

# INDIA'S GRAND STRATEGY

A Framework for the Future  
that Builds on Bharat's Ancient  
Statecraft of Peace, Prosperity,  
and Planet

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# Abstract

## **ASPIRING TO BECOME A**

US\$30-trillion economy by 2047, surrounded by hostile nations, and leading the idea of multipolarity in a bipolar world, India needs to articulate a grand strategy that has been missing in its statecraft. With the necessary conditions for such an endeavour in place, it is time for Bharat, under Narendra Modi's third term as prime minister, to thread the three core aspects of executing such a grand strategy: articulating the highest national goals (ends); procuring instruments to pursue those goals (ways); and acquiring the resources to achieve those goals (means). This monograph recommends that for a sharper focus, the Cabinet Committee on Security must be reformulated as the Cabinet Committee on Grand Strategy, and the research community should actively intersect with and expand this field.

# Introduction

## **THE MAKING OF A NATION'S**

grand strategy is the process of identifying, pursuing, and delivering the country's highest national goals. The absence of a clearly articulated, all-encompassing, whole-of-state grand strategy in India's statecraft is a vacuum that is out of sync with the trajectory of a rising nation. Today, Bharat is less than two years away from the deadline it has set itself for becoming the world's third-largest economy by 2025;<sup>1</sup> it has become the world's fastest growing economy over the past few years,<sup>2</sup> is a partner in promoting security in the Indian Ocean Region,<sup>3</sup> and has eradicated extreme poverty.<sup>4</sup> It is time for India to put together the pieces of the complex puzzle that is a grand strategy and mould a cohesive, focused approach to national, defence, and economic security—all functioning together, each powering the other.

As the "highest form of statecraft,"<sup>5</sup> grand strategy is a governance design that covers all aspects of securing a nation. These include managing external and internal threats, delivering economic prosperity, ensuring resource management, engaging in effective foreign policy, and embedding technology in governance, all of which need to function together. India has achieved all six necessary conditions to craft a grand strategy—the economic resources to finance aspirations, the defence infrastructure

to deliver security, the political intent to pursue self-interest, the geopolitical maturity to engage with and strengthen global multipolarity, the policy confidence to tie up complex international relationships in trade and investments, and the administrative competence to deliver all these aspects.

In the 75 years since independence, India has attempted to grasp the idea of a grand strategy, most of which have been around resisting international alignments and embracing an independent national policy. "In the sphere of foreign affairs, India will follow an independent policy," Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, said in a September 1946 speech.<sup>6</sup> According to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, India's second president, the roots of this independence are India's cultural affinity to embrace diversity—not an "either-or" but "this and that".<sup>7</sup> The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of 1954<sup>8</sup> was one such expression. Seven decades later, despite a long, rough road that often went off-track, NAM has morphed into "strategic autonomy" that is pragmatically in tune with India's stronger relationships with both the United States (US)<sup>9</sup> and Russia.<sup>10</sup>

When viewed through the lens of grand strategy, the difference is that if India wanted to be free of the burden of strategic alignments, it should have built itself as a strong nation. Thus, even though Nehru's NAM attempted to remain equidistant from the US and the erstwhile Soviet Union, India did not strengthen itself in the manner or the scale needed to power such aspirations—economically, militarily, or strategically. On the contrary, after the liberation of Bangladesh, where the US attempted to support Pakistan, India was forced to shift strategic attention and lean on the Soviet Union as a strategic and military counterweight. It has taken decades to rebuild the India-US relationship while maintaining an India-Russia relationship—a 'this and that'.

From this history comes Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strategic autonomy, under which India has experienced a substantial rise. What Nehru did was foreign policy; what Modi is carving out could be grand strategy. As Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar once said, NAM was "a term of a particular era and a particular...geopolitical landscape."<sup>11</sup> The philosophical foundations of NAM and strategic autonomy pivot around alignments being out of tune with internationalism and the concept of 'one world'. In NAM, Nehru attempted to steer away from the Cold War bipolarity between the US and the erstwhile Soviet Union; under strategic autonomy, Modi is getting closer to the US and the Russian Federation simultaneously while keeping China at bay.

This comes even as the grand strategies of the US, Russia, and China, all of whom are members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, have resulted in precisely what the UN had attempted to avoid—i.e., wars. Although the UN was created at

the end of the Second World War to oversee global peace and security,<sup>12</sup> wars and conflicts continue in different parts of the world, including China's invasion, occupation, and annexation of Tibet (1951 to 1959) within a decade of the UN's emergence,<sup>13</sup> the US wars in Iraq (2003 to 2011)<sup>14</sup> and Afghanistan (1999 to 2021),<sup>15</sup> and the recent Russia-Ukraine<sup>16</sup> and Israel-Palestine wars.<sup>17</sup>

