

विश्वनीति Viśvanīti

A Quarterly Review from the
School of International Studies



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Message from the Dean



I am delighted to present the second issue of **Viśvanīti**, our quarterly journal dedicated to showcasing the academic rigor and policy insights that define our School of International Studies. This issue is particularly special as we pay tribute to one of our academic legends, Professor Sisir Gupta. His seminal work on Kashmir remains the most authoritative study on the subject, and it is only fitting that we honour his profound contributions to the field.

We are also thrilled to welcome the brilliant Ambassador Venkatesh Varma to our faculty. A sharp analyst of foreign policy, he draws critical lessons for India from the ongoing war in Ukraine, offering insights that are both timely and essential for understanding our geopolitical landscape.

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to our young team of Editors. Their dedication to adhering to our timelines without compromising on quality is outstanding and reflects the high standards we strive for at our institution.

Viśvanīti aims to reach beyond the traditional confines of academia, engaging all those interested in foreign policy and international relations in our rapidly changing world. I encourage you to immerse yourselves in the thought-provoking content within these pages.

Amitabh Mattoo
Dean, School of International Studies



Timeless Classic

Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy: Russia- Ukraine War Lessons for India

Prof. Matinuzzaman Zuberi Memorial Lecture, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 7 December 2023



Amb. D. B. Venkatesh Varma

Honourable Vice Chancellor, Dr. Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit,
Head of the Centre for International Politics, International Organizations and
Disarmament Studies, Prof. Amitabh Mattoo,
Respected Faculty,
Dear Students of this wonderful University,

To be asked to deliver the first Prof. Matinuzzaman Zuberi Lecture, is indeed an honour. It is doubly so that it is in the presence of the Vice Chancellor, who is perhaps amongst the most distinguished alumni of this School. To the Vice Chancellor, I want to express my gratitude for chairing this meeting. Prof. Amitabh Mattoo, the Chair of the CIPOD, is one of India's foremost IR scholars. This memorial lecture- the first in a series, is yet another instance of the dynamism that he has imparted to all the prestigious assignments he has held here in India and abroad. It is a pleasure that Irfan Zuberi, Prof. Zuberi's son, has joined us today.

Kissinger Syndrome

By the time I joined the University in 1982, Prof. Zuberi was already a well-known public intellectual, for his work on issues of war and peace, which incidentally was the title of one of his MA courses. Prof. Zuberi began his teaching career at AMU and moved to JNU in 1975, where he taught for two decades. A globalist, he had studied at Oxford University and was widely travelled. He was foremost an Indian nationalist who believed deeply that the pursuit of excellence in any field, must serve the interests of the motherland. Thus, the natural interface he saw between academic excellence which he embodied and policy relevance that he aspired to. Of course, never one to take self-promotion too seriously, an aphorism he often mentioned was the 'Kissinger syndrome'- about academics and diplomats - by which he meant, referring to the larger-than-life profile of Henry Kissinger, how many academics harbour the secret desire to have Kissinger's policy impact and diplomats who not-so-secretly seek to embellish their image with the veneer of Kissinger's brilliance. This Syndrome will perhaps outlive the man who passed away last week.

Borodino and beyond

Prof. Zuberi had a sharp mind, an open heart, and a gentle soul. Entering his class was like being drawn into another world- enticing as it was fascinating, but an entrapment it really was, as his fellow traveller, on a journey of study and discourse, on matters of war and peace.

Those of us who had the good fortune of taking the plunge would remember his narration of Tolstoy's War and Peace - of Prince Andrei lying wounded on the battlefield at Borodino, looking at the stars, reflecting on the meaning of life in a future that awaited him as Napoleon's prisoner of war; why the best book written by Paul Kennedy is not the better known 'Rise and Fall of Great Powers', but his earlier book on British Naval Mastery; Stalin's discovery of General Zhukov after the battle of Khalkhin Gol, against the Japanese in Manchuria, in 1939; recovery of French and American military power after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and the fall of Saigon in 1975; the middle name of the US President who dropped the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki - Harry S. Truman; why was Neils Bohr considered a great nuclear physicist and a big bore; the spiritual universe of Robert Oppenheimer in which the Bhagavad Gita figured prominently; Homi Bhabha, the father of the Indian Nuclear Programme - his imprints- from India's scientific capabilities to the design of the BARC cafeteria; the genius of Field Marshall Manekshaw who led the Indian Army in 1971 in the most successful military intervention since 1945; the intricacies of nuclear deterrence and the meaning of deterrence in an age of revolutionary armies; why not signing the NPT in 1967 - the road not taken- was perhaps independent India's most consequential of national security decisions, and national security thinking for India outside the Anglo-Saxon bubble, which was and sadly remains the dominant analytical framework of our times. Like Mr. K. Subramanyam, the foremost of our strategic thinkers, Prof. Zuberi and many of his generation strongly believed in Indianizing the strategic prism through which we viewed the world. It is after all in the mind that strategic autonomy begins its life journey, and it is in the mind that it must be first nurtured.

