

INDIA'S STRATEGIC CHOICES IN THE MULTIPOLAR WORLD

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1 Introduction

The era spanning from the global financial crisis of 2008 to the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 has ushered in a transformative shift in the global order. This era of uncertainty holds unique implications and expectations for middle powers such as India, Brazil, Germany, and South Africa as they ascend towards greater global responsibilities. Amidst this transformation, India needs to redefine its relationships with diverse powers while safeguarding its national interests and adopting strategic alliances in dealings with neighbouring countries and major powers. The preceding decades were characterized by distinct phases—initially, a bipolar world during the Cold War, followed by a brief unipolar phase after the collapse of the USSR. However, the contemporary landscape is marked by the emergence of multipolarity, which is reshaping international dynamics. Sahakyan (2023) argues that the world order is no longer unipolar, and the war in Ukraine proves this fact.

India's unity amid diversity and its accomplishments in the face of challenges provide a compelling rationale for its greater role in the United Nations Security Council (Guha, 2012). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts India to be the fastest-growing global economy in 2023, developing by 6.1 per cent, well surpassing the 4 per cent emerging market average and remarkably exceeding the world's 1.2 per cent average growth. India's youthful consumer base holds a pivotal position in the growth strategies of numerous Fortune 500 corporations. This year, India's concurrent presidencies at the G-20 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) underscore its aspirations to be a leading, rather than merely a balancing, global force (Vaishnav, 2023, April 14). Furthermore, India is projected to sustain its status as the fastest-growing major economy with a 5.9 per cent growth rate this year. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently proclaimed,

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“India’s time has arrived” (Zakaria, 2023, April 28).

Beyond its economic prowess, India possesses the potential to earn admiration not solely for its economic growth but also for the values it upholds. This vision positions India as an incredible force, epitomising both growth and ethical principles (Zakaria, 2023, April 28). In the context of this evolving century, a transformative shift from unipolarity to multipolarity has significantly reconfigured the global geopolitical landscape, Mukherjee (2020) says that “the world is in flux, both in terms of the changing global distribution of power and the declining commitment of the United States to the international order”. The waxing influence of regional powers and the waning dominance of traditional global giants have precipitated a new era in international diplomacy. In this fluid landscape, India has emerged as a pivotal player, poised to shape global affairs amidst changing power dynamics. Sullivan de Estrada (2023) argues that India is actively contesting and, in some ways reconfiguring, the legitimating narratives.

Concurrently, the ascent of China and other major powers has reshaped the global power balance, while the once-Western-dominated international order faces mounting pressure (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). This transformative international framework has empowered regional actors like India to actively engage on the global stage. As India navigates this multipolar reality, it faces an intricate tapestry of prospects and challenges in its pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Within this intricate fabric, India’s task encompasses managing competing interests, mitigating geopolitical rivalries, and addressing regional and global security concerns. Amidst these complex dynamics, this paper seeks to spotlight the multifaceted challenges that India must adroitly confront in its pursuit of foreign policy goals within a multipolar world. By delving into the subtleties of this evolving global scenario, the paper strives to illuminate strategic options and diplomatic methodologies that India can strategically adopt to optimise its influence and secure its national interests.

1.1 Research Objective

This study aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities faced by India in navigating the multipolar world order, with a focus on its foreign policy objectives. It seeks to explore how India can effectively balance diverse interests, manage geopolitical rivalries, and address security concerns in order to enhance its global influence.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What key factors influence India's approach and policy initiatives to navigate multipolarity and how do India's geopolitical positioning and regional dynamics impact its strategy to deal with regional powers?
2. How does India's economic growth and development agenda align with its approach to multipolarity, and what role does it play in shaping its strategic decisions?
3. What are the implications of India's relations with major global powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia?
4. How does India's engagement with multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations and regional organizations, contribute to its strategy for navigating multipolarity?

1.3 Research Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive qualitative research approach to analyse India's foreign policy challenges and strategies in the context of shifting multipolar world order. It involves a thorough review of academic literature, policy documents, and expert opinions to identify key trends and challenges. The analysis focuses on balancing interests, managing rivalries, and addressing security concerns, providing insights into effective diplomatic approaches for India.