India under Modi already appears to be putting together various pieces of a grand strategy—on the foreign policy front, sending free vaccines to 101 countries during the COVID-19 pandemic;<sup>18</sup> on harmonising self-interest with multipolarity, the ability to simultaneously engage with the West, China, and Russia on its own terms;<sup>19</sup> on the narratives front, the pushback against and calling out Canada on Khalistani terrorism,<sup>20</sup> and Europe on continuing to purchase Russian oil;<sup>21</sup> on defence, the zero-tolerance of Pakistan using terror as state policy;<sup>22</sup> on disputes, standing up to China on territorial transgressions<sup>23</sup> and technological intrusions;<sup>24</sup> on the commerce front, high and sustained economic growth that has resulted in free trade agreement negotiations with multiple countries;<sup>25</sup> and on the resources front, the thrust towards clean energy<sup>26</sup> and procuring critical minerals.<sup>27</sup>

While it may be tempting to conclude that India has crafted a grand strategy under Modi, it would be short-sighted given that the idea is a work in progress and an executive, political, and intellectual consensus around it is yet to be articulated. Indeed, there is no dearth of political imagination, executive will, and policy changes showcased over the past decade. However, these events-driven, anecdotal, reactive, and tactical manoeuvres could mislead. These are merely the necessary conditions that add up to a grand strategy; they are the green shoots of India's grand strategy.

The three core aspects of grand strategy—ends, ways, and means—are missing from the public discourse and possibly on the executive side. India must now clearly articulate its highest national goals (ends). It must think about or procure instruments (ways) to pursue those goals. It should also create or acquire the resources (means) to achieve the goals. The three need to work together as the *raga*,<sup>28</sup> notes, or a melodic structure of musical notes having specific character, and governed by certain rules;<sup>29</sup> the *tala*,<sup>30</sup> beats, or the passage of musical time;<sup>31</sup> and the composition<sup>32</sup> of a classical grand strategy performance that harmonises the melodies, the percussions and the delivery.

The ends, the ways, and the means of grand strategy need to coalesce integrally, each part in tune with all the others, each powering the others. Not in silos, and no mavericks: grand strategy is teamwork at the highest level of government, with the private sector and civil society adding their weight. The lack of a grand strategy

is equally a hole in the intellectual discourse around the field. And in a world that has become more challenging due to geopolitics and more disruptive because of technology, this hole will widen at a pace never experienced before.

It is within these fault lines that India, which is slowly taking responsibility for global growth,<sup>33</sup> expanding the span of regional security in the Indian Ocean Region,<sup>34</sup> and bridging a conflicted geopolitical binary by working with the West and Russia together,<sup>35</sup> must enter grand strategy conversations and engage with its multi-layered complexities and deeper dimensions. This monograph seeks to ignite these conversations among leaders, policymakers, strategists, economists, scientists and corporate leaders. It also aims to encourage citizens to participate in these debates.



*India must now clearly articulate its highest national goals, think about or procure the instruments to pursue those goals, and create or acquire the resources to achieve them.*



# Definition

## **BEING A SUBSET AND**

core driver of statecraft, the field of grand strategy is narrow but complex. Grand strategy differs from foreign affairs but influences it strongly. It works with a national security strategy that looks outside but stands firm internally. It influences military strategy to prepare for wars but is being increasingly driven by amity, even if war is the path to peace. It is an approach to statecraft that manages risks and rewards together. It simultaneously attempts to neutralise dangers, power opportunities, and deliver growth.

Grand strategy as a field has evolved from one driven by wars to one that strengthens peace, from narrow military manoeuvres to broader civilian goals. In India's case, it also needs to focus on poverty reduction within while engaging with the warring neighbourhood outside. Although an integral approach, informed by the state of the nation (war or peace) and the psychology of aspirations (world dominance or national strengthening), grand strategy has no standard definition. From the start, therefore, grand strategy is a difficult conversation and an arduous national project.

Grand strategy is typically specific to nations. A rising but economically weak country like India, surrounded by two

aggressive nations, will have a different approach to grand strategy than a prosperous country like the US, which is protected geographically by oceans and financially by its reserve currency. It would be at cross-purposes from an authoritarian China shielded by a concentration of power in one hand,<sup>36</sup> with the Belt and Road Initiative fast becoming the “apotheosis of the CCP’s (Chinese Communist Party) grand strategy.”<sup>37</sup> Further, the grand strategy of democracies will differ from those of dictatorships—the latter are concluded at birth, the former debated till death. If Israel were to design a grand strategy, it would be dominated by and constructed in a model of a warzone; it would have to imagine civilians as instruments of war, and deal with non-state or para-state militaries. On the other hand, if Switzerland were to craft its grand strategy, it would do so for super-prosperity, stable peace, and internal order.