Four paragraphs

Prof Zuberi supervised my MPhil thesis - a comparative study of Diplomacy and Strategy of India's conduct of the 1965 and 1971 Wars with Pakistan. This was part of his pet project of documenting India's wars since independence. His style was to inspire in his students deep reading and reflection, not compel prejudged conclusions. The joy was in the journey, of looking for new facts through new perspectives but all tied together to

answer a single question- what does it mean for India and its interests in global affairs?

Just like ticketless travellers on public transport avoid ticket collectors, research students tend to avoid their supervisors when thesis submissions become overdue. On one such occasion, I ran into Prof. Zuberi in the up-campus bookshop. On being asked when I would turn in the full draft - Prof. Zuberi preferred seeing the draft in full and not chapter-wise - I said it was almost done, as only the concluding chapter was left to be written. A week went by, then two and then three. This time the much-feared encounter was during his evening walk along the ring road behind Dakshina Puram. Since he was a brisk walker, a quick escape was ruled out. 'Are you writing another 40 pages for a conclusion?' he asked, with an impatience that was too gentle to transcend to a rebuke.

"No sir, the conclusion is not forty pages but four paragraphs." I spoke.

"Ah, no wonder- the shorter it is, the longer it takes. It better be good!", he said.

I don't think he was disappointed with the final product. My enduring disappointment, however, and which will remain a mark of the incompleteness of my life, is that I didn't get to complete the PhD thesis under his supervision.

The Book Gift

On one of his visits abroad, Prof. Zuberi picked up two copies of 'Makers of Modern Strategy', one of which he gifted to me. Edited by Peter Paret, the volume set out the key markers of modern strategic thought from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age. This 1986 edition was an update on the first volume published in 1943. The third and latest volume - released a few months ago - the 'New Makers of Modern Strategy' edited by Hal Brands, is a must-read. Unfortunately, it does not include a chapter on Kautilya, a question I will return to later in my talk. In our daily lives, we all understand strategy broadly as getting things done. In the life of countries, matters of state, so to speak, strategy is more complex. National objectives differ; the means to achieve them are dissimilar and the international environment is often contested. There is the ever-present spectre of use or threat of use of force, which is the key characteristic that sets strategic studies apart from other disciplines.

While strategic instruments are impersonal, strategic decisions are not. These are made by individuals in positions of leadership that affect the fate of millions - for there is no human enterprise more consequential than the macabre dance of death and destruction on the highway of war. No war is good if it is avoidable. But lost wars are dreadful, for they inflict on the defeated not just the destruction wrought by battle but also the harsh penalties of peace arising from defeat. Good tactics enable good strategy, but successful strategy is one that fulfils the objectives of policy and remains bound by its limitations - both in terms of ambition and the means available for its accomplishment. In the pitiless world of strategy, high ambition backed by low capability is a sin without salvation.

Grand strategy, one of the pillars of statecraft - which readers of Kautilya would be familiar with - considers not just military but non-military means. Grand strategy is the key to keeping a balance between means and ends and of seeking objectives within capabilities. It determines not only how to fight but also when to fight - for there are times when it is more prudent to undertake peacetime competition rather than seek military conflict. When to end a war is often as critical as when to start one. The rise of great powers is often a function of the success of their grand strategy.

Forgotten dimensions

In the summer of 1979, Michael Howard, Oxford University's foremost war historian, wrote a seminal article in *Foreign Affairs* titled "Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy" in which, after a majestic survey of war in the preceding three centuries, identified four dimensions along which all wars are conducted - the operational, the logistical, the social, and the technological, pointing out that under different circumstances one or another of these dimensions would dominate and determine war outcomes. Prof. Howard was writing at the height of the Cold War, when a relatively stable geopolitical balance acted as a firm foundation for the operationalization of nuclear deterrence and its associated ecosystem of arms control and non-proliferation. The purpose of that article was to warn against the dangers of excessive dependence on the technological dimensions of war - in particular nuclear war, to the exclusion of the other three. Were Michael Howard to write the article today, I would expect that he would add a fifth dimension -

geopolitics - the renewed geopolitical competition between the big powers and the consequent weakening and fragmentation of deterrence in relations amongst them, which has led to the current lawlessness in the international system. This is where we turn to the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Lost opportunities

The Russia-Ukraine war represents a failure of big power deterrence on account of miscalculations on questions of capability, credibility, and communication on part of both Russia and the United States. The active phase of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is now well into its second year. Since 2014, when an insurrection in Kyiv unseated the incumbent President, relations between the two were tense but subsequent opportunities for a peaceful resolution receded as Ukraine swung decisively towards the West. War was not inevitable but opportunities for peace were lost by both sides - the 2015 Minsk accords, the first year of President Zelenski's term, the Biden - Putin Geneva Summit of June 2021, Russian proposals on European Security of December 2021 and the abortive Russia-Ukraine Peace talks of March/April 2022, which we now know from Ukrainian leaders were rejected on the advice of the UK and the US.