2 Discussion

2. India's foreign policy and its traditional approach to non-alignment during the Cold War era were shaped by various historical factors. These factors include India's colonial past, its quest for strategic autonomy, and its commitment to global peace and stability. "Instead of joining any of the two blocs, India, along with many of the then-newly independent colonies, established the Non-Aligned Movement" (Ranjan, 2022). India's long history of colonisation by the British Empire greatly influenced its foreign policy outlook. The experience of being ruled by a foreign power for nearly 200 years fostered a strong sense of nationalism and self-determination among Indian leaders. The struggle for independence and the subsequent process of decolonization shaped India's approach to international relations. India's colonial past instilled a deep aversion to external interference and a commitment to sovereignty and territorial integrity. This historical context played a significant role in shaping India's foreign policy decision-making, fostering a desire for autonomy and independence in its international engagements. The BJP's (Bharatiya Janata Party) core ideology and promise

of radically overturning this Nehruvian consensus are then taken up and empirically tested against three significant theatres of Indian foreign policy since 1998: nuclear proliferation, relations with Pakistan, and ties with the USA. (Chaulia, 2002).

3. India's quest for strategic autonomy was another important factor in shaping its foreign policy during the Cold War era. India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, sought to establish itself as a leader of the newly independent countries of the Global South. Nehru envisioned a world order where countries could maintain their independence and pursue their own development paths free from alignment with the superpowers. India's desire for strategic autonomy led to the formulation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. The NAM aimed to provide a platform for developing countries to promote their collective interests and resist the pressures of the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. India, along with other like-minded nations, advocated for a policy of non-alignment, which meant avoiding formal alliances and maintaining equidistance from both superpowers.

India's commitment to global peace and stability also played a crucial role in shaping its foreign policy during the Cold War era. India's leaders believed in the principles of peaceful coexistence, disarmament, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. As a country that had undergone a long and arduous struggle for independence, India empathized with the aspirations of other nations seeking freedom from colonial rule. India actively supported the decolonization process and advocated for the rights of self-determination for all nations. India also played a prominent role in peacekeeping operations under the United Nations, demonstrating its commitment to maintaining global peace and stability. The deployment of Indian troops in various conflict zones around the world highlighted India's dedication to international peacekeeping efforts. In summary, India's foreign policy and its traditional approach to non-alignment during the Cold War era were shaped by historical factors such as its colonial past, a quest for strategic autonomy, and commitment to global peace and stability. These factors influenced India's decision-making and positioned it as a champion of independence, non-alignment, and peaceful coexistence on the global stage.

4. The balance of economic power among nations has been shifting over the years. Emerging economies, like China, Brazil, South Africa, and India, have been gaining influence and challenging the dominance of traditional economic powers, such as the United States and the European Union. These changes can lead to new alliances, trade patterns, and geopolitical strategies. Rapid technological advancements continue to

revolutionise various industries and societies worldwide. Developments in artificial intelligence, automation, renewable energy, and biotechnology can alter labour markets, economic structures, and military capabilities. Climate change poses significant challenges and affects global dynamics. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity can exacerbate existing tensions, force migration, and impact economies. International cooperation and competition over resources and environmental issues will likely increase. Power struggles between nations may intensify due to the changing global landscape. Existing rivalries, like the one between the United States and China, and new geopolitical tensions may shape alliances and conflicts. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the interconnectedness of global health systems and economies. The emergence of new infectious diseases and health crises can reshape international cooperation and health policies. Examine the emerging multipolar world order characterised by the rise of multiple power centres, including the United States, China, Russia, and regional players (Turner, 2009). Analyse the challenges and opportunities posed by this multipolar environment for India's foreign policy objectives, national security concerns, and economic interests.

5. On many fronts including demography, technology, economy, geopolitics, and others, the world is passing through a period of profound upheaval. The paradigms of global politics are changing, with new standards clearly emerging in geopolitics--financially and strategically (Wiseman, 2023, April 27). Over the past decade, several emerging economies have grown more quickly than developed ones, changing the distribution of income globally in their favour. China has the second-largest economy in the world, behind the United States and ahead of Japan (Morrison, 2019). The global economic landscape is changing, and the economic centre of gravity is shifting from the West to the East. Mike Pence, an American politician said on February 16, 2019 "We cannot ensure the defense of the West if our allies grow dependent on the East." Emmanuel Macron argued "Take India, Russia, and China for example. They have a lot more political inspiration than Europeans today. They take a logical approach to the world, they have a genuine philosophy, a resourcefulness that we have to a certain extent lost. And so, all of that has a major impact on us and reshuffles the cards" (The Munich Report, 2020). In April 2022, Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank, gave a speech titled "A new global map: European resilience in a changing world", she acknowledged that the West did not have a monopoly on power. Despite that the West is losing power relatively, she observed, many Western policymakers are against proposals for wider power redistribution in global governance (Hashem, 2022). On April 5, 2023, Macron urged China's

President Xi Jinping to help negotiate an end to the War in Ukraine (The Wall Street Journal, 2023).

