

Reimagining India in the Geopolitics of the 21st Century (Dr. Nanda Kishor and Prashanth Vaidyaraj)

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The book titled *Reimagining India In the Geopolitics of the 21st Century*, edited by Dr. Nanda Kishor and Prashanth Vaidyaraj, stands as a profoundly insightful and meticulously researched work on India's foreign policy endeavours, elucidating its distinctive standing in global politics amidst the transition from a bipolar to a brief unipolar era and the current multipolar state of the world order. The book also delves into India's visionary perspectives and strategic considerations for the future. It is categorically organized into six primary sections, namely, Section I: India as a World Power, Section II: India and International Agencies, Section III: The China Challenge, Section IV: India and West Asia, Section V: India and South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia, and Section V: Defence and Technology.

Section I: India as a World Power

In a series of articles, various authors explore different facets of India's journey towards achieving great power status and navigating its role in international geopolitics. Gargi Shanbhag analyses India's relationships with key European powers, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach amidst changing dynamics, particularly in the context of the Ukraine crisis. Poornima B underscores the role of narratives in global politics, advocating for India to shape narratives and exercise strategic autonomy beyond military and economic strengths, thus indicating the need for India to balance its relations with other players as highlighted by Gargi because the ability to maintain relations even in this ever-changing power dynamics in the international stage is a

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characteristic of a “great power”, a title which India strives for. Priyanka Jaiswal delves into diverse perspectives on power, referencing Indian strategic thinking from sources like Arthashastra, and argues for shedding historical baggage to propel India towards great power status and an example of the aforementioned narrative shaping being done by India in global politics. Abhishek Kadiyala explores the evolution of geopolitics through historical stages, emphasizing the enduring centrality of human agency. Vishwapramod C. focuses on India's Neighbourhood First Policy, highlighting the importance of stabilizing the region for India's ascent. Lastly, Innocentia brings a feminist lens, urging gender mainstreaming in India's foreign policy to ensure equal opportunities and contribute to the country's attainment of great power status. The amalgamation and execution of diverse policy recommendations articulated by different authors have the potential to significantly propel India towards realizing its aspirations of emerging as a major global power.

Section II: India and International Agencies

This section features three articles highlighting the Indian perspective on international agencies. Induja JS underscores the significance of India's engagement with the United Nations, particularly on security issues, advocating for a "constructive engagement" to propel India toward great power status through multilateralism. Nikhil Gowda addresses the need for structural reforms in the UN Security Council, asserting India's rightful place as a permanent member based on its civilizational legacy, democratic principles, and economic rise. Dnyanashri Kulkarni explores the Indo-Pacific region's dynamics, where she contends that, owing to factors such as geographical asymmetry, political system variations, and diverse perceptions, multilateralism has proven ineffective in this region. She suggests countering China's rise through a minilateral mechanism, which is more informal, target oriented and relatively smaller group resulting in quick consensus.

Section III – The China Challenge

Comprising four insightful articles, this section focuses on the challenges arising from China's evolving role in the international system. Dr. Sriparna Pathak explores China's aggressive political consciousness, emphasizing its deliberate portrayal of India as an 'enemy' rather than a 'friend.' Sonam Bhavani offers an optimistic perspective, proposing that India and China, as two civilizational states, should leverage soft power through cultural diplomacy, highlighting the

importance of India's Project Mausam. Isha Tripathi takes a historical view, discussing China's maritime expansionism through the Maritime Silk Road, showcasing how China is using history-making to justify its maritime ambitions, and the implications for India and Japan. This is due to the fact that China is aggressively increasing its naval presence in the Indian Ocean due to the fear of its energy supplies being halted at the Malacca strait, which also led to other powers in that region like India to secure their interests in that region. Rahul Ajnoti examines India-China bilateral trade, noting a significant trade gap and China's coercive measures that have harmed India's national interests, perceiving India as a "weak player with limited global influence."