That Russia had to resort to use of force in its neighbourhood is not a measure of successful deterrence. That Ukraine miscalculated that its campaign to join NATO would not cross a redline that Russia had repeatedly articulated since 2007 is not a measure of successful counter-deterrence. Ukraine took the risk of seeking the protection of a distant power to address its proximate security needs. The deeply embedded perception of Russian weakness, evident since the 1990s, on part of the US and its NATO allies masked from view the turnaround in Russian military strength under President Putin and its will to act militarily to protect its interests in Ukraine. The stage was set for a prolonged military confrontation.

Doormats of history

This is now a proxy war between Russia and the West. While the military conflict has been confined to Ukraine, southern Russia, and the Black Sea area, the economic, energy, informational and cyber dimensions have given it a global scale. Like all

proxies, the fate of Ukraine is no longer in its own hands but at the mercy of wavering American strategic benevolence and uncertain European support. There have been proxies in the past and there will be more in the future- but they all meet the same fate - for in geopolitical conflict involving the big powers, proxies are the doormats of history.

While I have written elsewhere about the Ukraine conflict, and I am a bit embarrassed to say on the first day of the war itself – on 24 February 2022 with a subsequent piece on the 24 of February 2023, (both in the Indian Express), which laid out a broken future for Ukraine with partial but permanent loss of territory to Russia and with the rump Ukraine joining NATO. I am now getting a bit ahead of myself. Let's return to the five dimensions of strategy enumerated above.

In operational terms, Russia's desire for a quick and decisive blow against Kyiv in the early months of the war was a stunning failure. The fighting ability of Ukrainian units trained to NATO standards since 2016 compelled Russian withdrawals in northern and north-eastern Ukraine. The societal dimension also held up – though over 10 million people fled as refugees to Russia and Europe. President Zelensky was able to rally his country together, undertake successive mobilizations and conduct successful operations until September 2022 when Ukrainian forces reached the peak of their fighting capacity, having made advances in Kherson, Kharkiv and Sumy areas. Military support from the US and NATO of advanced weaponry added a new technological dimension to its fighting capacity. By the winter of 2022 the war had settled into a stalemate as none of the five dimensions – operational, logistical, technological, societal, or geopolitical were able to provide a decisive outcome to either side. Russia was too weak to win, and Ukraine was too strong to lose.

But in war, as in life, time doesn't stand still.

Coconut grater

In its second year, the stalemated war has turned gradually in Russia's favour. US and EU sanctions against Russia were predicated on crippling Russia's will and ability to conduct a prolonged war. Contrary to western expectations, the Russian defence industry has bounced back, with a huge hike in defence expenditure under conditions of better-than-expected but still modest economic growth.

The Russian military, like in all wars, has been adept at learning from its past mistakes. Having blunted the fighting capacity of the virulently far right anti-Russian units in the Ukrainian armed forces, including the AZOV battalion in Mariupol, Russia has systematically reduced Ukrainian fighting power in battles around Bakhmut and now in Avdeevka. Like a coconut grater, strong Russian defences have decimated Ukrainian forces.

In operational terms, the war has moved from one of manoeuvre to that of attrition. This is due to the impact of the ISR revolution disrobing battlefields of stealth or cover and the proliferation of drones and standoff weapons which can hit at will forces out in the open, making offensive operations costly in terms of equipment and manpower. Ukraine is also running short of fighting manpower- with its average officer age in the 40s. With an operational stalemate compounded by societal and logistical weakness, Ukraine is now desperately searching for a technological edge that could restore balance on the battlefield- which it can only get from the West, which in turn is related to the geopolitical dimensions of the war.