Moreover, in the contemporary multipolar world not a single nation or group of nations is leading the way to address global issues. In other words, new emerging powers have replaced the status quo. New paradigms are emerging, and old paradigms are disappearing. The efforts by Russia and China so that the yuan overtake the US dollar as the most traded currency in Russia are in progress. Russian President Vladimir Putin has hinted that his country wants to use the yuan in trade with other countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Importantly, India is actively promoting its currency in trade; 18 countries have agreed to use the rupee in bilateral trade, with more countries expected to join the group (Bhattacharjee, 2023, March 14). China and Brazil have decided to phase out the dollar in their trade and use their own currencies. Saudi Arabia has publicly stated that it is ready to conduct its trade, including energy, in currencies other than the dollar. On June 5, 2019, Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with Putin at the Kremlin, China and Russia have agreed to use the dollar in their bilateral trade.

6. The global financial crisis, COVID-19, and the Ukraine war are catalysts of trends that have been in motion since World War II. Surprisingly, those who have dominated the world order since World War II seem unable to think pragmatically about a new world order. They think in terms of a zero-sum game that cannot move in the right direction. Multipolarity is revealing new power realities in various places. Significantly, geoeconomic and geopolitical realignments are taking place in various parts of the world due to the emerging power of nations like China, India, Indonesia, and Brazil. The Middle East and North Africa are undoubtedly where this is the case. Arab countries are diversifying their strategic alliances in light of changing interests and the reality of power relations.

The Arabs are finding that their interests and strategic objectives increasingly align with multiple nations not limited to the West and the US. To gauge the decline of US influence in the Arab region, one needs to understand China's active role in resolving regional conflicts in Yemen and Syria. The Saudi Arabia-Iran rapprochement under China is certainly a clear signal that the US is not the single dominant player in a region of now-fluid alliances and partnerships. However, this is not generating a vacuum. American influence is being replaced by the collective efforts of nations in the region to restructure the regional order and deepen strategic partnerships with countries such as China, Russia, and India. The age of Western hegemony is over. Whether or not America itself declines, the post-war liberal international order underpinned by US military, economic and ideological primacy and

supported by global institutions serving its power and purpose, is coming to an end (Acharya, 2018).

No longer a single power can dominate the Arabs, some US and West policymakers are still focusing on the region as subject to unipolarity, Arab leaders do not want any single power or group of nations to have a monopoly on regional affairs. Not limiting our partnerships to the US or the West, but expanding them to emerging powers such as China, Russia, and India. "The 21st century is touted to be the Asian age, belonging to China and India. Cold War and growing impacts of globalization are making India redefine its position and role at the regional and the global level" (Bava, 2007).

This is the reason for seeking membership in organizations such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China, etc.). The BRI also includes the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and, the BRICS, its New Development Bank (NDB), headquartered in Shanghai. Strategically, it is not true that the Arabs do not want to continue their relationship with the US and the Western powers. However, Arab nations want to build up relations with countries based on mutual interests and benefits.

The Arab world's future strategic direction will help determine how the game of great power competition plays out and how it contributes to shaping international and regional dynamics. The Arabs are strategically, demographically, and geographically well-positioned to emerge as a pole of global influence. The Arab world is a decisive player in the balance of power. The changing nature of the present is no less than the change in global governance. The change accelerated only after the global financial crisis (2008). The major shift got a further boost after the COVID-19 and the Ukraine crises. The war in Ukraine demonstrates a battle between those who support privileges and the status quo and others who call for equality and fairness in the distribution of power. The process of global multipolarity is seen as Russia striving for its global role and relevance, India's carefully crafted strategic autonomy, the resurgence of the Arabs, and political awakening in other areas.

