

Section A

03

The greatest risk is to risk nothing at all.

"The ship is safest at the harbour but that is not what it is made for". The seas are dark, turbulent and ferocious. Every wave brings with itself new risks and challenges. But until the ship leaves the harbour, to face its destiny, it can never reach its destiny. In the end not taking the risk itself becomes the greatest risk we can take.

Life is full of challenges and risks. At every turn there is a new surprise. Some people get overwhelmed by these ever increasing and intensifying risks and decide to play it safe. But in doing so end up making a grave mistake for the greatest risk is to risk nothing at all in life.

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In this essay we explore thought provoking answers to some related questions such as who pose risks; why people avoid risks; ~~the~~ what issues are created by not taking a risk; why do we need a risk appetite; how much should one risk and how to make the right decisions.

Avoiding Risks like the Plague

As earlier mentioned risks are all around us. At home, abusive family members and relatives can make life all. In the society xenophobia and ethnocentrism can endanger lives of minorities. There is even a possibility of rights violations by those in power, a case in point is extra custodial violence.

At the global level we threaten not only national security but also human lives. Given the grim scenario, it is natural that the first instinct of most of us is to run away from such risks

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There are many reasons for our risk averse behaviour. Firstly, evolution has conditioned us to save our skin first when confronted with any danger. Our fear guides us to protect ourselves in these situations.

Secondly, our limited ability to foresee the future due to our myopic visions. We are unable to anticipate the potential fallouts of the risk in the future, this uncertainty overwhelms us and often paralyzes us to not take any action.

Thirdly, sometimes we simply lack the courage to take even a calculated risk. We feel scared and powerless in the face of uncertainty. And willingly and unwillingly end up nothing at all.

The Price we pay

But this inertia of ours costs us. In the moment we might think that by

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not taking a risk and playing it safe we have saved ourselves. But sadly we end up doing just the opposite.

When we don't take a risk in tough situations we sometimes enable the perpetuation of atrocities. During the Nazi Regime in Germany, the German population dared not to risk their life and silently allowed the persecution & genocide of Jews. Had they amassed some courage and took a risk, humanity's darkest era would not have occurred.

Risk aversion also breeds status quo. When we don't ^{take} the risk to speak up ~~against~~ or do something we tacitly give consent for things as is. We may feel that not taking a risk is right but ^{it} only incentivises the routine. When a woman chooses to not speak up against domestic violence and take some risk, she risks away her entire life to perpetual violence. This is exemplified

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in NFHS-5 data, which states that 1 in 3 women reported having faced physical/sexual violence.

Additionally when when we play it too safe we stifle growth. Our fear of risks ends up stopping us from realising our full potential. For example, when parents try to do 'helicopter parenting' by overprotecting their children, they unknowingly deny their child the opportunity for self learning and growth.

Case for a risk appetite

Thus there are serious concerns associated with not taking risks in life. This underscores the need to cultivate some courage and a risk appetite. But what good does this do for us?

We need to take certain risks to protect our safety and self interest in a hostile world. India too took a risk of international isolation and sanctions when

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we conducted the Pokhran Tests. Many western countries including USA, UK criticised our decision, but we felt it had to be done to protect our sovereignty & territorial integrity.

Risk taking is not only necessary to protect self interest but also collective interests. Sometimes brave heroes risk their image, reputation and even personal safety to ensure larger welfare of society. Edward Snowden, former NSA employee blew the whistle on the invasive state surveillance once against USA citizens. His courage has led to reforms in regulating surveillance by states.

Similarly risk appetite is necessary for the survival of humanity. Officers of the law like police & defence personnel risk their lives to ensure we sleep peacefully at night. Imagine the state of anarchy ~~had~~ if they stop providing their services

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so as to avoid taking any risks

Taking a risk is also important to face injustice and pave for justice in society. This is because non-cooperation with evil is our moral duty. Mahatma Gandhi during the Daadi March took the risk to violate the salt law in order to raise our concerns and demand reforms from the colonial government.

