

Great Power Games: From Western Decline to Eastern Ascent

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Great Power Games is an authoritative account of the world order in flux, from the ashes of the Second World War to the fractured present. That edifice now shows deep cracks: hot wars rage on multiple fronts, the West is riven by internal turmoil, and America, under the disruptive presidency of Donald Trump, has abandoned the very frameworks it once created.

In this gripping narrative, Shri. Vikram Sood, former chief of India's Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), reveals how nations pursue power. From the Cold War's shadow battles to the unipolar arrogance of post-Soviet America, he charts how the West rose and how it is now faltering. He traces how the Cold War divided the world into camps, how the Soviet Union fell, how America reigned in unipolar arrogance, and how a new balance of power is now emerging.

As the culminating volume in a powerful trilogy—following *The Unending Game* (on espionage) and *The Ultimate Goal* (on narrative control)—this work provides readers with a clear-eyed view of the real world of international relations, far beyond the headlines. Espionage emerges as a pivotal arena in Mr. Sood's analysis, where superspies engage in high-stakes games of win-some-lose-some. He masterfully peels back the layers of biased media narratives to reveal the actual mechanisms driving global politics: proxy wars, funding of NGOs, and the use of private enterprises as extensions of intelligence agencies. Drawing on his decades of experience, he delivers a well-referenced, data-driven analysis that challenges common misconceptions and offers a far more accurate picture for those who follow international relations (IR) closely—or those who should.

The book opens with a profound quote that captures its essence: “Empires do not rise or die overnight, or even in a decade. Sometimes it takes generations. The American Empire has been the cleverest of all its predecessors. It ran its empire by remote control.” Mr. Sood explores the history, philosophy, and future of power, tracing America's dominance over nearly two centuries—from inheriting the mantle of British imperialism to wielding influence through financial giants like Carnegie, Rockefeller, Morgan, and Jay Gould, as well as modern entities such as BlackRock, Vanguard, and State Street. The CIA, USAID, military might, espionage, and cultural superiority enabled the U.S. to dominate the 20th century, often through covert means and by neutralizing rivals like Germany and the Soviet Union. The first three chapters focus intently on America's “dirty deeds,” setting the stage for the broader narrative.

From Mao's guerrilla victories to Deng's "hide your strength, bide your time" dictum, China's transformation into an economic juggernaut—fuelled by Western investments—has bred a totalitarian model of AI surveillance and digital IDs. The book warns of tech wars where compulsory biometric control becomes global, positioning China as a blueprint for autocracies amid resource scarcities and demographic pressures. The middle sections shift to the rise of China and Russia's strategic manoeuvres in the ongoing "Great Game." Mr. Sood examines China's meteoric ascent under the philosophy of "hide your strength, bide your time," supported by economic data showing its progress across sectors. He also addresses contemporary conflicts, including military operations in Gaza and Ukraine, the rise of Islam in Europe, and the clash of major religious ideologies amid a world in transition from unipolar to multipolar order.

The final chapters turn to Bharat's role in this evolving landscape. Mr. Sood is optimistic about India's progress but urges caution. He argues that the greatest threat to Indian interests is not China or Pakistan, but the United States, which has betrayed India in past conflicts and maintains no permanent alliances. He discusses historical regional dynamics, recent reforms under the current government, and supports policies like the CAA and Operation Sindoor (India's response to the Pahalgam terror attack). Amid covert and overt adversaries—including U.S.-backed NGOs and agencies—Mr. Sood warns of "enemies within" and the need for vigilance as external powers resist India's rise. For India, he identifies internal obstacles such as demographic strains, water shortages, and political divisions, compounded by external threats from China-Pakistan collusion and Western interference via NGOs. He critiques historical appeasement, urging strategic autonomy and enhanced intelligence to claim regional ascendancy. Yet, the book offers optimism in India's awakening, leveraging democracy, youth bulge, and cultural soft power to counterbalance China, envisioning it as a pivotal force in multipolarity—shunning alliances with distant decliners or aggressive neighbours to prioritize national interests.

Condensing today's complex geopolitical events into roughly 330 pages is no small feat, and Mr. Sood succeeds admirably in providing a comprehensive overview. While the book devotes significant space to the U.S., with comparatively less on China and a somewhat scattered coverage of multiple issues, these are minor trade-offs for the breadth achieved. The section on India could have benefited from greater depth, given its relevance to youth, policymakers, scholars, and practitioners.

Released in late 2025 (with a launch event in November) and covering events up to September of that year, *Great Power Games* feels remarkably fresh and timely. Incisive, unsettling, and richly detailed, it is both a masterful history of global geopolitics and a timely reflection on the uncertain

future ahead. It offers an in-depth perspective on how power truly operates: America's past dominance, China's rapid ascent, India's emerging role, and flashpoints like the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, the rise of Islam in Europe, trade wars, regime changes, tech wars, resource scarcities, and civilizational clashes.

The book serves as an indispensable treatise for geopolitical analysts, foreign policy practitioners, scholars of international relations, and concerned citizens. With real-world insights into covert operations, proxy wars, and the "Deep State" complexes that underpin hegemony, it provides a comprehensive, insider-driven framework for understanding seismic shifts in global power dynamics. It equips readers to discern folly from foresight, fostering resilience in a turbulent world. For anyone interested in geopolitics, national security, or understanding the state of global affairs today, *Great Power Games* is a must-read. Vikram Sood's insider insights make it an essential addition to the library of any serious observer of global politics.