7. Germany and France are increasingly taking decisions independently to protect their national interests. Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholtz made a one-day visit to China, the first European leader to visit since the COVID pandemic, drawing criticism from the US and his own party. The consequences of the Asian tilt of world capitalism and the eventual overcoming of the legacy of the colonial world order are especially evident in the growing solidarity and expansion of BRIC. Asia's shift from the rich trans-Atlantic democracies to the centre of economic gravity has helped define China's rise within the network of bilateral trading relations, with ASEAN. Asian countries in terms

of population such as China, India and Indonesia support large domestic markets. The Ukraine war and Russia's annexation of the eastern states of Crimea and Donbas have reduced Russia's chances of occupying a powerful pole in the multipolar order. The liberal world order did expand and strengthen with the economic liberalisation in China and India, and with the end of the cold war. And while the champions of that order celebrated its expansion, they still assumed that its main challenge would come from the rising powers (Acharya, 2017).

8. China must be a competitor as well as an inspiration in shaping India to be a global player. The international and regional scenarios are very volatile. India should not allow events to come upon us; it is better to anticipate and analyse them in advance. Since the 1949 revolution, communist nationalism, and economic rise, our understanding of China has been inadequate. India missed the importance of the UN Security Council seat. China's arrival on the global stage as a superpower has repercussions in terms of several strategic challenges. The US-China dynamic as an emerging new world order is a major challenge for India's policymakers. The era of globalisation that facilitated the dramatic rise of China has probably come to an end, when anyone learns the complex dynamics of the world economic order, only then can India execute strategic policies in a new order. The world started to take notice of India's rise when New Delhi signed a nuclear pact with the US in July 2005, but that breakthrough is only one dimension of the transformation of Indian foreign policy that has taken place since the end of the Cold War (Mohan, 2006).

9. Today the West acknowledges India's potential to match China, with depth and skills, over the long term. Saran (2022) cautions that India must be careful of the economic chasm which makes China less sensitive to India's interests and exhibits a lower threshold of tolerance towards India. But an aspirational India should pursue a similar economic course, creating a knowledge and technological ecosystem that promotes quick innovation and assimilation. India must painstakingly pursue this rationale, which has been adopted by the majority of developed nations. India is the only country which has the civilizational depth, population, significant managerial, technical, and entrepreneurial skills to compete with China – and more, sustainably and over the long term. China is one of India's toughest strategic challenges. Consequently, the bilateral push-and-move over the border has years of twists and turns. Following the liberal perspective, Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao decided to target administrative management of the border over a political solution. India's strategy against a much stronger opponent, as diplomatic efforts focused on convincing China that any misadventure would result in full-scale war will affect long-term relations (Menon, 2018).

10. In the geopolitical competition with India in South Asia, China has scored more success in creating an opportunity between India and the smaller states that were traditionally close to New Delhi due to geography and cultural factors (Mosca, 2020). However, even here the relationships in South Asian states have benefitted from the India–China-managed rivalry. “The political psychology of Sino-Indian relations and of the roles of those two countries in the world understanding of contemporary world politics and to the approach of two of Asia’s rising powers to one another and to the global order” (Miller, 2020). The main reason for smaller nations’ strategic manoeuvring is the absence of a balance of power between China and India, which has enabled the smaller states to play off each other. India has been pursuing a mix of diplomatic engagement, limited hard balancing, and soft balancing policies towards China. India’s policy suggests a wait-and-watch approach, sending a message to the other powers that benign actions will create responses while aggressive measures may result in hard balances (Paul, 2019).

The past international opportunities and forthcoming strategies require historical shifts. Indian geopolitical position has made it strategically important to hold a key position. The growing recourse of unilateral measures by the major powers poses one of the gravest challenges to contemporary multilateralism which is a core principle of international cooperation and is essential to create a supportive external environment. India has been proactive in using multilateralism to meet its objectives. Menon (2021) finds India as central to Asia’s geopolitics and yet also set apart from it is a major contribution to our understanding of this great, rising power in this Asian century. In the process, India has contributed significantly to the rapid transformation of world order, driven by its ambitious socio-economic development programmes, which are steered by its international trade demands. The fact that this trade accounts for as much as 40 per cent of India’s gross domestic product (GDP) underscores the critical importance of the interlinkage between India’s aspirations need for international cooperation through multilateralism.

A nation’s hard power is defined by the ability to alter the behaviour of others to get what you want. Soft power is the ability to achieve this through ‘attraction’ rather than ‘coercion’ (hard power). Without, in any way, impeding or limiting the development of a nation’s hard power, it is very much visible that strategizing soft power projection by India should be prioritized as the pathway of primary foreign policy.

