

The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World (S. Jaishankar)

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Jaishankar, S. *The India way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*. Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022.

Any lay observer today will note that world politics and the global order are witnessing significant paradigm shifts. The validity of fundamental normals is currently under scrutiny, since the balance of power and hierarchy in International Relations is being inverted, and world political thought is evincing dramatic change. It is no secret that the world is currently experiencing volatility and uncertainty with tensions running high across the board. The strife between Russia and Ukraine remains unresolved, navigating China's emergence as a formidable pole in the multipolar universe remains a mystery, all while the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic still prevail. Furthermore, the revolution in technology has expanded the purview of politics and power from hard military to soft, cyber and digital. The global geo-strategic matrix has been overhauled as countries reposition themselves in the global architecture from an increasingly inward-looking America to the reinvention of Russia and the phenomenal rise of Asia. It is against this chaotic backdrop that Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, an Indian diplomat and politician, currently serving as the Minister of External Affairs in the Government of India, authored, "The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World."

"The India Way" sheds light on today's evolving global geopolitical order, while also identifying the fundamental reasons shaping the contemporary dynamic interplay, ultimately, describing India's position and path forward. There is no one better in contemporary India to write a book of this scope and expertise than Dr. S. Jaishankar.

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Dr. Jaishankar joined the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) in 1977. In his diplomatic career spanning 38 years, he served as the ambassador and High Commissioner to several key nations. Dr. S. Jaishankar's intellectual acumen and extensive background in diplomacy, as well as his current position in shaping policies and defining strategies, in combination with his critical thinking and introspection skills, contribute towards the book's significant appeal. It is a valuable resource for individuals who are interested in gaining insights into India's future trajectory, its challenges, and potential paths to progress.

The book spans about 200 pages and is structured into eight chapters excluding the preface and the epilogue. The chapters in this book address many contemporary concerns pertaining to global politics, including the emergence of China, the renewed importance with respect to the maritime affairs, and the implications of a more interconnected globe. Each chapter also sheds light on the role and relevance of India in the changing global order, the obstacles it encounters, and viable strategies and policy alternatives to address these challenges. This includes forging strategic partnerships, reclaiming its historical narrative, and enhancing its engagement in both the Asian subcontinent and the international arena. The book argues that India should adopt a foreign policy approach that combines elements of muscular realpolitik and a morals-based approach- as exemplified in the Mahabharat and the Arthashastra- in order to achieve development. Several recurring themes that have emerged in contemporary discourse include the ascendance of China, the constantly evolving volatile dynamic between the United States and China, and the potential opportunities for India within the ever-evolving global landscape. "The India Way" is a collection of personal reflections of Dr Jaishankar as a career diplomat and an active politician that highlights the vision of contemporary India and the way forward.

The first chapter of "The India Way" addresses a key exhortation reinforced throughout the book: individuals should not passively await external occurrences, but rather proactively anticipate and examine these events.. The chapter has been aptly titled, "The Lessons of Awadh." Awadh, recognised as the granary of India, was a strategically important location for the control of Doab, which is a fertile plain between the rivers Ganga and Yamuna. However, Indian self-absorption led to the taking over of Awadh by the East India Company (EIC). The annexation of the province of Awadh in 1856, carried out under the doctrine of lapse by the East India Company, had a significant role in instigating the first war of independence in 1857. The huge treasuries of Awadh proved to be of tremendous assistance to the East India Company in their efforts to conquer and

govern India. As per the assertions made by Dr. Jaishankar, Awadh serves as a representative entity that encapsulates the essence of India on a global scale². Consequently, the insights derived from the historical significance of Awadh holds paramount importance for India's contemporary self-definition. Dr. Jaishankar asserts that contemporary India has committed a number of significant errors, which have resulted in significant consequences. These include India's lack of certainty over the outcome of the Second World War, its approach to navigating the complexities of the Cold War, its insufficient comprehension of China, and its failure to capitalise on possibilities for economic advancement. For Jaishankar, India's rise in the contemporary world is reasonably assured and the only question is how to do so optimally.⁴ Dr. Jaishankar offers us the clearest elucidation of India's contemporary foreign policy:

“This is a time for us to engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbours in, extend the neighbourhood and expand traditional constituencies of support”⁵. However, in today's disrupted world, it will be difficult for India to perform this balancing act on the global stage. Nevertheless, India may encounter significant challenges in effectively navigating this delicate equilibrium on the global platform under the current context of global disruptions. The issue at the centre of the book's second chapter pertains to the evolving dynamics between the United States and China. Since the 2016 elections, there has been a noticeable decline in the traditional role of the United States as the guardian of the international order, resulting in a shift towards a more revolutionary stance. However, it might be argued that China on the other hand an emerging global power now finds itself defending the status quo. It is largely the dynamic between these two leading powers of the world that is and will continue to shape global geopolitics. For India to advance its goals it will need to successfully handle these two principal actors. Dr. Jaishankar considers the significant presence of conflicts within the realm of global geopolitics while recognises its intrinsic nature. He emphasises that for India to achieve success, it is imperative to strategically leverage these conflicts and utilise them to advance its own interest. India must reach out to a wide range of allies and find a point of

² S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 17.)

⁴ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 6.)

⁵ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 10.)

convergence with as many power centres as possible.⁶ India should aim for many friends, few foes, great goodwill, and more influence in the volatile world of today.⁷

But how can India prosper in a multipolar world compromised by rivalries, conflicts, disruptions and a clash of moral values? India's history and customs hold the key to finding the solution. As pointed out by Dr. Jaishankar, the Mahabharat, a powerful epic from ancient India, embodies all of the above-mentioned characteristics.⁸ The Mahabharat is undoubtedly the most vivid distillation of Indian thought on politics and statecraft and perhaps the most influential book written in this regard. All dilemmas and important questions in the field of diplomacy and statecraft such as risk-taking, making sacrifices, trusting, and practical compromises, ensuring a balance of power, and strategic alliances take mention in this powerful epic. In this book, Dr. Jaishankar highlights several instances from the Mahabharata, including Arjun's dilemma as he enters the battlefield and Lord Krishna's subsequent assistance, Krishna's willingness to forgive Shishupal a hundred times before punishing decisively, and Arjun's decision to choose Krishna over his army and weapons. These examples highlight the importance of strategic patience and unorthodox thinking which are applicable in contemporary politics. Dr. Jaishankar also emphasises the significance of Sama, Dana, Danda, and Bheda which loosely translate to alliance, compensation, force, and deception, respectively as mentioned in Kautilya's writings which serve as the foundation for addressing political challenges.⁹ China is the only nation to have successfully leveraged its cultural capital, historical legacy, and modern success. China's meteoric rise should motivate India to draw on its own rich history and cultural traditions. The chapter's most intriguing aspect in my personal opinion is Dr. Jaishankar's utilisation of the Pandavas' tale in the Mahabharat to serve as an illustrative tool to underscore the significance of narrative building. According to Dr. Jaishankar, the Pandavas had a distinct branding that represented their ethical standpoint, which is why they continually outperformed their relatives and generally came out ahead. The Pandavas also had a clear understanding of when to act valiantly and nobly and when to play the victim. India too shall have to take a call on its narratives and develop its message. Through the example of the

⁶ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 41.)

⁷ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 43.)

⁸ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 47.)

⁹ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 56.)

Mahabharata, Dr. Jaishankar demonstrates that India's vision for the future and its foreign policy are not based on the traditional notions of realpolitik and muscular diplomacy, but rather on ethics. The chapter also elucidates one of the prevailing themes of this book, namely, the imperative for India to draw upon its traditions and historical context in order to navigate decision-making against a turbulent global landscape. Being an ethical power is one aspect of the India Way.¹⁰

As stated in the introduction, a prominent recommendation made by Dr. Jaishankar in this book is for India to cultivate and transition towards a foreign policy that is grounded on pragmatism and realism. The author emphasises this argument in chapter four, titled "The Dogmas of Delhi." The author refers to the 1971 Bangladesh war, the 1991 economic liberalisation, the 1998 nuclear tests, and the 2005 Indo-US nuclear deal as illustrative instances when India effectively pursued its interests by making pragmatic evaluations of prevailing geopolitical circumstances.¹¹

