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India's foreign policy discourse and strategic analyses have this propensity to lapse into preferences for soft options like 'Non-Alignment 2.0' or "Strategic Autonomy' whenever the geopolitical power play churning becomes challenging as visible in 2019. Both these strategic philosophies are redundant when India has yet to add military muscle to its national aspirational ambitions.

Historical evidence of India's policy formulation record for decades suggests and reinforces my assertion made above. On the advent of the Cold War in the 1950s India stood non-plussed about its preferential choice between the newly emerged Superpowers-United States and Former Soviet Union. India took the easy way out of asserting for Non-alignment.

In the 1990s, with disintegration of Soviet Union and emergence of the United States as the unipolar Superpower, India stood paralysed in terms of foreign policy choices. It took nearly a decade for India to conclude that Non-alignment was not a valid foreign policy option in changed geopolitical environment. It undertook the first tentative steps towards forging the US-India Strategic Partnership.

In the first two decades of the 21st Century, especially during period 2004-14, India vexed at United States policy thrusts despite the US-India Strategic Partnership and the US-India Civilian Nuclear Deal started philosophies of unrealistic policy options of 'Strategic Non-alignment', 'Strategic Autonomy' and Non-alignment 2.0.

Global power 2019 churning today is characterised by a pronounced geopolitical tussle with China with Russia in tow rattled by United States continued global predominance notwithstanding China's exponential military expansion especially in terms of Chinese Navy maritime reach and deterrence.

Assessed in my preceding few SAAG Papers which also stand reproduced by Eurasia Review was that China is fighting a losing war with the United States in terms of displacing United States from its predominant perch.

Pointed out in my preceding Papers was also the stark reality that both China and Russia put together are in no position to offset the global balance of power heavily weighted in favour of the United States, its Military Allies and its Strategic Partners in the Indo Pacific Region.

Compounding the churning global power-play is the United States unleashing a new armoury of economic weapons in the form of Trade Wars more noticeably against China. While the United States may also feel the dents from the ongoing US-China Trade War, the socio-economic impact on China could be severe.

Contextually, against this backdrop, the Indian policy establishment stands challenged to resolve the dilemma compounded by three vexatious policy-planning factors.

In brief the three policy planning dilemmas revolve around (1) India's Nehruvian hangover of reverting to non-alignment mindsets when faced with geopolitical challenges dictating India to cast its strategic preferences. (2) Having for the last decade or so after firmly opting for a reinforced Strategic Partnership with the United States, becoming unsure with uncertainties generated by some deviations of present US President Trump's assertions and hence the talk of Strategic Autonomy to offset current pressures from United States on security and trade matters(3) Interim policy formulations till such time India can build up a commanding military and economic profile to be a "Stand Alone Major Power" to exercise "Strategic Autonomy" in its purest connotation.

Non-alignment 2.0 and Strategic Autonomy are not valid options for India both at the global level and regional level. Russia has cast its strategic preferences for China and Pakistan—India's major military threat perceptions and history of armed conflict with India. No space exists for India in this Trilateral firming -in and the concretised China-Pakistan Axis.

India's soft option for Non-alignment 2.0 or Strategic Autonomy is unsound as the balance-of-power of the above is heavily weighted against India.

India should not doubt the value of the evolving and reinforcement of the US-India Strategic Partnership as within the United States there exists bipartisan support for India. Past US Administration have publicly committed that the United States will assist India in emerging as a Major Power. Any current irritations in US-India relations are transient. Nuances could be read as transient but no change in the "value" of

US-India Strategic Partnership is visible in US policy planning circles.

In fact, India's role is becoming pivotal for the United States in terms of Indo Pacific Security, at least. For India too, the United States should be regarded as pivotal for India's security against the China-Pakistan Axis and with Russia in tow of China.

The third option of 'Interim Policy Formulations' till such time India develops muscular strengths for a 'Stand Alone' option, one hardly can visualise any viable strategies against the current backdrop of the global power-play churning that is ongoing.

In the interim period the military challenges for India from China and Pakistan are getting more threatening both in terms of external threats of armed conflicts and internal security threats of trans-border terrorism and insurgency externally sponsored. India's war preparedness has damagingly suffered in the period 2004-14 of the two consecutive tenures of the past political dispensation. It would take India two decades to acquire a 'Stand Alone' military profile.

During this time span of twenty years or so stated above India has no option but to opt for policy formulations which add to strategic ballast to India in the form of countervailing power/powers to offset threat to Indian security. Under the circumstances, India has no option but to opt for a mutually committed substantial US-India Strategic Partnership, taking the periodic warts in its stride. It needs to be stated that India's standing with Japan and Israel and even Western Europe went notches above after the forging of the US-India Strategic Partnership.

Concluding, it needs to be asserted that in 21st Century 'Global Power Play Churning' underway, China and Russia are in no position to whittle down US global predominance for at least two more decades. Contextually, India would be well advised to opt for the winning coalition of Major Powers led by the United States engaged in limiting China's not so benign military rise and aggressive brinkmanship. Balance-of-power strategies are not devilish as sought to be made out by advocates of Non-alignment is past decades.

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