11. International politics may face difficulties in today’s multipolar world with its rivals, power imbalances, and value collisions. India’s participation in any alliance for power tussling along with the traditional non-alignment

position. However, once the rivalry between its two main poles could no longer be restrained, others were forced to choose one side. New Delhi cannot allow prejudices and assumptions to get in the way. Delhi's dogmas now stand in the way of India's progress. Our national policy cannot be static in a complex, evolving environment if we are to achieve even more constant goals. Some examples include the 1971 Bangladesh War, the 1991 Economic and Political Repositioning, the 1998 Nuclear Tests, and the 2005 India-US Nuclear Deal. In fact, India was only able to effect significant adjustments in its favour through a series of upheavals.

From 1946 to 1962, the first phase could be characterised as an era of non-alignment. In a bipolar world, India's objective was to resist the constraining choices while protecting its sovereignty, rebuilding its economy, and consolidating its integrity. India's goal was to lead Asia and Africa in a quest for a more equitable and just world order. "This was the heyday of Bandung and Belgrade, the peak of Third World solidarity. It also saw energetic Indian diplomacy everywhere, from Korea and Vietnam to Suez and Hungary. For a few years, our position on the world stage seemed assured. The 1962 conflict with China not only brought this period to an end but did so in a manner that significantly damaged India's standing." (Jaishankar, 2020).

From 1962 to 1971, the second phase is a decade of realism and recovery. India adopted more pragmatic choices on security and political challenges. From 1971 to 1991, the third phase was one of the greater regional assertions. It began with the creation of Bangladesh and the paradigm shift towards India-Pakistan relations, but it came to an end with the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) misadventure in Sri Lanka. The fourth phase was marked by the fall of the USSR and the establishment of a unipolar world. It encouraged India to shift towards safeguarding strategic autonomy. The Look East Policy has changed the Indian approach to world affairs, like engagement with Israel. This fifth phase took a balancing act, resulting in the India-US nuclear deal, a better understanding of the West, and a common cause with China.

One has to acknowledge the ethos of India, that being a democratic polity, a pluralistic society, and a market economy, India can grow along with others, not separately. India must overcome three burdens of the past: first, the partition of 1947 reduced India's geo-political strength against China and created an enemy like Pakistan, second, a protracted economic reform delayed India's growth story; and third, a prolonged wait in the exercise of the nuclear option generated a loss of strategic strength.

12. COVID-19 has allowed India to project innovation in pharmacy and engage in vaccine diplomacy. The Declaration of International Yoga Day is an achievement to demonstrate India's traditional healthy lifestyle. India's

humanitarian intervention, especially in the form of UN peacekeeping missions in the Congo and Korea, served to cement its image as a helping hand and timely help to Turkey after a devastating earthquake earned praise altogether, and New Delhi's "disaster diplomacy" served as potent tools for outreach to countries in need. We must remember that China has been winning without fighting, while the US is fighting without winning. It is even more about economic growth, political influence, and quality of life. As a result, America lost its famous optimism.

In a globalised world, strategic autonomy is secured through creating mutually beneficial relationships of interdependence. In an interdependent world, the fruit of economic growth and development is pursued when a nation is able to utilise the benefits of interdependence. Hence, the concepts of "autonomy" and "self-reliance" should be defined in the context of the economic interdependence of nations. India has the military capability to defend its territorial integrity and security; however, it will have to sustain higher rates of economic growth to be able to alter the strategic balance in Asia, and across the globe. It is not economic growth that holds the key to India's global profile and power, but the nature of that growth process and the manner in which the economic challenges it faces decide the real power of the nation. Social and economic backwardness, inequalities and political uncertainty show the quality of economic development (Baru, 2016).

13. Today, non-state security or non-traditional security as it is commonly referred is not entirely new thinking. It was given as much importance to India's neighbourhood policy as more than a mere subset of its foreign policy. Ever since Indian Independence, the neighbourhood has always received prime attention from the leadership. In spite of challenges posed by legacy issues and concerns about its stance as the dominant country in the region, this has been quite evident in the choice of seasoned diplomats to represent India in the neighbouring countries and the economic and political capital that India spends to maintain friendly relations with each of the countries. The 'Neighbourhood First' strategy is a logical extension of the approach to India's neighbours. Foreign policy initiatives, defence preparedness, along with accurate and timely intelligence about external threats and challenges, technological prowess, and economic growth that invites foreign investment and promotes trade would be some of the main means for the preservation and enhancement of India's national interests.

