

## Book Review

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*The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*, edited by S. Jaishankar, ed. New Delhi, HarperCollins India, May 2022, Pp. 248, paperback edition.

“Tact is the knack of making a point without making an enemy.”

—Isaac Newton

The global community is observing a profound paradigm shift in the current state of world politics. Countries are changing where they stand in the global political system. The general global geo-strategic matrix has changed due to the rise of Asia, Russia's rebirth, Africa's economic potential, and America's policy of turning inward in the twenty-first century. Additionally, the seismic shift in technology and politics has made it so that power must now take into account cyber, digital, and physical connectedness as well as technological research and development in addition to 'hard' military and economic capabilities.

India needs to navigate these turbulent times with both stead and vigour. Against this backdrop, India's External Affairs Minister, and seasoned veteran of politics, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, has authored *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* to shed light on the new global political conditions in this impeccably measured, intelligently analysed and invigoratingly researched work in which he dwells on the strategy to be adopted by India if she has to tide over the trials and tribulations of an uncompromising, yet promising change.

It is not a comprehensive account of recent historical events considering these did not have a significant bearing on India. As a result, it is largely quiet regarding the establishment of the Euro Zone, different aspects of the Cold War, or the fall of the Iron Curtain to the extent that these events did not directly affect India. This book's description of India's foreign policy since Independence is extremely fascinating as he effectively borrows from our history to use the Panipat Syndrome to describe India's attitude toward its own national security.

In contrast to what he calls the "political romanticism" (p. 4) of the past, which is implicitly connected with Jawaharlal Nehru and his sense of *moralpolitik*, he advises taking advantage of the new conditions in a *realpolitik* approach. Jaishankar argues that in order to move on from a past encumbered by India's "soft condition," "fatalism," and "lost possibilities", we must reform India's foreign policy to align with its current ambition of becoming a leading powerhouse; this is to free ourselves from the burden of our bureaucratic decisions of the past (p. 74). The call for disruption can be heard on almost every page, and the author, who is undoubtedly a stellar representative of the Indian bureaucracy criticises it for its conservative ideology, though it is unclear precisely what it is being criticised for: "The real obstacle to the rise of India is not any more the barriers of the world, but the dogmas of Delhi (p.73)."

What is it that Jaishankar suggests that our country does not already do? In a nutshell, the solution is to use a transactional logic in all of its interactions in which there are only "frenemies" rather than allies or friends: "In a world of more naked self-interest, nations will do what they have to do with less pretence" (p. 26) and "even partners will always strive for better terms of transactions" (p. 27). Therefore, "realism" (p. 12), "*realpolitik*" (p. 5), and "hard security" (p. 74) are not the only significant phrases, together with "management of differences" (to take advantage of international tensions) and "pragmatic settlement" (p. 27).

It is clear from what he writes that he opposes India entering any alliance system. He also opposes the traditional non-alignment position. To illustrate his thesis, he used Balarama and Rukmi of Vidarbha from the Mahabharata as examples. Both chose to keep out of the conflict, and yet they still had to deal with the fallout. "Despite staying out of it, we are still left with the

repercussions. On some issues, we run the risk of upsetting everybody. It's an appeal for movement. He further asserts that the action is determined by "Krishna's choice" to "follow the dharma of the state," which entails declaring the national interest and achieving strategic objectives using a variety of tactics. In a multipolar world, his wager is on "many engagements," to put it another way. When compared to a previous posture of non-participation or abstinence, it "appears more vibrant and participative."

Few will contest the persuasive case that India must engage in several global activities while maintaining its strategic independence. The issue, however, is that Jaishankar doesn't provide more specific information outside of this framework, probably due to limitations imposed by his position in the administration. *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* looks more like a diplomat's manual—important for learning how diplomacy works—than a strategic expert's evaluation of the past and recommendations for the future. It has paradoxes as well. Jaishankar places a strong emphasis on the democratic framework, multi-faith principles, and pluralism of India. However, domestically and internationally, the government he is a part of has come under fire for jeopardising India's pluralistic principles.

Nevertheless, for both a worldwide readership and the Indian people, this book provides insight into the current course of India's foreign policy and the South Block's perspective on world affairs. The author makes a strong impression on his audience by describing how India's strategy has been able to successfully elevate its worldwide image as a prospective leader by creating a new model of foreign policy that is inherently driven by realism.