Fickle affections

While President Putin's nuclear warnings to the West not to supply advanced weaponry to Ukraine went largely unheeded, the West is now worried about the consequences of a major escalation with Russia. A Ukraine - fatigue has set in Europe. There is a fundamental churn in its political economy whose full implications are only beginning to become apparent – with two critical elements- a resentment against sacrificing more for Ukraine's war and a resentment against American domination over European energy and security policies. In America, the political ground has shifted somewhat with a Republican pushback in an upcoming election year. American focus towards Israel following the crisis in Palestine since early October, has struck a body blow to Ukraine as the top spot for American attention. Thus, with the logistical and geopolitical dimensions of the war shifting in its favour, perhaps irreversibly, Russia may be better placed by next year to dictate the terms of a peace settlement than it has been since the commencement of the war in 2022. It will of course be a contested peace – as US and EU will continue with the tight sanctions' regime as well as the tight geopolitical encirclement of Russia on its periphery. Russia would seek a peace

whose primary aim would be to ensure that Ukraine would not relaunch a war of revanchism to take back Donbass or become a forward base for American or NATO forces. Success would depend on the scale of its military victory or the scale of the collapse of the Ukrainian state. Ukraine is learning the hard way the risks of entrusting national security to the fickle affections of distant mentors.

Not an era of war

India's diplomatic approach to the Russia- Ukraine war has been one of pragmatic prudence, even while recognizing the unpredictable nature of war gains in an interconnected world, with Prime Minister Modi saying that it is not an era of war. Our diplomacy achieved the difficult task of bringing back over 20,000 Indian students from Ukraine, many of them from active war zones. While India has not condemned Russia for the invasion, it has highlighted its broader consequences – on energy, food and fertilizers and the global disequilibrium that the war has produced and of particular concern to the Global South. Russia, our long-standing strategic partner may finally prevail in Ukraine, but the war has placed it on the backfoot at least for the next decade. Another of our close strategic partner – the US - is now an overextended global power, attempting dual containment of Russia and China and succeeding in neither. This has provided a geopolitical sweet spot for China, which it is poised to exploit, despite the considerable downturn in its economic growth and instability in the ranks of its governing elite. In this triangular geopolitical equation, China has gained more than the other two.

What then are the takeaways for India? While Indian diplomacy has shown considerable skill in navigating a turbulent international system – including the remarkable success of the Delhi G20 summit, the underlying geopolitical trends are deeply troubling. A breakdown in deterrence equations - with nuclear deterrence no longer capable of deterring big power conflict in the conventional, cyber or space domains, and the weaponization of global interdependence radiating instability and unpredictability into non-military sectors globally, are key trends. International law, public opinion or even public conscience are now weak filters against conflict. There is wilful disregard of the UN and of arms control agreements. In this age of growing lawlessness, old paradigms of

interstate deterrence are breaking down under the weight of new actors, new technologies and new threats.

So, what specific lessons can India take from the Russia- Ukraine conflict and the broader international situation?

Prolonged wars

Operationally, the Ukraine conflict portends the onset of prolonged wars, which count not on military defeat but national exhaustion of the enemy. While no two wars are alike, and our security environment with China and Pakistan is vastly different, the general paradigm shift in warfare will have a long-term impact. With the ascendancy of defence as compared to offence, and the elimination of surprise due to the ISR revolution, semi-permanent war preparedness would become the norm. This would require longer deployments and quicker rotations than in the past, which will have an impact on overall numbers of deployable armed forces. The possibility of a two-front war with both Pak and China is higher than in the past. India needs to prepare two different war fighting doctrines- for Chinese capabilities are vastly different from those of Pakistan but also be prepared to execute them simultaneously. Prolonged wars also require logistics – stocks, reserves, and manufacturing potential of our domestic industry of a higher order as well as insulation against uncertain external supplies. Societal changes would need to adapt to the new strategic requirements - higher educational standards for intake into our armed forces and an in-service retention pattern that would ensure sufficiently trained and experienced units that can maintain effective combat readiness for prolonged periods in a high-tech combat environment. This is not an easy task for countries moving from limitless peasantry to a middle-class aspiring youth in a fast-growing economy. In terms of technology, we are witnessing the dawn of multidomain combat environments with unpredictable cross domain linkages-cyber, space and AI, which are fundamentally transformative of future warfare. The fusion between the sensor and the striker in weapon systems will become tighter and faster than ever before. Technology is malleable thus making situational and doctrinal surprise likely, if we make the mistake of thinking that the opponent thinks like us. Prepare to be surprised but prepare to prevail.

Dosa batter with pizza dough

The geopolitical dimension is now a critical reference point to calculate accurately the ebb and flow of international power. The role of diplomacy is vital – as the eyes and ears on a fast-changing world. Developing our own concepts is necessary as part of the change that we are witnessing and wish to influence. Building multipolarity with legacy concepts from the unipolar world would be like making dosa batter with pizza dough. Fit for purpose is measured by utility not familiarity.

