



## **The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World**

**By S. Jaishankar**

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## **Why Bharat Matters**

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India's foreign policy strategy from independence has been based on nationalist desires and aspirations that gradually crystallised during the freedom movement. The objective of the foreign policy doctrine has been to carve out a niche for India among the league of the world's great powers. The civilisation legacy of India, size, culture, history, geography and, above all, domestic and international political economy influenced Nehru while crafting the non-aligned approach to India's foreign policy. Even with the shift in emphasis at the operational level due to changes in the domestic and international milieu, successive prime ministers of Congress and non-Congress governments have maintained the continuity of the Nehruvian framework of nonalignment. This continuity, which emphasised political and strategic autonomy and a self-reliant growth path guided by the mixed economy policy framework without challenging the basic tenets of liberal capitalism, has provided a sense of security and stability in India's foreign policy. Despite socialist rhetoric, Nehru designed his populist national model of economic growth strategy and international engagement mechanism within the domain of liberal capitalism, and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, followed suit.

India's foreign policy has demonstrated remarkable adaptability, embracing liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) at the

beginning of the 1990s under the dual leadership of Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister and Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister. This adaptability reassured policymakers of India's ability to navigate changing global dynamics. Successive prime ministers took it forward. In a phased manner, privatisation and liberalisation of the economy initiated by Narasimha Rao's Government continued under UPA I and II coalitions of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the non-Congress governments that came to power during the Congress interregnum. Acceptance of the international trade regime under the WTO umbrella, export-oriented industrialisation, FDI, and currency devaluation often fulfilled the essential minimum qualification for graduating as a partner in the neoliberal economic order. In this process, the Nehruvian framework of mixed economy and Indira Gandhi's passion for a new global financial order based on South-South cooperation were thrown away by successive leaderships of the Congress party. A shift in India's foreign policy was discernible with the announcement of the 'Look East' policy, a closer partnership with the US, and the opening up of full diplomatic relations with Israel. These adjustments in foreign policy-making resulted from the shift in international political economy from 'embedded liberalism' to neoliberalism. Interpreting these adjustments in India's foreign policy as 'abandonment of nonalignment and getting onto the bandwagon with the US' is without adequately understanding the dynamics of underlying economic forces. So is the argument about the shift from nonalignment to multi-alignment.

In 2014, for the first time in the history of independent India, a cultural nationalist party that considers the secularism and pluralism of the Indian National Congress party minority appeasement came to power with a massive mandate. However, the signals emitted by the foreign policy behaviour indicated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would try to deepen the policy of integrating the Indian economy with the neoliberal global economy at a fast pace. However, Narendra Modi has replaced the vocabulary of nonalignment with 'strategic interconnectedness' or 'multi-vectored engagement'. His vigorous advocacy of solar energy articulated at the UN climate change conference, his categorical stand against terrorism, and the clear distinction between India's position on the need for a Palestinian state and his condemnation of terrorism in unequivocal terms made Modi's foreign policy distinct from his predecessors.

It is interesting to observe that Modi's continuous interactions with the leaders from the neighbourhood, the Japanese Prime minister, the Chinese President, and, above all, with US President Barack Obama, Trump, and Biden helped him rediscover the merit of strategic autonomy. In his second stint as Prime Minister Modi's choice of a career diplomat to succeed Sushma Swaraj as External Affairs Minister instead of a senior politician colleague from his party talks volumes about his commitment

to effectively protecting India's interests in an uncertain world and also infuse professionalism in the conduct of India's foreign relations. Modi has decided to tap the experience and insights of a career diplomat who has served as Ambassador to the US and China to implement a non-congress, non-Nehruvian foreign policy vision. He was also part of Modi's foreign policy establishment as foreign secretary from 2015 to 2018. Since May 2019, he has been India's External Affairs Minister.

Jaishankar has authored two books, the first in 2020 and the second in 2024, which explain India's foreign policy and relations and its operational aspects unequivocally.

In the first book, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*, he revealed the Indian foreign policy strategy thus: 'This is 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'. He redefined strategic autonomy as greater efficiency, stronger partnerships, and various options, all perceived as integral to risk mitigation. This book articulated the challenges India has been facing in an uncertain world and spelt out the strategic responses to address the challenges.

Why Bharat Matters(2024) is a collection of eleven interconnected essays. It includes an analysis of the global landscape to identify opportunities for India. It also consists of a study of India's key relationships worldwide. It is unique because each chapter in this volume has a packaging of a relatable story from Ramayana- an attempt to explain the theory and practice of foreign relations in light of events and episodes from Ramayana stories. According to Jaisankar, Mahabharata is an epic of statecraft, diplomacy, and realpolitik; on the other hand, Ramayana, which is the earlier one, has purity of thought and mobility of conduct as its central message. 'The Ramayana could be studied from the perspective of highlighting both the merits and challenges of building a rule-based order', Jaishankar observed. Rama sets the norms for personal conduct and promotes good governance. Jaishankar has redefined strategic autonomy through these two books and reconceptualised India's integration into the global economy and domestic reforms by his passionate argument for building an effective domestic supply chain to ensure 'economic growth with commensurate scaling up of skills, strengths and capacities'. He highlighted the importance of initiatives and mechanisms like Quad and FIPIC in the Indo-Pacific, I2U2 in Wes Asia, and the International Solar Alliance, India-Nordic Summit in Europe. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is the latest addition to the new initiatives. He has also emphasised the necessity of strengthening border infrastructure and maintaining deployments, utilising the possibilities that global dynamics could offer to counter the China challenge. On the economic front, he wanted the Indian strategy to be prudent when picking up FTAs.

The engagements with ASEAN, the EU, Africa, and the BRICS countries will continue as those were. These two volumes give readers insights into the essential continuity in foreign policy doctrine and strategy as determined by the domestic, regional, and global political and economic dynamics and imperatives of changes induced by an uncertain world.

Both books are must-reads for policymakers and students of India's foreign policy and relations.

