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**INDIA'S OPPORTUNITY IN A  
SHIFTING WORLD ORDER**

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## INDIA'S OPPORTUNITY IN A SHIFTING WORLD ORDER

### Context

- The **contemporary global order** is marked by **multiple simultaneous crises** where both adversaries and partners are distracted, creating a **temporary strategic pause (interregnum)** for India.
- They offer **India a rare opportunity** to consolidate internal strength rather than react to external provocations.

### Understanding Multipolarity

- Multipolarity refers to an international system where **multiple centres of power** (e.g., USA, China, EU, India, Russia) coexist and influence global governance, **unlike unipolar (US-dominated) or bipolar (Cold War) systems**.
- India strongly supports multipolarity as it enhances **strategic autonomy**, prevents dominance by any single power, and creates space for **middle powers like India** to shape global outcomes.

### Causes of the Shift to Multipolarity From Unipolar World

- **Relative Decline of the United States:** Economic challenges and internal polarization; strategic overreach (Iraq, Afghanistan); and reduced willingness to act as global 'policeman'.
- **Rise of China:** Second-largest economy; assertive foreign policy (Belt and Road Initiative, South China Sea); and military modernization.
- **Resurgence of Russia:** Strategic assertiveness (Ukraine conflict), and energy diplomacy and military capability.
- **Emergence of Middle Powers:** India, Brazil, Turkey, Indonesia gaining influence; and formation of new platforms like **BRICS, SCO**.
- **Fragmentation of Globalisation:** Trade wars, supply chain shifts, and rise of **economic nationalism and protectionism**.

### India's Vision of Multipolarity

- **'Multipolar World, Multilateral World':** A multipolar world must be supported by **reformed multilateral institutions** (UNSC, IMF, World Bank).
  - ♦ India advocates **inclusive global governance**.
- **Strategic Autonomy (Non-alignment 2.0):** India avoids rigid alliances, and maintains relations with competing powers:
  - ♦ USA (strategic partnership)
  - ♦ Russia (defence ties)
  - ♦ China (competition & cooperation)
  - ♦ Global South (leadership role)

### Key Pillars of India's Multipolar Strategy

- **Issue-Based Alignment:** India partners with different countries depending on the issue:
  - ♦ QUAD for Indo-Pacific security
  - ♦ BRICS for Global South cooperation
  - ♦ SCO for Eurasian engagement
- **Balancing Major Powers:** Engages US for technology and defence; retains Russia ties for energy and military supplies; and manages competition with China while avoiding escalation.

- **Global South Leadership:** India positions itself as a **voice of developing nations**. For eg, G20 Presidency in 2023; and advocacy for debt relief, climate justice.
- **Opportunities for India in a Multipolar World:**
  - ♦ **Enhanced Strategic Space:** Flexibility to pursue independent foreign policy; and ability to negotiate better deals (trade, defence, energy).
  - ♦ **Economic Gains:** Diversification of supply chains away from China; and attraction of global investments (China+1 strategy).
  - ♦ **Norm-Shaping Role:** Influence in shaping global rules on climate change, digital governance, and maritime security.

### Key Strategic Vulnerabilities for India

- **Military Modernisation Gaps:** Delays in procurement and indigenisation; dependence on imports for critical defence equipment; and need for advanced technologies (AI, cyber, drones, space warfare).
  - ♦ China's assertiveness (LAC, Indo-Pacific) challenges true multipolarity, and risk of **asymmetric multipolarity** dominated by China.
- **Weak Multilateral Institutions:** UNSC reforms stalled, and global governance still skewed toward Western powers.
- **Balancing Contradictions:** Managing US-Russia tensions, and handling China while participating in BRICS and SCO.
- **Energy Dependency:** Heavy reliance on imported oil and gas (~80% crude import); vulnerability to global conflicts (e.g., West Asia crises); and slow transition to renewables and alternative fuels.
- **Critical Minerals Dependence:** Import dependence for lithium, cobalt, rare earths; essential for EVs, semiconductors, and defence manufacturing; and limited domestic mining and processing capacity.
- **Weakness in Mining Sector:** Regulatory bottlenecks and policy uncertainty; underutilisation of mineral-rich regions; and dominance of PSUs limiting private sector efficiency.
- **Fertiliser Dependence:** High import reliance (especially for potash and phosphates), linked with energy security (gas-based fertiliser production), and impacts agricultural stability and food security.
- **Space & Intelligence Gaps:** Limited satellite coverage and failures in recent missions, weak integration of space-based intelligence with defence, and need for strengthening NavIC and ISR capabilities.
- **Supply Chain Vulnerabilities:** Dependence on China-centric global supply chains, and exposure to disruptions in pharmaceuticals, electronics, and APIs.
- **Economic Constraints:** Economic and military capacity needs to match ambitions. Multipolarity benefits remain limited, without internal strength.
  - ♦ Need for sustained high growth to support strategic ambitions; employment, manufacturing, and export competitiveness issues.

### Way Forward: India's Policy Priorities

- **Short-Term (0–5 Years):** Accelerate defence reforms, expand renewable energy capacity, strengthen space capabilities, and reform the mining sector.
- **Medium-Term:** Achieve energy diversification, build supply chain resilience, and enhance technological self-reliance.
- **Long-Term:** Sustain high economic growth, institutionalise strategic autonomy, and develop comprehensive national power.

**Conclusion**

- In a world consumed by conflict and uncertainty, India has a rare strategic opportunity to **focus inward and strengthen its foundations**.
- India needs to invest in **capabilities, resilience, and economic growth**, rather than being drawn into external distractions.

Source: BS

**Daily Mains Practice Question**

**[Q]** The transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order presents both opportunities and challenges for India. Examine India's role and strategic choices in navigating a shifting global order.

