

विश्वनीति Viśvanīti

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A Letter from the Dean



I am delighted to introduce Viśvanīti, a new publication from the School of International Studies. Viśvanīti serves as a bridge between a journal and a newsletter, offering a unique platform that combines academic rigour with timely policy insights. As the Dean of the School, I am proud to present this quarterly update on our institution, designed to accommodate and serve all our stakeholders.

Viśvanīti stands at the intersection of scholarship and policy. It is a testament to our commitment to fostering a deeper understanding of international affairs and their practical implications. Through this publication, we aim to bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical, ensuring that our research findings and expertise reach a wider audience, including policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. Scholarship forms the foundation of our School. Our faculty and researchers are constantly engaged in cutting-edge research, generating valuable insights and contributing to the global discourse on international relations. Viśvanīti will serve as a platform to project our ideas, providing a space for thought-provoking articles, research summaries, and expert analysis. It will be a source of intellectual stimulation, generating debate amongst scholars and students alike.

However, it is not enough to confine our knowledge within the walls of academia. In an increasingly interconnected world, it is crucial that our research has real-world impact. Viśvanīti will act as a conduit for translating scholarly research into actionable policy recommendations. We believe that by fostering dialogue between academia and policymakers, we can contribute to informed decision-making and address the pressing challenges of our time.

Viśvanīti is not just for academics and policymakers. We recognize the importance of keeping our students, alumni, and partners informed about the latest developments in the SIS. Through this publication, we will provide updates on our programs, initiatives, and events, transmitting the achievements and contributions of our vibrant community. Viśvanīti will serve as a platform for collaboration and engagement, strengthening our ties with all those who share our passion for international studies. Viśvanīti is a testament to our commitment to excellence, relevance, and impact. It embodies our belief that scholarship and policy are not mutually exclusive, but intertwined and complementary. I invite you to explore Viśvanīti, engage with its content, and join us in strengthening the discourse community in international studies.

Amitabh Mattoo
Dean, School of International Studies



Viewpoint

The Indian Quest for Permanent Membership of the UN Security Council: G4 Model and Beyond*



Bharat H. Desai

Introduction

On April 23, 2024, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) opened the debate on the use of veto by the five permanent members (P5) of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This debate took place on the eve of the second anniversary of the historic [resolution 76/262 \(26 April 2022\)](#) adopted by the UNGA to make the veto-wielding P5 countries accountable. The UNGA adopted the said resolution (76/262) to foster greater cooperation with the Security Council following [Russia's 'special military operation' in Ukraine on 24 February 2022](#).

Ironically, since the adoption of the said resolution, vetoes have been used 13 times by the P5 countries. Since the UN's inception, [vetoes have been used 320 times](#). Notwithstanding this as well as veto wielding countries' bottom-line in the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) that veto is non-negotiable, every major power seeking a permanent UNSC seat cherishes that illusive 'veto'. At the meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) [reforms](#), on March 20, 2024, [India rebuffed the model presented by the United for Consensus \(UFC\)](#) group of countries. The UFC opposes any creation of new permanent members.

It advocates for an expansion of the UNSC from 15 to 26 members with an increase merely in the non-permanent elected member category. The UFC group comprises Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, San Marino, Spain, and Türkiye (with China and Indonesia as Observers). As a permanent member of the UNSC, the presence of China in the UFC reflects conflict of interest.

Interestingly, the UFC model has been pitted against the long-standing demand, especially from the G4 countries (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan), for an expansion of the permanent membership of the UNSC. As of now, the crucial question of 'veto' is not on the radar.

"Threats to international peace and security have become more complex, unpredictable and undefined. The world of the twenty-first century desperately needs a UN 2.0 that is credible, representative, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the member states and capable of maintaining peace and security," India's Permanent Representative (IPR) to the UN, Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, said in response to the UFC model presented by Italy at the IGN meeting on the UNSC reforms.