Finally taking some amount of risk is necessary for success. Fortune also favours the brave who dare. A case in point is the experience of Mark Zuckerberg who left a prestigious college to create Facebook. Had he not taken this risk we wouldn't have Meta, a billion dollar multinational today.

Risk Taking: A Slippery Slope

While we need to take some amount of risks in life. We should make sure

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Our courage does not turn into recklessness and brashness. In Mahabharata, Yudhishtira gambled away his wife, kingdom and happiness. His recklessness destroyed the entire Kuruvansh.

Our history is replete with such examples. The infamous king, Mohammad Bin Tughlaq undertook his overambitious Deccan expedition and hurriedly changed the capital to Daulatabad. These risks became the final nail in the coffin for the Delhi Sultanate paving the way for its decay.

Finding the Right balance

Thus taking too many risks is dangerous, taking too little risks is also unwise. So what must we do? Aristotle proposes the idea of his golden mean. He urges us to find the balance between cowardice & recklessness in the value of

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— Courage. Courage empowers us to take the right (and even tough decision) even in the face of adversity.

We must also take a leap of faith sometimes. We cannot ever fully know the consequences of our actions. But this uncertainty should not be used as an excuse for inaction. Instead we should have faith in our abilities and in the almighty and put forth our best feet forward no matter what.

During covid, we did not have the time to follow protocol for vaccine development. There was an urgent need for a cure to deal with the invisible enemy. World over governments took a leap of faith to save humanity.

To ensure we take the right amount of risks in life we should be guided by rationality to assess the cost & benefits of our actions. If the benefits outweigh

the costs, then the risks ~~are~~ are worth it. To ~~save~~ humanity from the injustices of Apartheid, Nelson Mandela risked to spend 17 years in jail. For him the premise of a just and equal society was more important than the suffering of bondage in prison.

Risks are also worth it when they lead to the greater good of the greater number. This is rooted in utilitarian ethics. By building dams we ensure growth & development but risk the health of ecosystems. Utilitarianism highlights that such a risk is justified and ethical.

Therefore, we have explored that risks are all pervasive in life. They try to scare us and intimidate us. Most of us get overwhelmed by these risks as we only seek to protect our self interest. ~~and~~ The lack of courage in our conscience also demotivates us to take any chances.

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But such a safety first approach not only creates problems for us but also for others. We must be brave and smart to take some risks in life for our own sake and for humanity at large. But at the same time we must resist the urge to be reckless in this pursuit.

Everybody knows Walt Disney. But what most of us don't know is that he came to California with just \$40 ~~and a~~ ^{in his pocket} and a heart full of dreams. He took a risk. But his courage ~~has~~ led to the creation of Disney, a beloved production house by all.

Therefore we must remember, no pain no gain and the greatest risk in life is to risk nothing at all.

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3

Why is it risky to play safe?
 (consequences)

Perpetuate atrocities → germans
status quo breeds → women violence

parents x allow child to grow

x realise our potential

how much to risk

x detriment even well being
 x endanger society
 x humanity

hazard of too much risking

yudisto gambled away
 life kingdom happiness

→ MBT → Qursan expedition

recklessness. others dad; MIDAS

Why people x risks

→ safety first

→ future uncert fear psychosis

→ myopic vision

→ x lack courage

→ self interest protect

how to make right decisions

↳ leap of faith, rationality, cost benefit analysis
 ↳ covid time vaccines Nelson mandela, Malala

4 Why risk appetite?

→ to be right expose (WB) 69

→ freedom struggle gandhi salt law snowden haugen

→ attainment of others

→ capt police admin rescue oper UN

→ proclamation
 ↳ India Pokhran
int & isolation

→ inner deep tech corp
startups → take calculated risk great

→ deterrence
Manhattan project
Oppenheimer

Walt Disney \$40 loan from
 bro pocket full of dreams

→ empire today

climate

regrets

P
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open
mean
power

Section B

05

"Geopolitics affects every country whether at war or peace"

The ancient treatise on statecraft, Arthashastra by Kautilya talks about the Mandala Theory. The entire world is imagined as a series of concentric circles. Kautilya warns that a country's immediate neighbour is often hostile on the other hand the neighbour's neighbour is a natural friend.

