

CALIBRATED BALANCE: ON INDIA AND NON-ALIGNMENT

Non-alignment as a policy must be rethought, but India must be wary of alliance systems

In separate statements this week, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar laid out India's world view in the face of global challenges, many of which pull it in different directions. Mr. Jaishankar's contention was that non-alignment as a concept belonged to a bygone era and that multipolarity in the world necessitated that India would have to take a definite stand, and even take "risks" on issues such as connectivity, maritime security, terrorism and climate change. However, he made it clear that India does not reject non-alignment in its entirety, and that while it would no longer remain disentangled from difficult decisions, it would not compromise on its independence. More importantly, he said that India has "never been part of an alliance system, nor will it ever be". He added that even the U.S. must look beyond its present alliances, and engage with more multilateral arrangements. Mr. Jaishankar explained that while non-alignment worked for India during the Cold War era between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the fact that India and China share a land boundary would always be a factor in a "new cold war" between the U.S. and China. He spoke of Indo-U.S. cooperation in many fields, and the growing maritime collaboration in particular, but left unsaid the hard reality that military collaboration on land would prove problematic given India's disputed boundary with China, the venue of a nearly three-month-long stand-off between the PLA and the Indian Army.

Mr. Jaishankar's comments are a clear-eyed assessment of India's constraints and avenues for its potential growth. The assertion of India's strategic independence and resistance to joining any alliance comes as a timely reminder amid speculation that tensions with China will push India into a stronger clinch with Washington, which is on its own collision course with Beijing. It is significant that despite multiple references by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to the India-China clashes, the deaths of Indian soldiers at Galwan Valley last month, and his call for India and the U.S. to jointly "counter" China, the government has rightly chosen not to raise its tensions with China in any forum other than bilateral talks with Beijing. Equally significant is the government's outreach to Moscow, including a visit by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and the participation of Mr. Jaishankar in the Russia-India-China trilateral last month, and the External Affairs Minister's comments that India should also seek to build coalitions with "middle powers", such as the European Union and Japan. A time of crisis often clarifies priorities. At a time of a double crisis for India — battling the novel coronavirus pandemic in the country and Chinese aggression at the border — the message from New Delhi is one of a carefully calibrated balance.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **calibrated** (adjective) – carefully assessed /analysed.
- ❖ **non-alignment** (noun) – a term used for an international organization who do not want to officially align themselves with, or against, any major power bloc (group of countries).
- ❖ **wary** (adjective) – cautious, careful, circumspect.
- ❖ **lay out** (phrasal verb) – outline, draw up, formulate.
- ❖ **in the face of** (phrase) – when confronted/faced with; despite, notwithstanding, regardless of.
- ❖ **pull in different directions** (phrase) – to have different purposes that cannot be achieved together.
- ❖ **contention** (noun) – statement, pronouncement, assertion, affirmation.
- ❖ **bygone** (adjective) – past, out of date, outmoded.
- ❖ **multipolarity** (noun) – a system in which power is distributed among three or more countries, alliances, parties, etc.
- ❖ **necessitate** (verb) – require, need, demand.
- ❖ **maritime** (adjective) – of or related to the sea.

