India's Global Role: Not the Label of Power, but the Question of Capacity

News context: 2026-11-05 | **Published:** 7 November 2026

Mains: GS-II: Foreign policy and the changing global order



Original symbolic image: pcsmantra.com

Why in the News

An opinion article first published on 5 November 2026 argued for understanding India's role amid US-China rivalry through the lens of a **middle power**. This is not an official international status or a new government policy. Linking the debate on India's influence to real capabilities and outcomes, rather than labels of big or small power, is more useful.

The Concept of a Middle Power

In international politics, a middle power is generally an analytical description of a capacity and role in which a country does not determine the entire world order on its own, but can change outcomes through partnerships, regional influence and on specific issues. There is no single legal list that applies to all countries.

Regional influence, global military reach, economic size, technology and diplomatic clout are different scales. So one study may call a country the leading power in its region, while another may emphasise a middle-power role in the global system.

Different Scales, Different Conclusions

In the available India profile of the Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index, India is described for 2025 as Asia's leading power, ranked third among 27 countries on a base of 40 points. That is the same study's regional and method-based conclusion. It should not be taken as a new ranking for 2026 or as the agreement of all analysts.

So in the middle-power debate, it is not right to make any one index the final proof. The study's year, region, indicators and definition of power should be examined first.

What is a Bi-Multipolar Order

This term describes a situation in which the United States and China retain extraordinary influence, but other countries and groups also play independent roles on important issues. It is an analytical concept used in the opinion article, not a treaty or a universally accepted legal category.

In such an order, a country's usefulness is not determined only by standing with one superpower. Partnerships can differ across issues of trade, security, energy, technology and development.

Policy Options for India

- **Domestic capacity:** External influence becomes durable through manufacturing, research, skills and dependable infrastructure.
- **Strategic autonomy:** Independent assessment on every issue; this does not mean equidistance from all or passive neutrality.
- **Issue-based partnerships:** Cooperation with countries on concrete shared goals.
- **A voice for developing countries:** Practical proposals on development finance, climate and institutional reform.
- **Risk balance:** The costs of security cooperation and economic dependence should be assessed together.

Significance for the Exam

An answer should analyse the nation's aspirations and its available capacity separately. Beyond arguments for and against power labels, the question is how India converts domestic development, regional credibility and international partnerships into real outcomes.

Read on the practical side of policy with neighbouring countries: India-Nepal dialogue and relations (Hindi article)

Mains Practice Question

For an effective role for India in the changing global order, domestic capacity and issue-based partnerships matter more than power labels. Comment. (250 words, 15 marks)

Answer Outline

Introduction: State the multidimensional nature of global role and power.

Main Body: Give a balanced analysis of domestic capacity, strategic autonomy, partnerships and the priorities of developing countries.

Conclusion: Emphasise effective and durable outcomes rather than a claim to a label.

Sources

- 5 November: opinion article on India's middle-power role
- Lowy Asia Power Index: India's profile, 2025 analysis