Diplomacy can also play the role of a facilitator - of access to the sinews of our national development – to capital, markets, technology, and the protection of our nationals abroad. While we are focused on maritime connectivity, India's continental access to mainland Eurasia is being challenged - by the extension of Chinese influence into Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Hence, the importance of the INSTC, the EMC and the IMEC. Balancing our continental interests with that of our maritime interests is thus vitally important. How can India become a great power if we are geopolitically marginalized with limited land access on own Continent?

Geopolitical conflict feeds on not just on territories but also on technology. Given the pervasive securitization of global interdependence and the fact that global supply chains constitute more than 70% of global trade, it is vital we have the best of relations with the United States, and the top technology companies which are now formidable global players, in their own right. As a global power, the US would seek trade-offs consistent with its own global interests. Its current strategic predicament – a failing dual containment strategy against Russia and China along with a highly volatile Middle East involving the security of Israel is stretching US global influence to its limits. In the words of one of its former Defence Secretaries, the US is now a 'dysfunctional superpower'. But it is regaining influence elsewhere, in Latin America, East Asia and in South Asia.

Notions of omnipotence

For India, it is important to deal with the US for what it is – the world's largest economy, a pre-eminent technology and energy power but whose power projection capabilities are being increasingly

constrained by a deeply divided domestic polity, which is reducing its ability to simultaneously pursue a welfare state at home and a warfare state abroad, driving in turn an unsustainable rise in national debt. The US of the coming decades will be different from the US we have known since the end of Cold War. Exaggerated notions of US omnipotence in global affairs that tend to sometimes colour our thinking, much like the notions that were unquestioningly held about Soviet omnipotence in the 1980s - this campus is all too familiar with that, for sure - would only set the stage for mutual disappointment.

Diplomacy can also play the role of a compensator or force multiplier, in situations of power asymmetry that we now face with respect to China. Last year, China's total global exports were the same as India's GDP. China will be a formidable power in the coming decades and is showing the same proclivities for domination as hegemonic powers of the past. We should see China through our own prism, not one borrowed from others. Restoring credible military deterrence against China will enhance our ability to break the girdle that it seeks to build in our immediate neighbourhood. While our neighbourhood policy should be one of maximum possible economic accommodation, our redlines of no foreign military presence or bases on their soil, should be clearly understood by our neighbours. The Ukraine case shows that such attempts only bring grief to all concerned. Similarly, we need the naval capability and the doctrinal framework to retain predominance in the IOR. While friendly navies are welcome, a 'Free and Open' Indo-Pacific doesn't mean that the Indian Ocean region is a free-for-all 'dharmaśala' for foreign powers.

Fallacy of external balancing

Our defence relations with the US and arrangements such as the Quad are useful and necessary balancing instruments to compensate for the regional power differential with China, but such mechanisms cannot wholly compensate for shortfalls in our economic or defence potentials. Those supporting the so-called external balancing strategy to fill these gaps only generate false hopes and expectations. There is no substitute for a robust buildup of our own economic and military capabilities. Here too, Ukraine is a tragic example of the fate that await those willing to become proxies in big power conflicts. Living on borrowed

money is not the same as living on borrowed military strength- the latter erodes strategic autonomy far deeper than the former.

Our bilateral defence cooperation with the US should include robust technology cooperation- for which ICET offers a promising start and coordination of our deterrence postures in the broader region provided the US embraces the objective of a strong and independent India as vital to its strategic interests. The US would naturally seek a trade-off for such cooperation in terms of India committing to an alignment with its regional and global interests - on some issues these coincide and on some they don't. Extracting sustained US support for India's interests under conditions of fluctuating demands on US resources for its extensive interests elsewhere will be a vexing and perhaps exhausting pre-occupation of our diplomacy. But we must make every possible effort to keep open partnership possibilities.

Strong fences for strong partnerships

The sustainability of our long-term relations with the US is not only a matter of convergence of interests but equally of an understanding of their limits that both sides agree to respect. Strong fences make good neighbours but also strong partnerships. A durable understanding on limits would be an invaluable investment in friction-reduction and the best guarantee of a long term and sustainable partnership. Ukraine is an example of the thin line between partner and proxy and a lesson for any country wanting to become the Ukraine of the Indo-Pacific. To clarify matters, the US should embrace our strategic autonomy just as it accepted India's independent nuclear deterrent as a positive factor for its own interests. In practice, this would mean drawing a firm redline on the issue of integration of our defence forces with those of the US - either through interoperability or joint basing. Externally, it is important we engage but not get entangled in its global interests which are varied and liable to unilateral change. In short, for our relations with the US - coordination yes; integration no: engagement yes, entanglement no. Within these parameters there exists a vast universe of cooperation possibilities which are vital and necessary for India's security which may be pursued with full vigour, for there is no other relationship that it is more important for India to get right than that with the US.