This relationship goes on as one moves away in the Mandala. Arthashastra thus creatively imagines how geopolitics affects every country whether at war or peace.

In this essay we would dig deeper into the causes of geopolitics, the manner in which it affects countries (the good, bad and ugly) how countries too can influence

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geopolitics and how should nation states ensure to best use geopolitics for their advantage.

Genesis of Geopolitics

We live in an ever connected world. Nation states constantly engage with one another. Such engagements may turn to tussles and eventually Geopolitics.

The core reason for geopolitics is that nation states are sovereign entities. Within a country the people are bound by the law of the land, but out in the world there is no higher power over the nation states.

This creates anarchy ^{at} ~~on~~ global level. Arthashastra calls this "matsyanyaya", where might is right. To protect their best interests and exert their influence, nation states are constantly engrossed in a power struggle. This power play breeds geopolitics.

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Geopolitics: A powerful force

Geopolitics thus affects all countries whether at war or peace. This has been the case not recently but since time immemorial. Post the industrial revolution and enlightenment in Europe, there arose a competition amongst the newly developed powers.

This tussle amongst Britain, France, Spain, Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal triggered a spree of imperialism and colonialism. Countries of the global south like India were badly affected due to the drain of wealth and still suffer from the issues of colonial hangover to this day.

But geopolitics of today is different from that of yesteryears. Today geopolitics is emerging as a positive force.

Geopolitics has come to the aid of countries kneeling under acute distress, helping them tide over chronic crises.

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When Sri Lanka faced a terrible economic crisis countries came together under the umbrella of Paris Club to offer financial assistance to the island state.

Geopolitics also helps secure peace & stability and paves for prosperity. UN's Peace Keeping Force which recruits personnel on a voluntary basis from across the globe has been instrumental in restoring order in countries facing violence, uninsurgency and coups.

Geopolitics has paved a way for bringing in radical reforms to improve the wellbeing of global citizens. The ideas of globalisation and free market economies championed by the Washington Consensus have helped boost economic growth, innovation and infrastructure.

The world today faces many common challenges. geopolitics provides a way to forge consensus and drive collective action to deal with complex challenges.

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It is geopolitics which has made possible the conclusion of Paris Agreement, Global Biodiversity framework and UN high seas treaty to address the climate crisis.

Geopolitics acts as a moral force against rogue and violent entities. The global isolation of Taliban led Afghanistan to prevent Afghanistan's future from becoming its past is an example in this regard.

But most importantly, geopolitics ensures order and clarity. By defining rules it deters abuse of power by nation states. It prevents the exploitation of the weak by the mighty. Global legal frameworks like the UN Charter, UNCLOS etc enable order at the global level.

Unfortunately there is a dark side to geopolitics as well. In the garb of geopolitics countries may try to undermine the sovereignty of other countries. This was most apparent during the cold war era. When

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Super powers USA & USSR indulged in block ~~part~~ politics and proxy wars to subjugate post colonial nation states.

Furthermore geopolitics is often driven by self interest, even if it negatively affects other countries. The aid conditionalities imposed by institutions like IMF, WB etc are often criticised for their neo-colonial characteristics. Recently, Kenyans agitated against IMF saying "Kenya is not a lab rat of IMF."

Geopolitics is also not as powerful as it is made to be. Russia and Ukraine have been at war since 2022, Israel-Hamas conflict has been raging for the past 9 months. Multiple round of deliberations with varied leadership have been concluded. But geopolitics has failed to provide a solution to the raging wars, increasing the suffering of people and global community at large.

