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Reshaping India's Foreign Approach

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This Article is based upon **“Expanding India's Foreign Policy Canvas”** which was published in the Hindustan Times on 22/07/2021. It talks about the changes occurring in the global economic domain and how India can shift from just an aspirational player to a global one by expanding its foreign agenda.

After living for more than a year and a half with the covid 19 pandemic, the world is recovering and bringing changes in the global economic domain.

On one hand, a new global tax is being worked upon to establish a minimum corporate tax regime. On the other, carbon border levies are being unveiled to aid net zero emission goals.

Binding dispute resolution provisions are also being sought to be embedded into international agreements. Technological decoupling is also taking place, leading to new value chains being set up.

Climate, health, digital technology and geo-economics will define the global conversation. India must remain proactive and focus on understanding and shaping these domains rather than just remaining at the receiving end.

India's Foreign Policy

- **Focus on Geo-Politics:** Indian foreign policy, like that of most other States, has generally given primacy to the frictions and friendships relating to geopolitics such as:
 - The **demand for nuclear disarmament**
 - The **Non-Aligned Movement** as a response to the Cold War
 - Support for **United Nations (UN) peacekeeping**
 - Call for adoption of **Comprehensive convention on international terrorism**
 - However, lesser importance has been given to geo-economics.

- **Environment Related Initiatives:** The Prime Minister of India has espoused climate action as an issue where what India does within its borders to benefit its citizens also matters well beyond our borders. This has both economic and political benefits.
Also, India is among the select few countries to have hosted the **COP** of all three Rio conventions on climate change (**UNFCCC**), biodiversity (**Convention on Biological Diversity**) and land (**United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**).
- **Foreign Policy amid the Pandemic:** During the **second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic**, India's foreign policy apparatus was key in securing essential global supplies.

Challenges Associated

- **Issues regarding Human Resource:** Migration and human mobility are emerging issues.
India and Africa will be the largest repositories of young populations while most other societies age. Lack of opportunities in India create an obvious situation of **Brain Drain**.
- **Issues related to Science & Technology:** **Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** is a growing global problem to which the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic may further contribute.
Global concerns regarding **cybersecurity** are also rising.
- **A Stronger China:** Militarily, China has further strengthened itself and now seeks to dominate the **Indo-Pacific Ocean** with its announcement of its third aircraft carrier's launch in 2021.
- **Deteriorating India-Russia Ties:** Though India and Russia share a long history of strategic and economic cooperation, the post-Cold war Russia and China strategic convergence remains a foreign policy issue for India.
 - Moreover, the sanctions imposed on Russia after Crimea's annexation in 2014 has pushed Russia towards a tighter embrace of China.
This seems to signal reduced interest in countries such as India.
 - India's closeness to the U.S. has also weakened its links with traditional friends such as Russia and Iran.

Way Forward

- **Thinking Beyond Geo-Political:** Subjects such as regulation of trans-boundary digital behemoths, big data management, trade issues and disaster & humanitarian relief can prove to be beneficial by being addressed through the prism of a broader approach taking into account the global dimensions.
There is a need to expand India's foreign policy agenda beyond the traditional thinking of what is geopolitical.

- **Realising the Significance of Geo-Economics:** Geo-economics inevitably impacts geopolitics. China's Belt and Road Initiative is an example.
 - Climate, health security and digital technologies are becoming aspects of geopolitical contestation of different kinds.
 - India's willingness to encompass these areas, which it previously considered beyond the pale of its foreign policy posture, will be key to its ability to navigate the coming wave of global changes.
- **G20 in 2023:** India's presidency of **G20** in 2023 will provide it the opportunities to weave geo-economic themes with geopolitical interests.
 - Till now, India has played the role of an emerging power with ambitions to play the role of a global power.
 - The G20 summit of 2023 will provide the opportunities to articulate and be vocal on issues that matter to the world, and be proactive to further its interests.
- **Strategic Hedging:** The way forward for the Indian foreign policy should be **strategic hedging**; a combination of bolstering domestic as well as external strategic capabilities and creating economic dependencies abroad through enhanced manufacturing and exports.

Furthermore, a balance between capabilities and reach is what India needs to master strategic hedging with other countries.

Conclusion

The primary goal of India's foreign policy is to preserve, promote and protect national interests in the broadest sense of the term, and not to limit the canvas.

If India wants to ride the next wave of global change, it will need a broader global agenda and a carefully crafted game plan in place soon.

Drishti Mains Question

"It has been long since India has remained as an aspirational/emerging power. The time is now to bring a change in the paradigm and become one of the countries shaping the global economic domains". Discuss.