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'Don't buy the Chindia hype'

Parag Khanna, author of 'How to run the World', says India needs to worry about corruption, the Naxal problem, its youth bulge without jobs to match — not China

SANDIP ROY

Parag Khanna wants to tell you how to run the world. At least that's the title of his newest book. But Khanna has good credentials for that. He directs the Global Governance Initiative at the New America Foundation think tank. He's been a fellow at the Brookings Institution. He was a senior geo-political advisor to US Special Operations Command. But, more importantly, he's experienced the world first hand, not just through policy papers.

- He's survived on dried yak and milky porridge in Tibet. ("I think I lost 10 pounds in a month.")
- He's been robbed in the Ukraine and harassed in Venezuela. ("I think Caracas is more dangerous than Baghdad.")
- He's driven 8,000 miles from London to Ulaanbaatar. ("I had an awful accident on the way in Siberia.")
- He's swum in Lake Baikal in Mongolia on a chilly summer morning. ("I was the only person that I could see swimming — it was amazing.")

Khanna has always been on the move. Born in Kanpur, he grew up in Abu Dhabi and the United States. His father worked for Tata. His mother was one of the first women to graduate from IIT Kanpur. His parents gave him a sense of the world. "After the Berlin Wall fell, my dad yanked us out of school and took us to Berlin saying you *have* to see this," remembers Khanna. He still has a picture of himself sitting on the wall. "It was a moment of political awakening," he says.

He always knew he was going to be involved in governance and the world. Now with degrees from the London School of Economics and Georgetown University, Khanna is regularly on all those year-end lists — Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum, Esquire's 75 Most Influential People of the 21st Century, Wired Magazine's Smart List.



MEGA DIPLOMAT: Esquire calls Khanna one of the 75 people who will influence the 21st century

"The (US) policy of having your favourite son of a bitch in country XYZ can only take you so far," says Khanna. "You think by dealing with one guy you have the country in control. You don't. You have to have relations with the people. Otherwise you will be the loser when they overthrow"

But he says he's really pleased when someone in some remote part of the world says they've read his books. "I am the only one with a chapter about Uzbekistan in a mainstream book," he laughs. "I would trade a thousand book sales in the US for 100 in Vietnam or Turkey."

His previous book, *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order,* was a sort of primer on geo-politics — changing borders, pipelines, superpowers-in-training. The newest book puts all of that into the blender and tries to imagine how that new world will fare with its patchwork quilt of failing states and Jasmine Revolutions, corporations that have more muscle than some countries, NGOs and super-philanthropists.

Khanna says to imagine this you need to look in the rear view mirror to the Middle Ages — "that was a time when China, India, the Arab civilisations were powerful. The Byzantine empire was weak. Cities, companies, mercenary armies, humanitarian groups, all had a lot of influence as well. You had to fight for authority. That's what's happening today."

In this chaotic world, Khanna believes diplomacy is "the glue." "It's the second-oldest profession," he laughs. "It will outlive the state. It will even outlive Wikileaks." But the megadiplomacy Khanna is excited about isn't about the United Nations on steroids. "It's the .gov, the .com, the .org, the .God as I like to call it, all coming together, and the coalitions that form across the public-private divide — that's exciting."

Many countries would, he says, prefer that Bill Gates comes to visit than the Secretary of State. She brings lectures. He brings resources. But doesn't that give governments a pass? "Most of the world is populated by post-colonial countries and many of them, Sudan, Pakistan, Iraq are in a state of entropy," retorts Khanna. "So we need everyone from celebrities, companies, NGOs to be playing a role, being part of the burden sharing."

That doesn't mean Pakistan needs to be governed by Bono, Bill Gates and Walmart. Or that African countries shouldn't be suspicious of China building its roads. "You should be very suspicious. Why is it that the railway and road goes straight from the mine to the port?" he says. "But at least these countries now have money in their hands and roads and railways."

Money and roads might bring stability but that doesn't mean this new world will be more democratic. In fact, as the histories of Tunisia and Egypt show, the United States often preaches democracy but supports strongmen.

"The policy of having your favourite son of a bitch in country XYZ can only take you so far," says Khanna. "And Pakistan is a great example. People believed the Musharrraf regime was stable and open for business. But it was a veneer. You think by dealing with one guy you have the country in control. You don't. You have to have relations with the people. Otherwise you will be the loser when they overthrow (the dictator)."

The future, Khanna says, isn't about whether the United States is going to remain the world's solo superpower. Or whether India is going to squeeze past China. He points out that in his last book, he gave India short shrift, barely 3 pages out of 500. "I love India but I am dispassionate," he says. "Kashmir, the North East, endemic corruption, Naxalite problem, the youth bulge without jobs to match — these are the things India needs to watch 24 hours a day, not worry about China."

He remembers being a senior at Georgetown enrolled in a seminar on non-proliferation when India conducted its nuclear tests. "After that India became important. India became sexy," he says. But he's not convinced by the Chindia hype. "It's so easy to say China is rising, India is rising, Brazil is rising," he says. "We'll have a new concert of powers. I am not buying that. I am putting my faith in the people." ■