Yet, a grand strategy is wide enough to accommodate continents. Common externalities such as technology or non-state actors and their weaponisation by states mean that the field of grand strategy shifts course from being restricted to wartime defence and managing conflicts to an uncertain and unreliable peace. The coming together of radical Islamist transborder entities to fight a religious war without any borders in sight and the fusing of the civilian into the military<sup>38</sup> is a dimension that seems to be consolidating. For instance, collectively, the Islamic State is larger than several countries<sup>39</sup>—in 2014, it held 100,000 square km of territory (larger than Portugal)<sup>40</sup> and had a population of nearly 12 million people (more than Belgium).<sup>41</sup>

As a result, despite active engagements with these layers of grand strategy, the field needs to confront an existential issue—its definition. Is grand strategy merely the use and twisting of language by scholars to express their points of view? Is it an approach that brings several ideas together, with definitions a part of a pick-and-choose? Converging on a globally synced definition of ‘grand strategy’ remains an unfinished intellectual exercise, almost a mission impossible.

As India embarks on crafting its grand strategy, it should not lean only on the current models of intellectual discourse. India will need to excavate its ancient civilisation’s intellectual knowledge and approach and transplant it on a modern nation. This will heal the present by bridging the ancient-modern divide, and provide a unique equilibrium between the past and the future, the State and the people, the country and the world, and humanity and the planet.

Although Ved Vyasa’s *Mahabharata* does not use the phrase ‘grand strategy’, all the above resonate with, and are harmonious entities of, the idea. As with all lasting ideas of India, the grand strategy in the *Mahabharata* can be captured in one word—dharma. In a 1942 lecture, V.S. Sukthankar, the general editor of the *Critical Edition of the Mahabharata*, encapsulated the idea through the words of fallen warrior Bhishma to

Yudhishtira: "Dharma, says Bhishma, was ordained for the advancement and growth of all creatures; therefore that which leads to advancement and growth is Dharma. Dharma was ordained for restricting creatures from injuring one another; therefore that which prevents injury to creatures is Dharma. Dharma is so called because it upholds all creatures; therefore that is Dharma which is capable of upholding all creatures."<sup>42</sup>

The entire text revolves around dharma and its various nuances. Warfare and governance are clearly defined in the *Raja Dharma Parva*<sup>43</sup>—duties of a king, war, peace, and order. Outside this Parva lie several stories that show how Sri Krishna's grand strategy, using the means of war and diplomacy to deliver dharma, its highest-priority goal, functioned in the time. It involved killing Jarasandha<sup>44</sup> and Shishupala,<sup>45</sup> undertaking the Rajasuya sacrifice,<sup>46</sup> and crowning Yudhishtira as emperor in the service of dharma.<sup>47</sup> The grand strategy of ancient India was to establish dharma.

Dharma applies to individuals, governments, societies, and life alike. In the case of grand strategy, dharma would mean citizens' economic and spiritual growth. It would mean the prevention of the strong ruling over the weak, within through regulation and outside through global rules of law. It would imply an era of peace. It would defend the existence of not merely humans but animals and plants, water and air. India's grand strategy in the context of dharma would, therefore, mean a balanced pursuit of peace, prosperity, and the planet. Within this broad paradigm will come warfare, alliances, diplomacy, and espionage, all underlined by long-term interests. Travelling 5,000 years from the Mahabharata, modern India's vision of achieving a US\$30-trillion GDP and a US\$20,000 per capita income will go hand-in-hand with greening the planet to make growth as sustainable and inclusive as possible within and outside India.

Stray decades aside, dharma has been the fundamental—though invisible—guiding force of India's grand strategy. "That which makes the World-process what it is, and holds all its parts together as One Whole, in a breakless all-binding chain of causes-and-effects, is the Law (or totality of laws) of Nature or Nature's God, dharma in the largest sense," wrote philosopher and freedom fighter Bhagavan Das in 1932,<sup>48</sup> stressing that all ideas and actions of nations bow before the higher moral authority called dharma. "The glories of science and art and military trappings and bravery and all the splendours of the finest civilisation are mere dust, nay, more, they are so much explosive powder, so much the stronger agents for destruction, if the civilisation is not based on Dharma."<sup>49</sup>

This is in sharp contrast to the dominant Western-led discourse on grand strategy, where the outer surfaces of verbal sophistication get limited by national pettiness within. For contemporary scholars, the definitions get muddled by interests and hair-splitting. "A grand strategy tells a nation's leaders what goals they should aim for and how best they can use their country's military power to attain these goals," argues

Robert J. Art (2003) while defining the term for the US.<sup>50</sup> He identifies the goals as the US's interests in the world and how to protect them from threats, the US's national interests, and the specific political policies and military capabilities needed to support the grand strategy.

"Grand strategy lies at the nexus of politics and military strategy and thus contains important elements of both," writes Williamson Murray (2011). It exists in a world of "constant flux, one in which uncertainty and ambiguity dominate."<sup>51</sup> Tami Davis Biddle (2015) defines it as one that "identifies and articulates a given political actor's security objectives at a particular point in time and describes how they will be achieved using a combination of instruments of power—including military, diplomatic, and economic instruments."<sup>52</sup> According to John Lewis Gaddis (1987), grand strategy leads to statecraft: "To my mind, it [grand strategy] is simply the application of 'strategy' as here defined, by states acting within the international state system, to secure their interests: it is what leads, if all goes well, to 'statecraft'."<sup>53</sup>

When examined within the context of war, there are differences as well as commonalities between ancient civilisations and modern interests. For ancient civilisations, such as India and China, gaining victory over an enemy by war is at the lowest rung.