The IGNs are taking place in the proverbial UN Trusteeship Council (UNTC) Chamber itself. In view of the significance and sensitivity of the issue of UNSC expansion, parleys have been taking place both in an open format (recorded) as well as in an informal and interactive closed-door format. The G4 expects possibility of some tangible progress on the UN reforms in general and expansion of the UNSC membership (especially the five clusters of reform) by the UN's 80th anniversary (2025). The G4 has dubbed the current round of parleys as a "testament to stalled discussion at IGN" being done "without a text" amidst calls for "burning issue" of the UNSC reforms in a "comprehensive and holistic fashion". It alluded to the calls made by the leaders of the 87 countries, in their respective addresses in the high-level segment (September 18-22, 2023) of the UNGA's 78th session, for a reformed UNSC that is representative of the UN membership.

UNGA: Conductor of a Grand Orchestra

As the plenary organ of the UN, the General Assembly (UNGA) has been instrumental in setting in motion International Law-making and institution-building processes (through the ILC as its subsidiary organ, global conferences or other intergovernmental negotiations) decided at 62nd (2008) Session, to roll out the IGN process in an 'informal plenary' starting with the 63rd (2009) Session. As a sequel to his April 28, 2023 letter, the UNGA President enlisted 'elements' in his June 05, 2023 letter to all the PR and Observers concerning "convergences and divergences on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters". The UNGA has followed up each meeting of the IGN process and sought to nudge the Member States through a series of its processes (63/565 B, 64/568, 65/554, 66/566, 67/561, 68/557, 69/560, 70/559, 71/553, 72/557, 73/554, 74/569, 75/569, 76/572, and 77/559).

The high-level segment of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) concluded on September 26, 2022 was addressed by 190 speakers including 76 Heads of State, 50 Heads of Government and 48 Ministers. They resorted to posturing and airing of grievances against the global order, the UN system, global flashpoints and other states. Interestingly, the US President Joe Biden's September 21, 2022 UNGA address brought the spotlight back on the long pending discourse for expansion of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the Indian claim for a permanent seat therein:

"Members of the U.N. Security Council, including the United States, should consistently uphold and defend the U.N. Charter and refrain from the use of the veto, except in rare, extraordinary situations, to ensure that the Council remains credible and effective. That is also why the United States supports increasing the number of both permanent and non-permanent representatives of the Council. This includes permanent seats for those nations we've long supported and permanent seats for countries in Africa [and] Latin America and the Caribbean".

President Biden's statement did not spell out the countries that the US would support in both the categories even as he eschewed word 'Asia' from the geographical areas he mentioned. The Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM), Dr. S. Jaishankar, while attending a flurry of meetings in New York, addressed the UNGA plenary session on September 25, 2022 (A Watershed Moment: Transformative Solutions to Interlocking Challenges), contributed to the 32 countries' joint statement of September 23 for comprehensive reforms for a "legitimate Security Council" and held a meeting of G4 countries on September 22, 2022 jointly seeking a permanent seat. Each one of the G4 (Brazil, India, Germany and Japan) countries have challengers from the UFC group to their claims in respective regions.

Security Council Veto: The UN Charter's Inherent Inequality

The advent of the UN, on the ashes of the League of Nations, was an audacious project to "to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war" (Preamble, UN Charter). In his address at the adoption of the UN Charter on June 26, 1945, the US President Harry Truman prophesized that "If we had had this Charter a few years ago--and above all, the will to use it--millions now dead would be alive. If we should falter in the future in our will to use it, millions now living will surely die".

United Nations Security Council's horse-shoe table

The special provision for the “concurring votes of the permanent members” (Article 27), known as veto, proved most contentious at the outset since many of the original 51 founding members expressed reservations about making the P5 countries – China, France, USSR, UK and USA (Article 23) – more equal than the others. However, with the collapse of the League, the war-ravaged world was left with no option but to accept the imperfect general political organization that the victorious powers pushed down their throat. It was ‘take it or leave it’ situation. That legacy continued even after expansion of the non-permanent membership from 11 to 15 by a December 17, 1963 amendment to Article 23. Since then, the world has been greatly transformed in the last six decades including the UN membership of 193 states. The UN has been a human construct and not a perfect solution for the ‘outlawry’ of war. It was not “to take mankind to paradise, but rather to save humanity from hell”, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in his address to the UNGA on September 24, 2022.