Section IV – India and West Asia

West Asia holds critical importance for India due to its complex geopolitical scenario, offering both economic and strategic significance. Anmol Kumar, in his paper "India's Relations with West Asia in an evolving multipolar World," focuses on India's ties with key nations – Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. He highlights the "complex interdependence" fostering economic growth in India and advocates for India's "Link West" policy. Arun Mathew delves into the historical roots of India-Iran relations, emphasizing the significance of the "Look West" policy amid geopolitical complexities, especially with the U.S. Rushita Shetty discusses the evolving India-Israel relations, noting the sidelining of the Palestinian issue post-Abraham Accord, enabling India to strengthen ties with Israel. The Modi government's adept handling is credited with the positive trajectory in India-Israel relations.

Section V – India and South Asia, Southeast Asia & East Asia

The Act East Policy of India is central to fostering relationships in the region with deep cultural, religious, and economic ties. Mayank Dalvi, in his article on India-South Korea Relations, highlights the substantial growth in the relationship since India's economic reforms in the 1990s, citing increased investments and business collaborations after PM Rao's visit to South Korea in 1993. Priyadarshini Baruah assesses India's Act East Policy, emphasizing its transformation from the Look East Policy in 2014 under the Modi government. She underscores the policy's focus on enhancing cultural and economic ties in the region, particularly in connection with India's strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. Baruah argues that this policy serves as a means for India to effectively manage the rise of China.

Section VI – Defense and Technology

The Defense and Technology section, a pivotal aspect of India's pursuit of great power status, features three insightful articles. Malavika Madholkar explores the evolution of civilian and military space technology, underscoring the significance of outer space activities for India's global standing. She advocates for robust multilateral space ties with the U.S., asserting that India's cost-effective technology positions it as a key player in the global space economy. Viswapramod C. focuses on revisiting India's nuclear doctrine, urging a reconsideration of the no-first-use policy to align with contemporary geopolitical realities. Dr. Ragotham Sundararajan delves into emerging science and technologies, emphasizing their role in society and their impact on India's comprehensive national power, from the Internet of Things to artificial intelligence and space technology.

Overall, this book showcases India's ambition in various fields to better itself in different fields be it in the way India presents itself in the International Organisations like the UN or how India is improving cultural and economic ties with its neighbours to the east or India's pursuit of the status of a great power through the evolution of civilian and military space technology. Its foreign policy fundamentals have remained strong and have stood the test of time since the days of the Cold War era. It also sheds light on the new direction India's foreign policy has taken under Prime Minister Narendra Modi since 2014, highlighted by aggressive outreach exercise to all the nations in an attempt to build meaningful ties with all of them. India has now rose to become a strategic ally of the West due to their trust in India being a counterbalance to China which is primarily showcased through India's interminable military build-up and the ramping up of its manufacturing sector in recent years in order to move important manufacturing operations from China to India. As this book states, ancient nation India is an emerging great power in the comity of modern nations which has made name for itself in the realms of scientific and technological prowess and one way of measuring this is the large amount of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) graduates India offers to the world on a yearly basis who sometimes as diaspora contribute a lot to the nations they live in and to India.

India has also been engaging in aid diplomacy, using Lines of Credit (LOC) as a tool which has been employed by India to achieve its goal of giving developmental aid to countries in need, especially, her South Asian neighbours in a bid to achieve its goal of regional hegemony over the region. The noteworthy accomplishment of the G20 summit distinctly indicates that India has

reached a position where it possesses the influence to influence the global order. Serving as a champion for the Global South and emerging as its leader serves as a symbolic illustration of this achievement. The book has also suggested the need for India to counter China's influence first before trying to rise to the position of a great power. I do not harbour any specific objections to the perspectives presented in this book which has given with multiple authors working on one chapter each, concisely laying out the progress been made by India in each of the six broad fields mentioned, the challenges it is currently facing particularly with regards to China and the possible direction it can take in the future to ensure the prosperity of its citizen while also realising the goals it had set for itself decades ago.