In the *Mahabharata*, Ved Vyasa had expressed this idea five millenniums ago; the great war in the text is estimated to have happened in 3137 BCE.<sup>54</sup> "The lord of the earth should prosper through victories without battle," Bhishma tells Yudhishtira on the Kurukshetra battleground.<sup>55</sup> "It is said that victory through a war is the worst."

Following through around 300 BCE, India's Kautilya devised a four-part formula and expounded it in *Arthashastra* (his treatise on statecraft)<sup>56</sup>—*sama*, *dana*, *bheda*, and *danda*, or "adopting a conciliatory attitude, placating with rewards and gifts, sowing dissension among enemies, and using force."<sup>57</sup> Regarding war, Kautilya is strategically pragmatic while weighing in against war. "When the degree of progress is the same in pursuing peace and waging war, peace is to be preferred. For, in war, there are many disadvantages, such as loss of troops, expenditure and absence from home."<sup>58</sup>

In his *Art of War*, China's Sun Tzu reached similar conclusions in 5 BCE. His thrust is on strategic tactics: "Therefore the skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them; he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field."<sup>59</sup>

Modern scholars are veering towards and echoing these ideas as well. B.H. Liddell Hart (1967) not only looks at war as a route to peace while differentiating strategy from grand strategy, he also argues for securing that peace and making it last. "While the

horizon of strategy is bounded by the war, grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace. It [grand strategy] should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace—for its security and prosperity.”<sup>60</sup> Edward Mead Earle (1942) raises the mast of peace as a tool of grand strategy even higher: “The highest type of strategy—sometimes called grand strategy—is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory.”<sup>61</sup>

A unity of purpose and a whole-of-state approach are other aspects of grand strategy. “The crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation’s leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation’s long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests,” writes Paul Kennedy (1992).<sup>62</sup> “...it is a difficult art that, since it operates at various levels, political, strategic, operational, tactical, all interacting with each other to advance (or retard) the primary aim.”

At the same time, the concept has drawn much criticism. For instance, Christopher Bassford (2007) sees grand strategy as a mere expression in the larger domain of definitions. “Tactics, operations, military strategy, grand strategy, and policy are all essentially the same thing—processes of interrelating means and ends—at different scales of time, space, and numbers of people and resources involved,” he writes.<sup>63</sup> Nina Silove (2018) argues that while there is no single definition of grand strategy, there are three concepts—grand plans, grand principles, and grand behaviour.<sup>64</sup> Hal Brands (2014) retains the need for knowledge but is circumspect about its execution; “At best, grand strategy can provide an intellectual reference point for dealing with those challenges, and a process by which dedicated policy makers can seek to bring their day-to-day actions into better alignment with their country’s enduring interests... Achieving this would be good enough; expecting more would probably be unrealistic.”<sup>65</sup>

Ordinarily understood, grand strategy applies to securing nations. India’s grand strategy, however, is a unique approach that, while powering national interest, should also apply the principles to the well-being of the planet. As such, this monograph defines the concept thus:

“Grand strategy is the execution of national power by using extant and emerging instruments of statecraft to shape and impact internal and external environments that deliver highest-priority national goals, while creating an international framework for global engagement that enables peace, prosperity and self-expression for every citizen of planet earth.”

# Articulation

## **BEYOND DEFINITIONS, IT IS**

clear that India needs to articulate and develop its grand strategy. The scale, the velocity and the time have come together as a common trigger. India has the scale to envision its large national goals as it sits atop a US\$4-trillion GDP, going on to US\$10 trillion by 2032 and US\$30 trillion by 2047. It has the velocity and the momentum as the world's fastest growing large economy to procure the instruments to get there. And it stands at the right time to acquire the resources to achieve those goals, in the middle of serial conflicts and great-power games as the world looks for a mature, stable and secure nation to anchor itself to. By engaging with the US, the EU and the Russian Federation simultaneously, India is redefining multipolarity in a thus-far bipolar world. The velocity of growth will increase its scale. The rise of scale will add force to diversity of global expressions despite differences in issue-based stances.

India's national goals must include, but not be restricted to, national security and economic prosperity. Next, these goals must engage all tools of statecraft, such as sharper exploitation of resources within and stronger geopolitical relationships outside. Finally, it must drive the ethos of India as a geography of harmony in a world of strife using the hard power of defence and economy combined

with the soft power of diplomacy, generosity and influence. While effecting such a grand strategy, India must be ruthless against foreign aggression, relentless against violence within, and alert to intrusions from technological equipment, platforms, and algorithms. At the same time, it must not give up its ancient ethos of oneness and the modern essence of democratic discourse that includes protests and free speech.