“A misreading of geopolitics and economics up to 1991 stands in contrast to the reformist policies immediately thereafter. Two decades of nuclear indecision ended dramatically with the tests of 1998. The lack of response to 26/11 is so different from the Uri and Balakot operations.”¹²

As the above quote mentions Dr Jaishankar contrasts the instances of the Indian government and its policymakers sticking to their preconceived notions and dogmas² with instances of them implementing reformist policies through a hard-headed and pragmatic assessment of the political environment, and demonstrates how the latter has proven better for India and its national interests. Dr Jaishankar also asks for a dispassionate assessment of our performance regarding foreign policy since independence. Despite achieving a reasonable level of progress in terms of national unity and integrity, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of our borders still remain unresolved. Furthermore, when comparing our economic performance to that of Southeast Asian countries and China, it becomes evident that our economic growth appears moderate at best.¹³ certain misconceptions about our past relations continue to affect our relations contemporarily. A prime example of such an instance is to think of the 1962 conflict with China as inevitable and to

¹⁰ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 67.)

¹¹ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 74.)

¹² S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 74.)

¹³ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 79.)

accept the story of a betrayal. According to Dr. Jaishankar, this demonization of China has prevented a fair evaluation of India-China relations at present. ¹⁴

The chapter titled "The Nimzo-Indian Defence" addresses in particular the aspect of Chinese relations, which is one of the main topics covered in this book. The bilateral relationship between India and China holds significant implications for contemporary India, making it imperative for India to effectively navigate its interactions with China. India and China share great historical ties dating back to the Silk Road trade and the spread of Buddhism. The history and cordial relations between the two countries went on till India's independence and in its afterglow as well. However, during the 1950s, latent tensions were building which finally came to a head in 1962. The war in 1962 resulted in adverse consequences not only for India but also for the bilateral relationship between India and China, leading to a persistent sense of mistrust that endures to this day. Furthermore, it is worth noting, as Dr. Jaishankar aptly points out, that China's association with Pakistan has had a detrimental impact on its diplomatic ties with India. The Sino-Pakistan nuclear collaboration and the unfolding of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) directly affect and violate India's sovereignty further souring relations. China's extraordinary rise is one of the main factors of the present uncertain world order and managing its rise and coming to terms with it is something not just India, but the entire world has to do. Dr. Jaishankar asserts that in order to establish a stable relationship between India and China, it is imperative for both nations to embrace the concepts of multipolarity and mutuality. This acceptance will serve as a catalyst for fostering a broader framework of global rebalancing. ¹⁶

Via an in-depth study of the book "The India Way" authored by Dr. S Jaishankar, readers acquire valuable insights into the contemporary world order and India's envisioned role within it. This perspective is presented via the lens of Dr. Jaishankar, who is currently serving as the Indian Minister of External Affairs, thereby positioning him as a significant participant in shaping this dynamic landscape. The eight thematic chapters of this book present diverse approaches to addressing the overarching examination of the strategies India should adopt amidst significant paradigm shifts in the global landscape. Dr Jaishankar offers the reader three broad strategies, namely reject all alliances tie one's hands instead focus on plurilateralism,¹⁷ exploit the conflicts

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 154.)

¹⁷ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (Gurugram, Haryana: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022, 35.)

that are inherent in the increasingly multipolar world of today, and lastly accept the contradictions that result from plurilateralism. The analysis provided by Dr. Jaishankar with respect to China is extremely insightful, owing to his extensive experience as India's most tenured ambassador to the aforementioned nation. As to his perspective, while acknowledging the potential threat posed by China in the future, it is imperative for India to make attempts to emulate China's model presently, with the aim of replicating its remarkable ascent. Like China, India also needs to leverage its extensive cultural heritage and historical background to construct its narrative and assume its responsibilities. Several significant themes that warrant exploration in Dr. Jaishankar's book include India's defective Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), the persistent challenges posed by illiteracy and poverty, and the economic setbacks experienced by India because of the epidemic. It is possible that a subsequent publication could address these concerns. "The India Way" is a highly recommended literature for anyone who possess a curious disposition about India and its relations.

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