Continental Eurasia

Russia will remain important for the coming decades for our defence inventory management, alternative energy sources and for maintaining balance on the Eurasian continent. Russia of the future will be very different from the Russia of the past- geopolitically relevant but economically weak. Russia is for India a permanent partner on the Eurasian continent, even though its perceived weakness will continue to invite US pinpricks in the coming decade. If the US - the world's most powerful maritime power places a low premium on stability on the Eurasian continent, India cannot remain insulated from its destabilizing impact for long. If the net result of US policy on the Eurasian continent is the steady expansion of Chinese influence, even while India is expected to join the US in containing China in the maritime domain, the resulting incongruity at the heart of India's grand strategy will be hard to ignore.

Inevitable India

The next decade will be more challenging than the last one. Diplomacy is important but there is no substitute for national strength. The next 25 years - what PM Modi has called 'Amritkal' - is vital for our economic growth, ensuring equity and innovation, doubling our GDP every decade - aiming for 30 trillion USD GDP by 2047 - is perhaps by itself the highest national security requirement. In the last few years India has put in place transformative macroeconomic fundamentals - ranging from GST, infrastructure, domestic manufacturing, a world class digital public infrastructure, Start Ups to name a few. However, in the field of computing technology, which is the defining technology of this century, like nuclear technology was the yardstick of power last century, US and China are only two AI superpowers today. India is an insignificant compute power, even while considering our considerable talent in software design. While the Indian Government has initiated steps to catch up, we have a long way to go. India needs to be more than a data goldmine and software design sweatshop. We can and should be the front face of the front-end of the fourth Industrial revolution, not its back-end back office. Overall, if we can maintain the tempo of reform and innovation under conditions of political and domestic stability, there is widespread expectation that 'Incredible' India will also be, as some have said 'Inevitable' India in terms of joining the ranks of the great powers. The

road from aspiration to reality will have to be paved with unity, growth, innovation, and sacrifice over the coming decades.

India is undergoing a quiet military revolution. Much delayed defence reforms now underway are being taken forward by the Government in a determined way. Changes in command and control, with emphasis on jointness, integration and theaterisation will greatly enhance the combat capabilities of our armed forces. Changes in recruitment procedures through the Agniveer programme and the indigenization of procurement and domestic manufacture of weapon systems, greater participation of the private sector and emphasis on defence exports, put together will fundamentally transform our armed forces. However, the most important change will be doctrinal, considering not only changes in our immediate security environment but also global trends which have been referred to. To support these changes, it is necessary to increase defence spending to an average of 3% of GDP, enshrined in law, for the next decade. This will provide a predictable resource base to plan this buildup. It's not that it has not been done in the past- between 1963 and 1988 - India's defence expenditure averaged above 3% of GDP. Today's the country's economic possibilities, its military modernization programme and the troubled international security situation make this both possible and necessary. While conflict with China is not inevitable, a continuing gap in military capabilities will enhance the possibilities of conflict.

Grammar of strategy

Before I conclude, let me reflect briefly on the status of strategic studies in India. As part of globalization, it was understandable that our foreign policy and security communities readily absorbed strategic perspectives emanating from the West. Our expectations of a permanently benign global situation have been belied. This reversal, disappointing as it is, has also led to creeping self-doubt on whether we can afford to pursue a policy of strategic autonomy, when there is a growing power gap with China. The belief that some dilution of our strategic autonomy is a justifiable cost to be

D. B. Venkatesh Varma

(Former Ambassador of India to Russia, Spain and the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva; completed an MPhil from the JNU in 1986. Lightly edited from the Zuberi Memorial speech delivered) on 7 December 2023.)

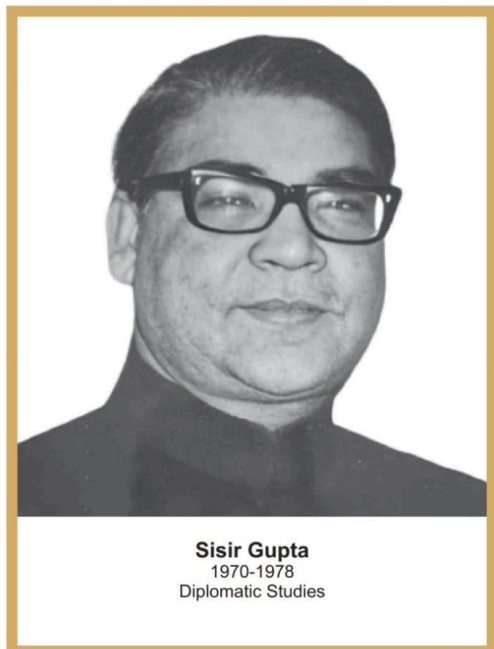
paid for its preservation is fundamentally flawed and can be a barrier to India's rise. Our strategic autonomy is both a practical requirement and a civilizational necessity, for no country has ever risen by fighting wars for other countries.

