastern Ladakh.

★ **No One Wants Nuclear Escalation — But it Can Still Happen**

To be clear, the acquisition of nuclear weapons and delivery technologies by governments does not imply the imminence of a crisis or war. The main purpose of China, India, and Pakistan's nuclear arsenals has always been to discourage rivals by showing them the enormous costs of going to war, rather than using them for actual combat. The leaders of the area are also highly motivated to maintain the safety of their arsenals and to establish command, control, and communications systems that are meant to avert mishaps, unauthorised use, or theft. None of them take their nuclear projects lightly.

★ **A 'Cascading Security Dilemma'**

Such actions by India would not only highlight the "cascading security dilemma" in the area, when military capabilities meant to deter one foe can inspire deadly anxieties in another, but they would also pose severe strategic questions for the United States. Pakistan sees new dangers from India when it arms itself to deter China, and it is likely to pursue improved capabilities of its own. In the worst-case scenario, perceptions of deterrence and stability in Southern Asia may be catastrophically and unpredictably altered by uneven waves of additional expenditures in capabilities and delivery systems, leading to an intensified nuclear arms race.



★ **Increasing Vulnerability From Nuclear Modernization.**

India, Pakistan & China have consistently modernised their nuclear forces over the past two decades. Everybody wants to make sure they can match each other at less severe escalation levels. These technological advancements have increased the vulnerability of all sides at different places in the escalation ladder. This can involve using low-yield nuclear bombs in certain battlegrounds and the ability to launch enormous strategic counterattacks against each other's cities.

India is reportedly working on building nuclear systems that are proactive and adaptive. These include ballistic missiles with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle systems, more precise, short-range nuclear delivery systems, and a growing fleet of cruise missiles. India is developing a new generation of surface-to-surface ballistic missiles dubbed Pralay, which has a range of 150 to 500 kilometers, in addition to its 1,000-kilometer land- and sea-based cruise missiles.

To enhance the robustness of its nuclear arsenal, New Delhi has built a "triad" of delivery systems that can launch nuclear weapons from platforms situated in the air, on land, and in the sea. By declaring intentions to build three new nuclear submarines in addition to the INS Arihant, which is presently in service, it is fortifying this triad. The ultimate goal is probably to have a patrol capacity that can perform "continuous-at-sea-deterrence," akin to what the navy of the US, France, Russia, the UK, and the US can accomplish.

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