Thus, at the outset itself, the instrument of iniquitous veto was not inserted in the UN Charter “in a fit of absent-mindedness”. It was a “deliberate decision to render the Security Council incapable of undertaking enforcement action against, or against the will of, any of the Big Five” [Inis Claude, Jr., *International Conciliation* 532 (1961) 329]. On numerous occasions, the P5 have proved this prophecy correct on inability of the UNSC to bring about ceasefire, peace agreement in several global conflicts including the stand-off in Russia-Ukraine (since February 2022) and Israel-Gaza (Palestine) (since October 2023) conflicts.

Indian Quest for Comprehensive UN Reforms

The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a call for “comprehensive UN reforms” in his address of September 25, 2021 at the 76th UNGA. “We cannot fight today’s challenges with outdated structures”, the Prime Minister said. His priority list included climate change, poverty alleviation, situation in Afghanistan and the Security Council reforms. In response to a question by this author, the EAM Jaishankar, SIS/JNU alumnus, made similar assertion in during his February 26, 2024 Kunzru Lecture (SIS/JNU) as to why India deserves to be on the Global High Table of the UNSC. As a part of their New York confabulations (September 23, 2022), during the 77th UNGA, the respective Foreign Ministers underscored the need for text-based negotiations for expansion of the UNSC in both permanent and non-permanent categories.

Apart from the claim of India and others, the question of veto remains the bone of contention. Will the P5 allow the future inductees the privilege of wielding a veto? In all probability and as indicated by the Co-Chairs at the IGN (April 05, 2024), the question of abolishing or sharing this privilege with new members remains non-negotiable for P5. In this respect the contours of the IGN negotiations comprise some key issues: categories of membership; the question of the veto, regional representation, size of an enlarged Security Council and working methods of the Council; and the relationship between the Council and the General Assembly. Hence, the prospective bidders shall have to take a realistic position. Interestingly, some improvising is now discernible from President Biden’s UNGA address (September 21, 2022) when he suggested that the P5 need to “refrain from the use of the veto, except in rare, extraordinary situations”. Similarly, in the wake of use of the Russian veto in the aftermath of the ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine, the UNGA adopted an unprecedented resolution 76/262 on April 26, 2022 (adopted without a vote) on a “standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council”. The said resolution took into account the UN Charter provisions concerning voting in the Security Council (Article 27) as well as the powers and functions of the General Assembly (Articles 10-12) in matters pertaining to the maintenance of international peace and security. The “standing mandate” UNGA resolution considered the UNGA decision 62/557 of September 15, 2008 that triggered the process for “to commence intergovernmental negotiations in informal plenary of the General Assembly”. Other relevant resolutions in this respect include 48/26 of December 3, 1993, 53/30 of November 23, 1998 and 61/561 of September 17, 2007 (equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters). In view of the fact that the intergovernmental negotiations (IGN) on Security Council reform is underway, the Assembly decided, without prejudice to IGN process, the following:

- Decides that the President of the General Assembly shall convene a formal meeting of the General Assembly within 10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Security Council, to hold a debate on the situation as to which veto was cast, provided that the Assembly does not meet in an emergency special session on the same situation;
- Also decides, on an exceptional basis, to accord precedence in the list of speakers to the permanent member or permanent members of the Security Council having cast a veto;
- Invites the Security Council, in accordance with Article 24 (3) of the Charter of the United Nations, to submit a special report on the use of the veto in question to the General Assembly at least 72 hours before the relevant discussion in the Assembly;
- Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its 77th session an item entitled "Use of the veto", and that the item should remain on the agenda of the Assembly for consideration in accordance with paragraph 1 of the present resolution;
- Also decides that, should a veto be cast by one or more permanent members of the Security Council during the remainder of the 76th session of the General Assembly, the President of the General Assembly shall convene a formal meeting of the Assembly, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the present resolution, under the agenda item entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations system".