The intellectual foundation of India's journey to developing a grand strategy must be powered by knowledge intrinsic to Bharat through priorities coded in the wisdom of the country's ancient statecraft. This knowledge must feed into the expanding universe of information that defines the modern world. Finally, it must turn into actions that serve India's interests in the present and secure its future while carrying the world along. Having articulated a cohesive and comprehensive grand strategy, a complex and noisy democracy like India must communicate it within to build a national consensus. It must then step outside to shape a wider global concord that looks beyond the narrow and shallow ideas such as a 'new world order'.

The idea of a world order is primitive and dissonant with a more equal 21st century. That nations need to be 'ordered' is an articulation of medieval moorings leading to modern perversion of power. A world order is a paradigm whose time has gone but in whose momentum the US, China, and Russia remain trapped. The hegemonic expression of power is yesterday's conversation; equality is the future's signature. As such, international relations need to be reimagined. India's ancient dictum of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the world is one family) can become the alternative narrative, infused into the intellectual framework and executable action of its grand strategy.

The moral framework of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* is already underway. Widening the G20 to include the African Union<sup>66</sup> expands the footprint of global discussions and gives voice to the world's second-largest, 54-country, and a 1.2 billion-people continent. Distributing free COVID-19 vaccines to 101 countries<sup>67</sup> amid global hoarding delivers protection to poorer nations. A US\$4-billion assistance to Sri Lanka<sup>68</sup> ensures financial stability in the neighbourhood and affords protection to 22 million people. India has been pushing and must continue to power this idea into global conversations across multilateral engagements and bilateral talks. As part of its moral stance, this elegance of equality must replace the vulgarism of world orders in India's grand strategy.

This has been explicitly and clearly stated but lies aloof from India's statecraft. In a 15 August 1947 message, the day India attained independence, nationalist freedom fighter and philosopher-sage Sri Aurobindo put some of these ideas into an integral, cohesive, and choate ideal that merged statecraft into moral craft. To him, India's

freedom and rise were not to dominate the world. India was an instrument not merely for the “expansion, greatness, power and prosperity” of its people; the greatness of India was to “live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race.”<sup>69</sup>

Such a vision must also inform India's emerging grand strategy, particularly in a world of divisions. Unifying the world through Indian spiritual traditions that see every human bound to the other as a fragment of God and journeying together to find that divinity will be the moral dimension of India's grand strategy. This may seem out of sync with a present that sees conflict and control as instruments of world domination and statecraft shorn of spirituality. But it is precisely this moral-philosophical-spiritual alternative that India needs to offer the world. *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* is one of several such expressions of oneness, creating unity without uniformity and embracing disagreements without being disagreeable.

India's grand strategy, therefore, must begin from its cultural moorings, philosophical values, and spiritual depths. In a world dogged by me-first (the US) or me-only (China) paradigms, Indian interests must certainly remain the key focus of India's statecraft, but its national goals must simultaneously drive international persuasions. Its national means must diminish global differences. A 'Bharat Consensus' must push towards a new and more harmonious planet, ensuring respect for the uniqueness of nations expressing themselves through their distinct cultures. India must look beyond boundaries to dissolve outer differences of races, religions, and riches, and replace them with inner harmonies of bodies, minds, and souls. This must be the underlying context and driving force of India's grand strategy.



# Execution

## **UPON THIS PHILOSOPHICAL BASE**

stand a quadrant of contexts that complete India's grand strategy circle.

The first quadrant is time. India's grand strategy needs to be crafted around three timelines. One, around the 'Amrit Kaal' (the next quarter century till the year 2047, when India celebrates 100 years of independence), serves a visible and accelerating young generation. Two, across the next half century, when its alignment as a developed country is complete and India becomes one of the global pillars responsible for creating a secure and sustainable planet by 2100, a home to international investments, workers, explorers, and tourists. Three, a physical and philosophical human unity, spread over the next millennium, by the year 3000.

The second quadrant is security. India's grand strategy must be fashioned around the principle of security, both internal and external. Internally, the causal sparks igniting fires of violent discord must be, and are being, countered by development. This must be powered by a force that unifies politically- and ideologically-driven societal rifts around religions, castes, geographies, and occupations. The politics of division must transform into a force of fusion. These must be underlined by the power of made-in-India

technologies. External challenges, notably around the Pakistan and China borders, have been met by strong actions from the Indian state, combined with the implosion of the former and the isolation of the latter. And yet, India must stay alert to these. Beyond this destructive duo, often acting in tandem, India must secure its place in the Indian Ocean Region and become a key player in the Indo-Pacific. All through, hard power must be underlined by solid values.

The third quadrant is economic. India's grand strategy must pivot around reaching a per capita income of US\$20,000 in absolute terms by 2047, increasing and leveraging that income for welfare by 2100, and directing the resultant inclusive financial force into unifying Earth while expanding humanity's footprint beyond it by 3000. Economic reforms will drive the first quarter century, economic consolidation the next half century, and economic vision the millenniums beyond. The economy must be an enabler of individual aspirations, a lever that powers self-expression, and a catalyst for creativity. It must also bind communities along a single aspiration of dynamism and prosperity. With extreme poverty eliminated,<sup>70</sup> India must now focus on raising the international poverty line from US\$1.90 per day to US\$2.15, and then beyond US\$5.00. All this must happen while it prioritises addressing its energy dependence.