Indian foreign policy has remained reactive to the strategic environment rather than to strategic realities. Such a casual response to the structural imperatives gives little outcome when India is on the periphery of geopolitics. Sundaram (2022) says, "India's quest for power must be viewed

in geopolitical terms not as hubris, but as a long-term driver of its foreign and security policies. He reminds us that Asian geopolitical structures from Iran to Indonesia are interdependent and that India's agency in the past worked within this coexisting multiverse in the pursuit of its interests. Such an inheritance must lead to prioritizing connections rather than exclusion, prudential agency rather than geopolitical determinism, and an outcome orientation that brings prosperity to the masses rather than flaunting India's ambitions for international prestige." Michael (2013) argues why and how India has until now preferred bilateral negotiation processes and has used a multitude of multilateral organizations in order to push through its own self-interests. India must come to grips with its discomfort with the very notion of power, particularly its wariness of using hard power. India's reluctance to accept a more sophisticated understanding of power, in general, and military power, in particular, will continue to undermine Indian foreign and security policy. By its very nature, India's South Asia policy needs to be extremely dynamic and nimble. Over the last few years, the 'Neighbourhood First' policy has invested significant diplomatic capital in it. But the underlying factors that have traditionally framed India's difficulties in getting its neighbourhood policy right remain as potent as ever (Pant, 2019).

3 Conclusion

The emerging world order is likely to go on the path of the balance of power as its operating principle, rather than collective security. China has never missed the role of the great disrupter, unlike Japan, South Korea, and the ASEAN, its emergence cannot be accommodated in the liberal order. The ability of India and China to work together could determine a balance between many fronts. As S. Jaishankar says, "Asia is being shaped largely by the outlook of the UN, the power of China, the weight of Russia, the collectivism of ASEAN, the volatility of the Middle East, and the rise of India. In India's engagement with the West, the shared values and the changes are underway." (Jaishankar, 2020)

The West and the US should accept that India's growth is a strategic development for its larger interests of liberal world order. When it comes to China, the mantra of strategic maturity is at work between the two countries. India refers to its strategy as multi-aligned, but its systemic interactions stand in stark contrast to its scant involvement at the regional level. A strong multilateral framework has not yet been developed in Asia as well as the global level. India needs to adopt multi-polarity in place of neutrality with the changing world without compromising on its strategic autonomy.

India's foreign policy has witnessed a dramatic transformation since the end of the Cold War (Pant, 2019). India is an emerging player in the multipolar world. It has a robust economy, a large population, and a growing military. The strategic decisions made by India in this new world order will have a significant effect both locally and internationally. India has traditionally pursued a policy of non-alignment, but this is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the current environment. China is a rising power and a major challenger to the United States. India has to decide whether to align itself with the United States or China or to pursue a more independent policy. India is also facing challenges from its neighbours like Pakistan and China. China is expanding its influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, which is a major concern for India.

India's strategic choices will be shaped by a number of factors, including its economic development, its military strength, regional cooperation, and its relations with other countries. India will need to balance its desire to maintain its independence with the need to cooperate with other countries to address common challenges. India's strategic choices in the multipolar world will be complex and difficult. India will need to be careful to avoid making any decisions that could jeopardise its security or its economic development. However, India also has the opportunity to play a major role in shaping the new world order. The choices that India makes will have a major impact on the future of the multipolar world. India has the potential to be a major force for good in the world, but it will need to make wise decisions and build strong partnerships with other countries.

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ABSTRACT

The post-World War II landscape underwent a seismic shift, crystallising into a bipolar structure with the US-led West facing off against the Soviet Union, instigating the Cold War. However, the USSR's collapse in 1991 shattered this bipolarity, ushering in an era of American dominance (unipolarity). Yet, this once unassailable US-led global order is undergoing rapid contraction. In its wake, a fresh paradigm is unfolding as novel power centres coalesce to address shared dissatisfactions. Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran forge convergences, beckoning others to unite against US-led supremacy. Astonishingly, Saudi Arabia aligns with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as a dialogue partner, relegating its erstwhile oil-for-security doctrine to antiquity. Simultaneously, the Brazilian President advocates terminating dollar supremacy. In a bold affront, Russia challenges the US world order through its Ukrainian incursion. Notably, Emmanuel Macron declares Taiwan beyond the West's scope, potentially puncturing American hegemony. This paper fervently explores how the burgeoning multipolar world order engenders arenas for regional powers, scrutinising the prospects and hurdles that confront New Delhi as it navigates India's foreign policy.

KEYWORDS

Bipolarity, Multipolarity, Middle Power, Regional Power, Unipolarity, World Order.

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