Strategic thought is not alien to India. Kautilya's Arthashastra is not just a political treatise. It is not just a textbook on statecraft. It is a magnum opus on grand strategy, more comprehensive than the works of Machiavelli, Jomini, Clausewitz or other thinkers. Though written millennia ago, its timeless quality is derived from the grammar and logic that Kautilya's distilled wisdom provides for strategy's permanent dilemmas - how to pursue long term goals with constantly shifting balance of power amongst competing states under material limitations and mental distractions. Kautilya's prescriptions are not for the fainthearted. They are for those wanting to transition India from power to great power, not for those willing to let India slip from partner to proxy. In Kautilya's world, strategic autonomy is non-negotiable, as it is the original purpose for which the state exists. Kautilya is not just for a sharpening of the mind but also for a strengthening of the soul.

The Arthashastra is a grammar of strategy for the ages with each age writing its own strategic literature relevant to its specific needs. With such a rich tradition to draw on, we should have no difficulty to construct our strategic thought and practice for India's needs relevant to our times. This will entail restoring faith and confidence in ourselves and a clear vision of what we are and what we aspire to be - in other words to transition from an allotted identity given to us by others to an identity rooted in our land. In the world of strategy, what nations accomplish is determined by what they settle for as much as what they aspire to. For India, we owe to our sacred land the higher purpose, passion, and perseverance that is bequeathed by our civilization - a vision of India's greatness that is backed by a moral conviction that provides all our people a sense of belonging and hope which soothes the pain of sacrifice our country's rise will invariably require. It is to that higher calling that we must all strive for - in this great University and beyond.
Thank you.

Pioneers of SIS

Remembering Prof. Sisir Gupta



Prof. Sisir Gupta was a pioneer of International Relations in India and the first Professor of Diplomatic Studies at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. His contributions played a pivotal role in shaping the field of International Relations in India. A prolific writer, Prof. Gupta made significant contributions to the understanding of Great Power relations, the dynamics of the Third World, Asian nonalignment, and India's position in the international system.

One of his notable works is an article published in *Strategic Analysis* in 2009, titled "The Great Powers and the Sub-Continent: A New Phase?" In this piece, Prof. Gupta explored how the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign, independent republic in 1971 radically shifted the balance of power in South Asia. He argued that this development particularly affected the two Super Powers, though other Great Powers also experienced shifts in their regional influence.

Prof. Gupta's most renowned book, *Kashmir: A Study in India-Pakistan Relations*, was published by Asia Publishing House, New York, in 1966. This seminal work examines the nature of the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and explores potential solutions for peace.

Another major contribution to the field is the posthumously published volume *India and the International System*, edited by M.S. Rajan in 1981, which contains a selection of Prof. Gupta's writings on India's foreign policy and international affairs. His earlier work *India and Regional Integration*, published in 1964, reflected his deep insights into Asian nonalignment, particularly in the aftermath of the India-China war. Prof. Gupta remains one of the most influential voices in shaping India's engagement with regional players.

Book Review

Why Bharat Matters: India's Geopolitical Ascent Through Dr. S. Jaishankar's Lens

Book: Why Bharat Matters

By Dr. S. Jaishankar, Rupa Publications, Published: January/2024, E-ISBN: 9789357026406, pp223, ₹695.00 (Hardback)

The past decade has been very eventful in the international domain, providing much to witness regarding geopolitical shifts. *Why Bharat Matters* by S. Jaishankar offers a new perspective on India's place in the changing global landscape, in the past ten years. The book is a collection of eleven essays ranging from an analysis of the global landscape to an identification of India's opportunities. The author makes appropriate connections between historical events and current circumstances by drawing comparisons between the Indian epic Ramayana and current global affairs. By taking its cues from the Mahabharata as well, the writer illustrates how the nation's sense of self and identity have changed. The book covers trends in Indian foreign policy after 2014 and familiarizes the reader with the challenges and accomplishments faced by the Modi administration in implementing its foreign policy during the previous ten years.