The fourth and final quadrant is inter-country inequalities. India is on the path to achieving a US\$10-trillion economy in the 2030s, growing to between US\$30 trillion and US\$50 trillion in the 2050s.<sup>71</sup> India reaching such a position of strength should not be seen as—and, importantly, will not be—a threat to any other nation. Unlike other superpowers over the course of human history, India harbours no hegemonic dominance; this is not part of its civilisational or philosophical DNA. Next, India must persuade and lead the world towards a new form of global unity that captures the essence of unifying ideas such as peace and prosperity while enabling individuals, communities, and nations to retain their unique ways of expressing themselves. Finally, India must lead the way to show how the souls of individuals can become the souls of nations, which in turn converge into the soul of the planet. In other words, it must challenge the idea of a 'world order' that ranks nations and usher in a flat, inclusive, and equal structure of international relations, regulated by administrative synchronicity, either through the reform of the UN or through the creation of a new organisation that is more in tune with the times.

India could have driven home the idea of global peace 75 years ago. Indeed, India attempted to engage in world peace on 14 August 1947—a day before independence—in the fifth session of the Constituent Assembly of India through a resolution. "At this solemn moment when the people of India through suffering and sacrifice, have secured freedom and become masters of their own destiny, I," said Nehru, "a member of the Constituent Assembly of India, do dedicate myself in all humility to the service of

India and her people to the end that this ancient land attain her rightful and honoured place in the world and make her full and willing contribution to the promotion of world peace and the welfare of mankind."<sup>72</sup>

Fine words. Laudable ideas. Huge aspirations. However, the path to executing such aspirations needs a crucial tool of negotiation—hard power. A poor, emaciated, colonised nation, experiencing its first flush of freedom, does not have that luxury. It must deal with other problems, such as consolidating that freedom, constructing states, and creating nationhood, rather than grand strategy. Not doing so has had its repercussions. Nehru's NAM was a creative but ineffective apology towards a grand strategy—it had the ingredients of activism, but the forces within, particularly economic, were systematically smothered.<sup>73</sup>

It took 44 years after independence for the anti-business, anti-wealth policies to bring India to the brink of default. Reeling under balance of payments constraints, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao changed the economic direction in July 1991 with the 'Statement on Industrial Policy 1991'.<sup>74</sup> Once the economic base was settled, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was able to negotiate an Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation deal in August 2008.<sup>75,76</sup> Once the economic and strategic bases were in place, Modi began the process of consolidating these disparate parts into a cohesive national narrative.

Seventy-seven years after independence, India has to transform these foundations and this narrative into a clear and complete grand strategy that stands on four pillars—security, economy, technology, and resources. These are the necessary conditions for any state attempting to craft a grand strategy. These conditions are within India's reach, but they are not enough. The will to execute this grand strategy, while taking the nation along, the sufficient condition for all democracies, including India, remains a work in progress. Unlike one-person drivers such as Xi Jinping in China, democracies carry institutional restraints. They need a broader consensus to effect change. Some, such as the US, can push the national interest through the creation and domination of 'deep state' actors. Overall, democracies need to balance the unpredictability of political power in the short term with the predictability of a grand strategy for the long haul.

As a result, wars and conflicts often become the triggers around which political narratives are formed. For India, the case of Pakistan since October 1947 is one such trigger. But because Pakistan only has a military strategy, perhaps even a religious *jihad* strategy,<sup>77</sup> but not a grand strategy, it is compelled to face serial Waterloos against India, losing battles and inviting global condemnation. It has lost all wars with India, one each in 1947–48, 1965, 1971, and 1999. Its terror factories that now have no way to export terrorists into India are devouring it from within. It has degenerated

into becoming a hub of global terrorism and related terror financing. Essentially, it is a nation imploding under its own contradictions and misguided sense of Islamist grandeur.

Today, Pakistan is an army appended to which is a nation of 230 million people. If it continues with its Kashmir obsession, as it is politically and militarily compelled to,<sup>78</sup> this flailing state will take no time to become a failed state. Already, the US is considering reducing its involvement in Pakistan due to "international terrorism and nuclear proliferation,"<sup>79</sup> changing its earlier position of the 1970s to support it.<sup>80</sup> As far as India goes, after the Balakot airstrike in 2019,<sup>81</sup> Pakistan has become an irrelevant page in India's and the entire Western worldview; it has become a client state of China<sup>82</sup> and an instrument to contain an India<sup>83</sup> that is now beyond its reach.