This extraordinary step by the UNGA shows the future pathway to blunt the edges of veto used by P5. Hopefully, it could render veto less attractive for the future expansion of the UNSC. That inevitably opens the doors for the third category of the UNSC's permanent membership without veto. It now appears to be the pragmatic way out for India and G4 to secure a permanent seat on the UNSC's horse-shoe table. The G4 model presented by the Indian envoy Ruchira Kamboj at the IGN (March 08, 2024) and recent statements of the Indian EAM, Dr. Jaishankar, underscore this graphic reality.

Making the UNSC Permanent Seat to Follow India

It is feared that the UNSC expansion would open up a Pandora's box since different parts of the Charter (General Assembly, ECOSOC, Security Council, Trusteeship Council and the International Court of Justice) need to be reviewed especially on the issue of representation in view of multi-fold growth in the UN membership (from original 50 to 193 at present). Many member states, including India, genuinely feel that the UN Charter does not reflect realities of the 21st century world. In a futuristic scenario, if consensus would emerge at the IGN in the near future, it will necessitate an amendment of the Charter under Article 108. It would require approval by a two-thirds of the UNGA members as well as concurrence of P5 of the UNSC. As an alternative, a review conference under Article 109 can be convened by a two-thirds vote in the UNGA and a vote of any nine UNSC members. Notwithstanding this, any alteration of the Charter proposed at such a review conference would still necessitate the consent of the P5!

If the UNSC expansion comes up on the agenda, can the revival and repurpose of the UN Trusteeship Council (UNTC), lying dormant since November 10, 1994, be far behind? This author has suggested (The Tribune, December 2, 2020) for the repurposed UNTC (EPL 52 (2022) 223–235) to exercise trusteeship of the planet through global supervision of environment and the commons. It also forms part of the author's books (1) *International Environmental Governance* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2014) and (2) *Envisioning Our Environmental Future: Stockholm+50 and Beyond* (IOS Press: Amsterdam, 2022, Edited.). The ideational proposal holds significance in view of a flurry of initiatives taken by the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) António Guterres including his 2021 report 'Our Common Agenda'.

In a letter dated 28 January 2019 to the author, the President of the 73rd UN General Assembly, Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, shared her sentiment that "preserving and caring for our planet and protecting the environment are among the most pressing challenges we face globally". She further added: "As you rightly point out, a new mandate for the UN Trusteeship Council would necessitate consensus among the UN membership and an amendment to the Charter in accordance with its article 108". Significantly, the idea for "trusteeship of the planet" (The Tribune, December 02, 2020) was also flagged by the Indian Prime Minister Modi's address of November 21, 2020 to the G20 Riyadh Summit. That would require an institutional wherewithal that is readily

available – at no cost – by revival and repurpose of the UNTC in the same hall where the current IGN meeting is being held at the UNHQ. The idea of repurposed UNTC holds significance, along with the expansion of the UNSC membership, for the forthcoming UN’s Summit of the Future (September 22-23, 2024).

The Road Ahead: Spelling Out the Scholarly Role

Assuming that the G4 model and the Indian bid for a permanent seat of the UNSC materializes in the coming years, it would still require cutting-edge futuristic ideas for providing solutions to the global problematique. That calls for timely investment in the study of international affairs by institutionalizing knowledge-driven architecture in the mainstream Indian university sector. Originally registered, on May 25, 1956, as Indian School of International Studies (ISIS), this author’s home turf – School of International Studies (SIS) – has the requisite credentials as envisioned (December 11, 2008) in the role of a ‘think tank’ both at unveiling (December 27) of the SIS Faculty Wall of Honor (2023) as well as in the five years long painstaking process of Making SIS Visible initiative (2008-2013). Cumulatively, it can be based on the bedrock of solution oriented cutting-edge scholarly works of global relevance (addressing issues such as resolutions of the global conflicts affecting 2 billion people; delegitimization and elimination of rape as a weapon of war; environmental crimes; humanitarian crisis; exacerbation of conflicts and disasters by climatic changes; making International Law instruments work etc.) emanating from the SIS as a ‘think tank’ as well as other Indian centers of International Law and International Relations. They need to provide vital building blocks for knowledge to facilitate the role of India as a Global Solution Provider wherein the UNSC’s permanent seat would legitimately follow India.