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Another limitation of geopolitics is its lack of empathy for the needs & concerns of masses. In the tussle ~~to~~ of power play, it is often the common folk who suffer. During pandemic, geopolitical forces resorted to vaccine hoarding and vaccine nationalism.

Some countries even lobbied against India's bid for IPR waiver for vaccines. This resulted in massive loss of life across borders.

Countries as Change makers

Thus we have seen geopolitics is all pervasive. It is impartial in the sense that it affects every body in myriad ways. But is the interaction always unidirectional?

"Foreign policy is domestic policy and domestic policy is foreign policy" - US President J. Biden

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This quote beautifully highlights that the interaction between geopolitics and nation states is bidirectional.

Even nation states possess the power to affect geopolitics. During the cold war, instead of joining a power bloc, India launched the Non Alignment Movement opening a third front. This move changed geopolitics ~~however~~ forever as it helped third world countries find their voice at global fora.

When the USA dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki it ended the second world war. ushering in a new era, free from imperialism and colonialism.

Geopolitics: Unleashing the Potential

Given that geopolitics is inescapable and a highly potent tool. It would be wise for nation states to develop the ability

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to channelise geopolitics constructively.

First and foremost there is an urgent need to address the lacunae with global institutions like WTO, UN, IMF, WB etc.

It is rightly said that there is global governance but no government. UNSC reforms regarding the use of veto powers should be first on the agenda followed by improving representation from countries of the global south.

Secondly given the high levels of entropy at the global level (pandemic, wars, supply chain disruptions, It would be prudent for countries to build their "aatmanirbharta" by building domestic capabilities in core sectors like defence, technology and economy, countries can insulate themselves from undue geopolitics and also gain a strategic edge to negotiate for their own self interest

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Thirdly it is important to remember that there are no permanent friends in geopolitics only permanent interests. In this regard countries should forge strategic partnerships with like minded countries. India's role as a vishwaguru through its multi-vector and multi-alignment strategy is a shining example.

Countries can maximise their interests through this approach. By engaging both with USA in QUAD and with China in BRICS, India is showing the world how its done.

Geopolitics is an omnipresent force. Now more than ever. It affects all countries in multidimensional ways. This impact has the power to be both beneficial and problematic. It can solve problems or create new ones.

In a multi order global system of today even single countries can affect geopolitics through their actions. Thus given the potential of geopolitics it is important to leverage it for individual and collective welfare.

We should all use geopolitics to build bridges not walls. We should use geopolitics to work with one another and not against one another. We can achieve this great feat by always remembering "Vasudha Kuttumbakam". One World. One Family. One Future.

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Rough work:

Geopolitics affects every country whether at war or peace.

foreign policy is domestic policy, domestic policy is foreign policy.

② How it affects every country

historically IR in EU → imperialism
→ colonialism peace
great game → africa doom
IT, GR

economy → NPM, Washington consensus
↳ globalisⁿ everywhere
LPS,

socially/culturally

politics → UNSC P5 dysfn
health → vaccine hoarding
→ Kenya response

climate finance all countries
at war against CC, but
poor need money

tech! regional trade WTO
BIMSTEC → UNPKF help.
SAARC → help Sri Lanka crisis

Positive effects → supports globalisⁿ
SDG
Paris target G20

④ Negative effects → undermine
LPS
aid conditionality
Kenya x lab rat of IMF

Covid

① Why geopolitics

— power struggle
— sovereign
— maximizing

Countries @ war

→ Myanmar under Junta
but sanctions by west

→ Afghanistan under Taliban

→ Iran under sanctions

→ Ukraine war
geopolitics by G7 → aid/arms
↑ continued while Russia sanctions

Countries → geopolitics

✓ IND-NAK

✓ Am → bomb
WN2 end

↑ protectionism post Covid

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foreign policy but also FP.

how to handle global per w/o principle X.

- ① int governance ^{x part} alliances
- ② atmanirbharta across sectors ^{Self power}
- ③ leadership at global p
- ④ multi-vector policy like \$
multi-alignment.

Global village vs global trust

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