The case of China's border transgressions into India is different. China has a grand strategy, arguably one of the strongest in recent times and its tactics one of the sharpest—the attempted weaponising of 5G technology in 2019<sup>84</sup> or infiltrating US ports through cranes in 2024<sup>85</sup>—with smothering neighbours and contesting the US for world domination as its grand plan. In this plan, border clashes with India are tactical expressions. For the moment, as Samir Saran argues, China wants a multipolar world but a unipolar Asia.<sup>86</sup>

Over the next few decades, it aims to rule the world<sup>87</sup> by weaponising all ways and means it has at its disposal, including the economy,<sup>88</sup> telecommunications,<sup>89</sup> technology,<sup>90</sup> and critical materials.<sup>91</sup> It has even weaponised its citizens and effectively turned them into spies for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).<sup>92</sup> China's attacks on India, therefore, are supported by a perverse grand strategy that stands on hegemonic ambitions of what is known as the 'Middle Kingdom syndrome'<sup>93</sup> and imperial in its structure with world domination as its expression.<sup>94</sup> Several analysts are predicting the end of the Chinese miracle.<sup>95</sup> These are wishful thoughts. A GDP of US\$18.6 trillion cannot, does not, and will not implode in merely a few decades—if it does, it would be a world's first.

On its part, India's grand strategy will need to manage tensions with China and engage more deeply with the US and Russia. Simultaneously, it must persuade Europe, led by Germany and France, to stop sacrificing its long-term and long-lasting strategic interests for short-term commercial gains to China. As is evident in its actions, Europe finds that outsourcing its security interests to the US and being addicted to China for markets and manufacturing will continue until a Russia-Ukraine-like situation emerges with China and Europe. This strategic drift will continue while it implodes from within through its unabated and unregulated refugee influx. In an interlinked world, all these will impact India too.

Such events have impacted India in the past as well. India's security and economic actions in the first seven decades after independence were seen as reactive. Too colonised to stand on its own after a millennium of subjugation, too young to imagine its place in the world, and too vulnerable to the power play in the aftermath of the Second World War geopolitics and amid the Cold War, India's strategic actions had been spurred from the outside. Attacks from an expansionist China on the one side and the US-supported Pakistan on the other saw India sign defence ties with the erstwhile Soviet Union. As a result, it also took the ideological expression of the Soviet Union's grand strategy—the failed socialist model of economic development, which restricted India's entrepreneurs, smothered its economic freedom and kept the country poor.<sup>96</sup> India's non-alignment, therefore, remained only on paper; effectively, it had veered towards the Soviet Union.

From Nehru and his daughter, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to her son, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, India remained a reactive player. While Rao changed that economically and Singh strategically, Modi has taken the batons of strength and turned them into a proactive approach. Through the Balakot strike,<sup>97</sup> India took a decisive step towards an active defence strategy and called out Pakistan's nuclear bluff.<sup>98</sup> By repealing Article 370 in August 2019,<sup>99</sup> upheld by the Supreme Court in December 2023,<sup>100</sup> it also made clear its position on Kashmir. Such a "Whole of Nation Approach" has resulted in the "reduction of violence, stone pelting & agitations in the Kashmir Valley"<sup>101</sup> domestically, and ended all ambiguity around Kashmir internationally.

What makes India's neutralising active threats from Pakistan and China even more impactful is that in doing so, it has confronted and rectified the two greatest errors of US grand strategy—military assistance to Pakistan and economic support to China. The timing could not be better. While Pakistan is reeling under the burden of its own violence, the CCP under Xi has become hostage to a one-person rule. As the "chairman of everything,"<sup>102</sup> Xi has been pushing the boundaries of repression, both within<sup>103</sup> and outside.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, China has territorial disputes with 17 countries along its borders and in the East and South China seas.<sup>105</sup>

China is clear about its grand strategy—regional domination followed by world domination. As a result, a new rift has been created in international relations, with Pakistan and North Korea a part of China's grand strategy on the one side, Europe and the West part of the US grand strategy on the other, and Russia following its own military-dominated grand strategy and intersecting with China's tactically. The grand strategies of Russia (and the erstwhile Soviet Union) and the US had influenced global politics since the Second World War until the mid-1980s, after which China joined the game. Today, there are three points of grand strategy—the US, China, and Russia.

As a result, despite shifting from reactive to deliberate, India's grand strategy will be crafted in the crossfire of these three competing grand strategies in the next quarter century.<sup>106</sup> On the positive side, India will work with the grand strategies of the US and Russia. India has deepened its strategic and economic relationships around defence, multilateral cooperation, investments, and energy with both countries. On the negative side, it will be built around the grand strategy of China, where, despite border tensions, trade continues to rise—a strategic incongruity. All the while, India will need to keep its national interest in mind while exporting a model that neutralises aggressors and embraces friends to keep its economic and security directions unambiguous and uncompromised.