In this wake, the author has earnestly sought to walk-the-talk, made out a scholarly case in numerous writings, nudged conscientious colleagues and pleaded for knowledge-driven approach in one-on-one meetings with the decision-maker at the highest level. The challenge lies in making this knowledge-driven roadmap possible by putting into place a robust architecture, an ecosystem to facilitate generation of futuristic ideas and finally, an entrustment to genuine scholars as the thought leaders. Rest would follow.

*This article is substantially revised and updated version of the author’s SIS Blog Special article dated March 22, 2024: Intergovernmental Negotiations: G4 Model for Permanent Membership of the UN Security Council and Beyond (sisblogjnu.wixsite.com)

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Commentary

Will Taipei Become New Delhi's Strategic Partner in the Post-Tsai Ing-wen Era?



Aleksandra Jaskólska
Antonina Łuszczkiewicz

Introduction

In the midst of general elections in India, Lai Ching-te—the former Vice-President of Taiwan (known officially as the Republic of China, ROC)—has been sworn in as the new President of the democratically-ruled island on May 20, 2024. Will he maintain policies and strategies toward India that were undertaken by his predecessor, President Tsai Ing-wen? What kind of challenges does Taipei now face in developing its relations with the most populous country in the world? To answer these questions, the authors of this paper focus on the two aspects: a) New Delhi's relations with Taipei in the context of India's perception of and disputes with China, and b) patterns and prospects of India-Taiwan economic cooperation.

The Triangular Relations between and among China, India and Taiwan

As a result of the Chinese civil war, the nationalist troops of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek evacuated from the mainland to the island of Taiwan in late 1949, ensuring the survival of the ROC. Soon afterwards, New Delhi terminated relations with the ROC and established formal ties with its new communist neighbor, the People's Republic of China (PRC), on April 1, 1950—making India the first non-socialist bloc country to normalize contacts with communist China. India has observed the ambiguous one-China policy, according to which there is only one China in the world and the PRC is its sole legal government; importantly, however, the one-China policy does not arbitrate whether Taiwan is a part of China. The then Minister of External Affairs (MEA) Sushma Swaraj clarified in 2014 that since India respected China's sensitivities about Tibet and Taiwan, Beijing should, in return, understand and appreciate New Delhi's sensitivity with regard to Arunachal Pradesh.

During the controversial visit of the US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in August 2022, China expected the Indian government to confirm its position on one China. In light of ongoing controversies over the status of Arunachal Pradesh and the Galwan valley skirmish on India-China border in June 2020, India did not fulfill China's request—instead, New Delhi's restrained reaction was in fact a veiled message that as long as China does not recognize India's border claims, the Indian side is not willing to reiterate its one-China policy.

It seems that with the deterioration of China-India relations, New Delhi symbolically-but meaningfully-increased its involvement in Taiwan affairs. Shortly before the Galwan valley crisis, the Government of India had decided on the participation of two Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) parliamentarians, Meenakshi Lekhi and Rahul Kaswan, in President Tsai Ing-wen's online swearing-in ceremony in May 2020. It was the first time when Indian parliamentarians participated in swearing-in ceremony of Taiwan's President. China called India's decision "utterly wrong".

Few months later, the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi sent out a letter to Indian journalists, asking them not to cover the news on Taiwan's National Day on October 10. In response, Indian media seemed to have expressed more interest in Taiwanese celebrations than ever before. Moreover, one of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members hanged some posters congratulating Taiwan outside of the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi, whereas several Indian politicians posted National Day wishes on social media. The following day, President Tsai Ing-Wen thanked "dear friends in India" for their wishes and defending Taiwan's "democratic way of life".

India-Taiwan Economic Cooperation

In absence of official diplomatic ties, economic cooperation is the primary domain with open and direct government interactions between New Delhi and Taipei. The two countries have signed the bilateral investment treaty in 2018. As of 2023, India ranked as the 16th largest trading partner for Taiwan, whereas India was the

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12th largest export market for Taiwan. India also stood as the 25th largest import source for Taiwan. Taiwan has maintained a favorable trade balance with India.

Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC) was opened in Chennai in 2012. Same year, a non-government business organization, supported by business leaders and instructed by government competent authorities, Taiwan-India Business Association (TIBA), was established with the support of business representatives and India Trade Agency. Its main goal is to support Taiwan companies which are interested in entering the Indian market. The Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA), a semiofficial agency promoting trade and investment, which has been an important actor since the inception of the New Southbound Policy (NSP), has four liaison offices in India—in New Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai.

As of February 2024, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Taiwan reached in total around 4.46 billion USD. A significant increase in the flow of FDI could be observed in recent years—for instance, FDI increased almost 10 times between 2017–18 and 2018–19. In early 2024, there were approximately 250 Taiwanese companies involved in investments in India, responsible for the establishment of 170,000 jobs. The most popular sectors among Taiwanese investors are electronics, information and communication technology, petrochemicals, rubber goods, chemicals, computer software, metallurgical engineering, shipping, footwear manufacturing, automotive and motorcycle components, finance, and construction.

Several Taiwanese companies, such as MediaTek, Wistron, and Foxconn, have had a well-established presence in India. Additionally, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (TSMC) and United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC) have expressed interest in the Indian market. Apache and Feng Tay Enterprises are the two leading footwear contract manufacturers from Taiwan which operate in India.

Finally, it is worth stressing that there has been some potential in the overlapping of India's Act East Policy (known earlier as Look East Policy) and Tsai Ing-wen's flagship New Southbound Policy (NSP). In economic cooperation, trade, and investment, both India and Taiwan want to enhance their positions in Southeast Asia and beyond thanks to deepening their economic ties and strengthening people-to-people exchanges. Moreover, they are interested in expanding into educational exchanges and tourism, thus bolstering their soft power in the region.

Conclusion

Even though India-Taiwan bilateral trade and investments have significantly developed in recent years, the full potential of India-Taiwan cooperation remains untapped due to several factors. First, it is challenging for Taiwanese investors to navigate the policy disparities between the central government and the state governments in India. Second, there are some cultural barriers in cooperation with partners from India, as opposed to a higher level of familiarity with the markets and cultures in the Southeast Asia.

In a political perspective, New Delhi is mindful of potential reactions and retaliatory actions from China, especially in light of the ongoing border dispute - if India decides to strengthen its relations with Taiwan, especially on a political and diplomatic ground. Therefore, even though the Indian government has the "Taiwan card" in hand to play against Beijing, it is not willing to use it because it may jeopardize India's already strained relations with China. Thus, from New Delhi's point of view, it is most desirable to attract Taiwanese investors without provoking Beijing. This poses a great challenge to the new Lai Ching-te's administration, which—in addition to economic ties—would welcome an increased political and diplomatic engagement with such an important partner like India.

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Book Review

From Epic to Ethics: Lessons from the Mahabharat on International Relations

Book: Strategic Choices, Ethical Dilemmas: Stories from the Mahabharata

By Aruna Narlikar, Amitabh Mattoo and Amrita Narlikar, Penguin Random House, Published: Nov/2023, ISBN: 9780143459750, pp 184, ₹399.00 (Paperback/Hardback)



Oorja Tapan

Introduction

Conventional wisdom in International Relations (IR) is dominated by Western (predominantly American) outlooks on realism, idealism, and identity-norm creations. It is only in the 21st century with the mammoth rise of Asian giants like China (earlier) and India (now) that more attention is being drawn to non-Western perspectives on security, war, and strategy. Enough has been written on and around "Art of War" (Sun Tzu) and "Mandala Theory" from Arthashastra (Kautilya). Lesser explored are other grand texts from the Indian civilization which are canonical and sempiternal in unravelling 'Bharatiya' (Indianness) and Bharatiya values of statecraft, law, diplomacy, and war. Most consequential in these Indian texts is the epic, Mahabharat, which also consists of the holy Bhagavad Gita.

