



# **DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS**

**THE HINDU**

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**Topic: GS2 - Challenge for Indian  
Foreign Policy**



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## Negotiating the forks in the road of diplomacy

### Context:-

- Indian foreign policy has many challenges as it is facing a number of issues, each of which represents a fork in the road, depending on India's decision on them: a fork **where the U.S. holds one prong and the Russia-China axis holds the other.**
- Future policies decisions depends on the G-20 summit in Osaka (June 28-29), where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold bilateral meetings with at least eight world leaders (most notably U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin), and participate in two parallel trilaterals, the Russia-India-China (RIC) and Japan-U.S.-India (JAI) and other meeting with the major powers US, Russia and China again this year.

### Challenges to Indian Foreign Policy:-

- **Trade Issues:-** On trade, the tussle is evident.
  - India's long-standing concerns about China's unfair trade practices.
  - Trade issues with USA.
  - New Delhi must make another choice, on whether to sign up for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

- **Energy:** The choice on energy, and in particular on Iran is another issue.
  - When the Trump administration pulled out of the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** nuclear agreement in May 2018, but granted India and a few other countries a waiver to continue oil imports (as well as one for **Chabahar trade**), the government had assumed it could muddle through the Iran-U.S. confrontation.
  - Instead, it has **lost on both principle and profit.**
  - After accepting U.S. sanctions on oil imports, India's intake of cheaper, better Iranian crude will dip from about 23.5 million tonnes in 2018-19 to zero in 2019-20.
- **Communication:** The waiver for Chabahar turned out to be a red herring as banks, shipping and insurance companies have declined to support **India-Afghan trade** through the Iranian port for fear of sanctions affecting their other businesses.
  - There is concerns on India's investments and its dreams of larger connectivity via Chabahar and the **Russian-led International North-South Transport Corridor**, in the event of a full-scale confrontation between the U.S. and Iran.
- **Telecommunication:** Another choice New Delhi will be forced to make in the next few months is on telecommunications and building its **5G network**, for which trials are due to begin in September.

- The U.S. has made it clear that it expects the Modi government to exclude the **Chinese telecom company, Huawei**, over security concerns, and threatens to withhold intelligence and security cooperation if India allows this company to control its 5G networks.
- China has made it equally clear that India must make an “unbiased” choice and will oppose any move to cut Huawei out of the trials.
- **Defence:** On the **Russian S-400 missile system deal** too, its a black-or-white decision for the government to make as the U.S. makes it clear that going ahead with the deal won't just invoke sanctions but will close the door to American high-tech and advanced aircraft deals.
- **Maritime Sphere:** The U.S. and China are pitted against each other in the **South China Sea**, which is now **spilling over into South Asia** through the **Indo-Pacific**.
  - While India has focussed on China's encroachment in subcontinental waters, it is clear that the U.S. too is seeking a role here.
    - The signing of an updated **Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)** which was put off, along with a cancellation of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Colombo at the last minute this week, will be one of many such military and security upgradation plans for the U.S. in the region.

## Suggestions for India's Foreign Policy:-

- **Need For a Substantive, More Clearly Defined Strategic Course:** The tussle between the U.S. and Russia-China is not new and India has negotiated these in the past few decades with considerable success. However, there are following reasons why this does not hold in the present, and why New Delhi will need more than nimble footwork to navigate the choices that their contestations present.
  - Russia-China bond today is firmer than it has been at any point since the 1950s, cemented by the **Xi-Putin friendship**.
  - The Trump administration has crystallised that bond by marking out “revisionist” Russia and China as the U.S.’s “central challenge” in its National Defense Strategy published in 2018. As a result, both sides are imposing an “either/or” choice on countries that are not already strategically or economically riveted to one side or the other.
  - In a world where the rhetoric is increasingly about interoperability, India’s pivot within this period, away from “non-alignment” to “multi-alignment” or “issue-based alignment”, therefore, is unsustainable.
  - Hence India needs a substantive, more clearly defined account of its own objectives to steer its strategic course in these stormy times.
- **Focus on It's Own Backyard:** It is necessary to stay rooted in India’s own geographical moorings within Asia and within South Asia in particular. An India that carries its neighbourhood is a formidable force at

- any international forum, compared to one mired in sub-regional conflicts.
- **Focussed Persistence and Quiet Diplomacy:** India needs its own list of “asks” from its relationships with big powers. The recent success with listing Masood Azhar as a globally designated terrorist is an example of how focussed persistence and quiet diplomacy pays off.
  - However, India **needs to think in terms of long-term strategic needs** and move beyond asking for punitive measures against Pakistan or its constant demand for more visas for Indians to live and work abroad and.
- **Reembracing the Policy of Non-Alignment:** India needs to re-embrace non-alignment as it was envisioned, not as the Non-Aligned Movement grouping, which is now in disarray.
  - Former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao wrote in 1989 that “**Standing on our own feet and not being a plaything of others was the essence of the policy of non-alignment... a means of safeguarding India’s own national self-interests, that also constituted an earnest attempt to democratise international relations.**”

### **Way Forward:-**

- It is necessary to reject the “**tactical transactionalism**” that has currency today **for a more idealistic view** of the world that India wishes to shape in the future.
- It would be a mistake, as Australian Prime Minister **Scott Morrison** said recently, if we become “**nothing more than the sum of our deals**”. **It would be a greater misfortune, however, to be trapped in the ‘zero sum’ of our deals.**