*India reaching a position of strength will not be seen as a threat to any other nation. Unlike other superpowers over the course of human history, India harbours no hegemonic dominance; this is not part of its DNA.*

# Conclusion

## **AS MODI 3.0 TAKES CHARGE<sup>107</sup>**

and powers the governance push of the past decade deeper, he must understand that before the next general elections in 2029, India would be a US\$7-trillion economy, heading towards US\$10 trillion. As a result, Modi must embed the whole-of-state approach of grand strategy into every reform within and every bilateral or multilateral treaty outside. Defence interests must power economic growth, the economy must leverage foreign affairs, partnerships must deepen towards mutual interests and India must be ready to take on the burden of regional, if not global, peace. This monograph has recorded the necessary conditions for such an approach. Putting them together into a cohesive grand strategy is also a work in progress. These must now be executed. And for legitimacy, India's grand strategy endeavours must reside in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Outside the PMO, every important ministry, from finance and information technology to defence and external affairs, must ensure that its framework of governance is aligned with India's grand strategy. Over the next 12 months of persistent efforts, India should be able to articulate its grand strategy. As an extension, the Cabinet Committee on Security must be renamed Cabinet Committee on Grand Strategy (CCGS)—security without a whole-of-state

approach towards national goals will regress into a silo, when the need of tomorrow is an integral approach. Like it or not, the 21st century has gone back in time to usher in an era that requires nations to think far more strategically than ever before. And yet, the either-or binaries placed by great powers before the rest are dissolving. India is in the right place at the right time to power this breakdown and create a new model—not a new world order but a new way of harmonising the world.


The specifics of India's grand strategy will follow through and flow from its imagining, articulation and execution. To illustrate, if securing the nation from external hostile forces while maintaining stable international relations is one national goal or "end"; engaging in bilateral and multilateral negotiations to resolve conflicts and build alliances follows through as a "way"; and a strong military and weapons system the "means". But on its own this will merely be a defence strategy. For it to transform into a grand strategy, India would need to deploy the economy, ensure the stable flow of capital. It would also need to secure energy flows while working with alternative energy resources, such as solar, to ensure energy security. Finally, it also means looking at the private sector as a strategic partner to develop arms, energy and technology that power the State. Thus, securing the nation involves not just military or finance but foreign policy and private sector as well, a project that needs scale, time and a political will that looks beyond political parties. The PMO-CCGS reorganisation needs to bring this approach to all of India's large national goals.

As a rising power, India will have to negotiate one more challenge: the trio of narratives, fake news, and plain disinformation, the sources of which are both internal and external. On the internal side, they are political and ideological. With the proliferation of electronic media, particularly social media, the rich and deep democracy of India will be able to take them in stride. But from the external side, the impact of this troika is harder. The low rankings of India's democracy from Western think tanks and universities are not merely laughable (India is listed under "Electoral Autocracies" by V-Dem),<sup>108</sup> their methodology leaves a lot to be desired (Denmark at the pole position has a King as its head of state; it should be labelled "Electoral Monarchy", not "Liberal Democracy"). Worse, these rankings impact India's credit ratings, an unfinished business for Modi.<sup>109</sup> Having incorrect, manipulative, colonial and adverse opinions is free speech; legitimising them through World Bank's 34 Worldwide Governance Indicators<sup>110</sup> and trickling down into credit ratings that increase the cost of money in India is institutional capture by such herd narratives. Going forward, India's grand strategy will have to engage and counter these, politically and intellectually.



Ideally, the various arms of such an endeavour—military, economy, energy and private initiatives—must progress simultaneously. In this quad of requirements, the first three are on course and with a little finetuning can be made more effective. It is the fourth part, private sector's participation in India's grand strategy, that needs working. Although the defence sector has been opened up to private investments, with 100 percent foreign direct investment, it will take time to set up, build, test and deliver to the military. Investments thus stand at a mere US\$600 million.<sup>111</sup> The transition from dependence on Russian or US arms to Made in India defence products could take longer. But once in place, it would put India in a much stronger footing. Likewise for other grand strategy goals.

Howsoever large and ambitious these goals seem and whatever the hurdles to bring together the accompanying means and ways to accomplish them, they seem easier when compared to internal hurdles. One of the biggest challenges would be to bring a national consensus around India's grand strategy. Here, Modi needs to engage with the political Opposition and persuade it to converge around India's national goals. Political fissures are a signature of democracies in action. India is no different. But bringing a grand strategy consensus that is party-neutral can also construct national unity around large national goals. This consensus needs to go beyond politics and enter policy spaces of defence, foreign policy, internal security, technology and the economy. Further, it should attempt to embrace citizens directly. These are the ideal conditions. But if consensus is difficult, Modi must work his executive arm and still author a grand strategy. This would be his greatest legacy and fill the vacuum in India's statecraft.

Beyond the government, the ideas community must press harder. In India, grand strategy as a field is conspicuous by its absence. This void must end through new concepts, papers, books and related serious literature. It must become an optional course at universities, and further powered by PhD theses. Equally, the think tank fraternity must build intellectual foundations for governmental action, and effective frameworks for action. In an age of hyper-specialisation, this may not be easy; but it must be done. The defence staff colleges that house soldier-scholars could make a beginning and set the ball rolling. The all-encompassing approach of the State must trickle down to scholars, while scholars in turn must offer integral strategic design elements to the State. In a country as diverse as Bharat and as politically divided as India, this state-scholar nexus will become the final but essential component for building India's grand strategy. 

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