



# **CHATURANGA**

CONFLICT, CONTEST, COOPERATE, CREATE

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## Messages





### Message

The 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Raisina Dialogue focuses very appropriately on the ancient Indian strategy game of Chaturanga. While its underlying theme is the reality of competition that has long characterized world politics, its elements are the facets of Conflict, Contest, Cooperate and Create. These four dimensions today drive the games that nations continue to play. It is the risks, challenges, choices and outcomes that the Raisina Dialogue gathers to deliberate upon.

We can all see for ourselves the reality of re-balancing that is compelling the democratization of the global order. The G20 that India just chaired is itself a reminder of the transformation of our times. But these trends, however imperfect and incomplete they may be, are not proofed against the shocks which international politics experiences from time to time. This decade, we have already seen the backlash against globalization develop into a potent force in many societies. The trauma of the Covid was magnified by the dangers of over-concentration. Across geographies, societies are now seeking to be more resilient and self-sufficient. Two years ago, the fighting in Ukraine dominated the debate. In the last few months, the conflict in Gaza has captured our collective attention. Even as they unfold, the possibilities and challenges of emerging technologies are beginning to be assessed and analyzed. As always, the old and established co-exist with the new and disruptive.

Over the next few days, the Raisina Dialogue will host conversations and hear arguments on the pressing issues of our times. In doing so, it would reaffirm its salience as a key venue of the global public space. I welcome all participants and look forward to the discussions.

  
(Dr. S. Jaishankar)

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## Message



From the Chairman,  
Observer Research Foundation

**THE FIRST QUARTER** of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will go down as an interregnum (a period caught in the crosshairs of a transition), a time of upheaval and discord, when established structures and expected norms come under intense scrutiny. In the midst of this churn, we find ourselves in a divided world—a world cleft in twain, each hemisphere scared and haunted by the shadow of the other.

There are some today who despair the return of another Dark Age. The parallels are numerous. For one, a Black Death came a-knocking at the turn of the decade. The prosperous fenced themselves in while the rest suffered inhumane losses. War proliferated across the face of the globe, with conflicts no longer constrained

by rules or conventions. New instruments of war—cutting off access to food, energy, finance, data, and information—were deployed at scale.

Yet these are not the Dark Ages, and the digital age is no descent into darkness. To the contrary, it is a case of being blinded by too much light, being bombarded with stimuli from all directions, being rendered dumb and blind in the hypnotic glare of sleepless screens. This hyper-stimulation and hyper-saturation of media has confounded our ability to tell truth from falsehood. As a result, disinformation spreads further, faster, deeper, and far wider than any truth. Each tweet chips away at the very foundation of mutual trust. No wonder that, as a majority of the world's population approaches elections this year, a fear looms: can democracies endure attacks from ideological opponents, on the one hand, and algorithms designed to deceive, on the other?

Then there is the biggest dilemma of the times: how do democracies surmount the temptation to emulate the other, to allow fear to transform them into becoming the very enemy they set out to defeat, to lose in essence what it means to be a democracy? More importantly, if this were to happen, who would win and who would lose?

And so it was that the central idea of Raisina 2024 evolved: Chaturanga, that board game extending across all four domains.

The saying goes that this ancient game of warcraft was devised by none other than Mandodari, the queen consort of the demon king Ravana. She, who was a pious, god-fearing woman, aimed to keep her war-mongering spouse away from real conflict by immersing him in a virtual one. What a prescient narrative, more applicable today than ever before! It is peculiarly apt at describing a time when the virtual has acquired greater power than the real, when algorithms exert control over vast swathes of humans and their lives, when we find ourselves numbed and swayed by the graphic images and curated content that inundate our smartphones.

But Chaturanga has yet another meaning besides warcraft. It is a genre of musical composition, a performance in four parts spun out in real time where the notes, the words, the meanings, and the rhythms come together to make a harmonious whole. Far from a game of conflict and discord, Chaturanga is about exploring the harmony of concord.

## Raisina Dialogue 2024

While the global panorama may appear pessimistic, 2023 emerged as a pivotal year for forging consensus, within the Global South as well as across the North and South. The global community was able to reconsider its approach and engage with longstanding allies.

As we convene the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Raisina Dialogue, we aspire to build upon India's G20 legacy of fostering consensus and devising global solutions. I extend my best wishes to all engaging in thought-provoking conversations that engender a shift from conflicts and contests to cooperation and creation. May these dialogues help pave the way for a better world for all.