Strategic Choices, Ethical Dilemmas: Stories from the Mahabharata delves deep into the timeless epic of the Mahabharat, offering readers a nuanced exploration of its rich narratives and profound moral dilemmas to comprehend modern economic and foreign policy challenges. Authors Aruna Narlikar, Amitabh Mattoo, and Amrita Narlikar weave together an enchanting volume bringing Hamletian dilemmas, Machiavellian schemes, and Manichean choices from the ancient grand Indian epic to plead today's questions of the Realpolitik unflinchingly. Through vivid retellings of key episodes from the Mahabharat, the authors implore the readers to deliberate upon the ethical implications of the characters' actions and decisions, probing the boundaries of right and wrong, duty and desire, honor and expediency. The Sanskrit 'shlokas' handpicked by the authors are the 'icing on the cake' adding credibility and authenticity to the text.

Each of the eleven chapters (apart from the introductory ones) encompasses a section of an episode from the Mahabharat followed by lessons for everyday life along with foreign policy and governance overall. The most nuanced one for IR students was the chapter on the Bhagavad Gita presenting the Hamletian dilemma in the form of "to war or not to war" with the authors coming up with a gallant exposition of Indian foreign policy stances in the form of "non-alignment", "strategic autonomy", "multi-alignment" etc. However aside from this obvious choice, special mention must be given to the authors for the succeeding chapter on fake news and disinformation which offers remarkable insights on the role of "narratives", "perception-battles", the role of BigTech, and data privacy plus regulations for policymakers, media, and political leaders drawing on the characters of Dronacharya, Yudhishtir, and Ashwatthama. This chapter sets the stage for a 'post-truth society' wherein today's conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia are also warring misinformation with a 'clash of narratives' being played in social media -making it difficult for third-party nations to choose sides.

Other episodes cherry-picked by the authors from the Mahabharat also deserve commendation, for instance, Ganesh being the choice for penning down the epic alludes to the skill of negotiation and alliance-building in international politics and the unanticipated friendship between Duryodhan and Karn being indicative of grey shades in the Dharm-abiding Pandavas offers valuable advice to the Western nations to introspect their (mis)treatment of the Global South. The most novel choice from the list of Mahabharat episodes was the story of the Noble Parrot and the Tree which is less heard even in Indian oral traditions pointing out the need for compassion in today's models of ecologism and the need to go beyond Anthropocentric visions of world order. The last chapter on Animal rights and Personhood kind of doubles down on this message leading to a harping tone of adopting an ecologist foreign policy along with personal lessons which gives a rather lukewarm ending to the fantastically futuristic and metaphysical tale of the Yudhishtir and the dog. Nevertheless, the entire book dabbles between proposing solutions to real-life practical challenges along with statecraft and geopolitics with utter ease and palpability. For many Indian readers, the stories have been part of our childhood traditions and

learnings and might not be a completely new subject matter- yet the interpretations by authors bring resolute lessons for us in our daily lives when we face moral dilemmas of virtue, law, and duty. For foreign policy enthusiasts, academics, and diplomats, the book offers a fresh Indian perspective on international politics and global governance.

The conclusions drawn in each chapter never seem far-fetched and divorced from reality. The stories might come from the Dvapara Yug but are eternal in their appeal and wisdom even in Kaliyuga. The authors make the text engaging, accessible, and lucid in deriving complex philosophical and narrative nuances for readers from all backgrounds. The text is an aim at decolonizing IR scholarship from the conventional realist, liberal, and constructivist theories dominated by Western scholars at a larger academic level. Such studies need to come up in more numbers to reclaim and reframe Indian IR discourses.

There are innumerable writings and spiritual Gurus out there in recent times sketching linkages between life management and Vedantic texts. However, there is barely any spin-off in international politics from such literature and epics. By blending scholarship and storytelling, this book is an introductory chef-d'oeuvre in the new-age Indic knowledge systems' derivatives for foreign policy discourses at both local and global levels in academia. This trailblazing text leaves an indelible imprint on the minds of readers urging them to venture out into ancient Indian spiritual-philosophical texts to further carve out more retellings and inferences for global politico-economic quandaries. Several episodes remain from both the Mahabharat as well as the Ramayana for the same!

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Gallery





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