The central theme of the book concerns itself with the changes India has undergone in terms of how it presents itself and how the rest of the world perceives it. It talks about how India is beginning to shape its agenda and narrative rather than being a mere follower or spectator. Or, as the title suggests, Bharat is now a 'shaping and moving force' in geopolitics. In the current multipolar world order, the book continuously tries to make the reader walk through India's journey from taking a non-aligned stance to one that is more confident. The book goes into length on the, 'What, Why, and How' of the Modi administration's foreign policy. In addition to providing a comprehensive overview of world affairs, the book details the smaller components that India has contributed to the world affairs. The book explains the timeline of several significant events, the most discussed ones are the COVID pandemic, the fragile state of

international relations, and globalization. The text also goes into great detail about the changes in foreign policy since 2014.

This book gives us a general review of Indian foreign policy in the introductory Chapter, "**Presenting a World View**", where it places the country in the context of global geopolitics and discusses the issues it faces as a rising power. The reader is made aware of how citizens are affected by foreign policy. The following chapter, "**Foreign Policy and You**" discusses how the leadership's perspective has changed to emphasize the diaspora's soft power and the Modi government's increasing outreach to the Indians living abroad. In the **Chapter Three-"The State of the World"**, readers are provided with a comprehensive overview of current global issues and are shown where India fits within them. This chapter also tells us that India is speaking up more for the common good and its principles on the world stage. One such instance discussed by the author is how India is emerging as a voice for the Global South, calling for a reform of the existing global framework.

In **Chapter Four-"Back to the Future"**, the US and China's Great Power Transition is thoroughly explained and connected to other emerging power centres. Dr. Jaishankar emphasizes here the dynamic character of contemporary world politics with this description. He discusses the power struggle between Kaushika and the sage Vasistha in addition to highlighting Indian political theory's Mandala Theory, which helps to explain the layers of Indian foreign policy. The Modi government's many '*Mandalas*' of concentration are reflected in its focus on the immediate neighborhood, the extended neighborhood, and Central Asia. **Chapter Five-"Transformational Decade"**, offers a

comprehensive examination of the policy initiatives implemented under Narendra Modi's leadership. **Chapter Seven-"Quad: A Grouping Foretold"**, has the most intriguing analogy by drawing parallels in the four Quad member states and the Ramayana's Four Sons of King Dashrath. The chapter discusses the Quad and its significance in the Indo-Pacific region. It provides a thorough analysis of India's Indo-Pacific policy. As the author puts it, "the Quad was not an accidental alliance. It was a necessity born out of a shared understanding of a changing security landscape".

An in-depth analysis of India's numerous approaches to China is provided in **Chapter Eight-"Dealing with China,"** which also sheds light upon the difficulties and errors that have been made during the execution of foreign policy by India. The evolving concept of security, which goes beyond conventional ideas, is explained in detail in **Chapter Nine-"Re-imagining Security"**. **Chapter Ten - "Roads Not Taken"**, offers a novel viewpoint on the necessity of altering viewpoints about foreign policy. A brief discussion is made of the various diverse historical perspectives held by Ambedkar, Masani, Patel, and Mukherjee. The final chapter-"**Why Bharat Matters**", which concludes the book, weaves together the points raised in the previous chapters to show India's path toward becoming a powerful and self-assured country from post-independence to the present. The author captures the essence of India's future ambitions: "*Bharat's rise is inevitable, not just for its own sake, but for the sake of a fairer, more just global order.*"

This book is relevant because it provides a thorough analysis of India's strategic position under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as this is when the author believes the transformation occurred. The strongest thesis of *Why Bharat Matters* is the increasing significance of India as the Global South's leader, negotiating disputes between superpowers while promoting causes like technological governance, fair globalization, and climate

change. Jaishankar presents India as a nation able to impact international policies that serve the interests of developing countries, in addition to being a regional force. For intellectuals, academicians, policymakers, or anybody else who wants to understand how India's role in international affairs is evolving, this book will be an insightful read.

Many books have been written about Indian foreign policy, but this one stands out for the way it presents India's current geopolitical comeback, which is supported by strategic cultural thought from the country's past. Jaishankar's sophisticated methodology, which integrates Realpolitik, history, and culture, makes the book both practically relevant and intellectually engaging. Its relevance stems from its capacity to capture India's transformation from a defensive, non-aligned country to a dominant player on the world stage.

However, there are certain areas that could benefit from further exploration. Although the author acknowledges the Modi administration's pivotal role in reshaping India's global image, a deeper analysis of the continuities and breaks with past administration- particularly the groundwork laid by previous governments- could have provided a more nuanced understanding of India's rise.

Another area that might have deserved more attention is the domestic implications of foreign policy. While Jaishankar explores the impact of foreign policy on the diaspora, the book does not fully engage with how shifts in foreign policy affect domestic economic and social policies.

In summary, while *Why Bharat Matters* offers a rich and detailed exploration of India's foreign policy, a more critical engagement with the historical continuities, unresolved tensions, and domestic implications would have enhanced its comprehensive approach.

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