**- Sunjoy Joshi**

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## Curator's Note



From the President,  
Observer Research Foundation

**2024 IS A HISTORIC YEAR.** With over two billion humans going to the polling station and at least 64 countries holding national elections, more than half of humanity will exercise its franchise. As such, 2024 will go down as the single biggest election year. Elections represent hope, optimism, and the quest for a better future. But they also engender anxiety and uncertainty about what is to come. We are at an inflection point for the world. As the old order lies broken, actions taken at this critical juncture will script a new architecture. Decisions made at this pivotal crossroads will shape the trajectory of generations to come.

The theme of this edition of the Raisina Dialogue is perhaps more apt than

ever before. Chaturanga, the ancient Indian game of battlefield strategy and the ancestor of modern chess, involved four elements: infantry, artillery, elephantry, and chariotry. In older times, when civilisations were built on hard power and coercion, these were the four tools that dominated and decided the politics of the day. With time, the world has evolved and grown more complex. The means have changed, but the ends remain the same.

Our theme, “Chaturanga: Conflict, Contest, Cooperate, Create”, succinctly describes this reality. It engages with the four trends visible in today’s world that, intermixing and intermingling, weave a complex tapestry. How do we navigate these four trends as individuals, as communities, as countries, as a collective? What is the Chaturanga of today?

### **Conflict**

For the past two years, we have been living in a world at war; 2022 and 2023 saw conflict than at any time in the post-1945 period. Hamas’ unspeakable acts of terror and Israel’s muscular response, along with conflicts in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, have set the Middle East ablaze yet again. The largest war in Europe in eight decades, armed conflicts in Africa, cartel violence in the Americas, and most recently Iran’s bombing of Pakistan are under threat across the world.

### **Contest**

Pax Americana has coughed, sputtered, and died. Multipolarity defines the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Geopolitics is today characterised by powers large and small contesting each other, vying for power on the regional and on the global stage. China is attempting to exploit the postwar global architecture through its expansive and intrusive politics, affecting the economic fate of numerous countries. The contest between EU and Russia has impacted the bottom-lines of millions across the world, at grocery stores and at gas pumps. As world powers compete, world citizens suffer. Persistent global challenges require patient global collaboration. This is in short supply today.

### **Cooperate**

The Pandora’s box of multipolarity has unleashed troubling forces. But it also holds hope. India’s G20 Presidency demonstrated conclusively that even in a polarised,

divided, and divisive time, consensus can be built. The cooperation achieved in New Delhi on global climate action is heartening. India has foregrounded Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, emphasising the inherent unity of the world and the common nature of our strivings. Brazil 2024 will represent the third successive year that the G20 is being hosted in the Global South. Out of the ashes of the old order can rise the phoenix of a new vision, one that is more inclusive and more equitable than anything that came before.

### **Create**

After the agricultural and the industrial revolutions, we are today witnessing a new revolution of equal disruptive potential. The technology revolution is changing the fabric of the modern world. Forces of creative destruction are rejuvenated and re-energised. After years of lethargy and slumber, innovation is back on the agenda. While the promise of generative AI is vast, its realisation will require creativity and deliberation. India is at the forefront of ensuring dividends of this revolution flow to the many and not the few. We are democratising AI. Already, a quarter of all open-source AI code is written in India. It will be Indian minds that harness the good and leverage it for a better and brighter world.

The undergirding of the postwar political order has given way. At the same time, the 21st century world order is still inchoate. It is a fallacy to wait for an opportune moment to architect the new order. The future is being written and rewritten every day. The actions of today will create the normal of tomorrow. The Raisina Dialogue simply aims to ensure that the script being written does not mirror ones that came before.

While discourse lingers in and on the past, the Raisina Dialogue provides a rare opportunity to look to the future. This is the goal of the 2024 Dialogue: to script a truly forward-looking agenda by cutting through doublespeak, spin doctoring, and politicking. To navigate pathways for a world where conflict is a rampant reality and contests are omnipresent, but where cooperation exists and creation abounds. To engage diverse voices in open and frank discussion with the ultimate end of building an inclusive infrastructure for the 21st century.

2024 is truly make-or-break. At this decisive fork, will we have the courage to take the road less travelled? "No" is no answer.

**- Dr Samir Saran**