- ❖ **climate change** (noun) – a long-term change in the Earth’s climate, or of a region on Earth (Courtesy: NASA).
- ❖ **in its entirety** (phrase) – as a whole, completely, entirely/totally.
- ❖ **disentangle** (verb) – disengage, detach, disconnect.
- ❖ **compromise** (verb) – undermine, weaken, lessen.
- ❖ **look beyond** (verb) – to see a point past someone.
- ❖ **multilateral** (adjective) – involving many different countries.
- ❖ **the Cold War** (noun) – The Cold War was a state of political and military tension after World War II between powers in the Western (Capitalist) Bloc and powers in the Eastern (Soviet) Bloc.
- ❖ **speak of** (verb) – indicate, show, display, demonstrate, reveal.
- ❖ **collaboration** (noun) – cooperation, alliance, partnership.
- ❖ **unsaid** (adjective) – unstated, unmentioned, undeclared.
- ❖ **given** (preposition) – considering, taking into account, bearing in mind.
- ❖ **stand-off** (noun) – deadlock, stalemate, impasse (in a dispute/conflict).
- ❖ **People’s Liberation Army (PLA)** (noun) – People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is the armed forces of the country of China and Communist Party of China (CPC). It is one of the largest military forces in the world.
- ❖ **clear-eyed** (adjective) – far-sighted, sharp, insightful.
- ❖ **assessment** (noun) – evaluation, appraisal, analysis.
- ❖ **constraint** (noun) – restriction, limitation, restraint.
- ❖ **avenue** (noun) – way, path, direction (of approaching a problem).
- ❖ **potential** (adjective) – possible, likely, probable.
- ❖ **assertion** (noun) – contention, declaration, affirmation.
- ❖ **resistance** (noun) – opposition, defiance, confrontation.
- ❖ **timely** (adjective) – opportune, well timed, at the right time, appropriate, prompt.
- ❖ **amid** (preposition) – in the middle of, surrounded by; during.
- ❖ **speculation** (noun) – prediction, guesswork, opinion/thought.
- ❖ **clinch** (noun) – embrace, alliance, collaboration, embracement.
- ❖ **on (a) collision course** (phrase) – if two persons/things are on a collision course (or path), they will end up colliding (coming into conflict with) each other.
- ❖ **valley** (noun) – a low area between hills or mountains typically with a river running through it.
- ❖ **call for** (phrasal verb) – require, publicly ask/necessitate, demand.
- ❖ **counter** (verb) – oppose, resist, tackle, confront, stand up to.
- ❖ **bilateral** (adjective) – involving two groups or countries.
- ❖ **outreach** (noun) – the level of reaching out/activity/effort; involvement.
- ❖ **trilateral** (adjective) – involving three nations/parties/groups.
- ❖ **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, work towards.
- ❖ **middle power** (noun) – middle power is defined as a country that is neither great nor small in terms of international power, capacity, and influence, and demonstrate a propensity (tendency) to promote cohesion and stability in the world system.
- ❖ **novel coronavirus (nCoV)** (SARS-CoV-2) (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. (Courtesy: **WHO**)
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **aggression** (noun) – hostility, belligerence, combativeness, warmongering, hawkishness.

ESCALATING TENSIONS: ON U.S. CLOSING CHINESE MISSION

The downward spiral in U.S.-China ties is bad news for the whole world

The U.S.'s decision to close China's consulate in Houston is an unprecedented escalation in the steadily deteriorating ties between the world's two largest economies. The Trump administration has accused the consulate and other Chinese diplomatic missions in the country of economic espionage, visa fraud and attempted theft of scientific research — allegations that China has denied. It has announced visa restrictions on students, imposed sanctions on Chinese officials over a Hong Kong security law and is reportedly considering a sweeping travel ban on the millions of members of China's ruling Communist Party. The consulate decision is by far the most drastic measure. This is the first time a Chinese mission is being closed in the U.S. since both countries normalised diplomatic relations in 1979. Since the tariff war that President Trump launched in 2018, China has retaliated against every hostile move by the U.S. China made matters worse by providing refuge in its San Francisco consulate to one of the Chinese researchers against whom the U.S. has issued an arrest warrant because she allegedly lied to the authorities about her ties to the Army.

The U.S.-China tensions are no longer about trade and technology. What started as a trade war has snowballed into a larger geopolitical contest between the two superpowers, something the world hasn't seen since the hostile competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. President Trump, who is under attack at home for his handling of the novel coronavirus pandemic, may be finding comfort in ramping up tensions with China in an election year. But what makes the crisis dangerous in the long term is that there is a growing consensus in Washington that a hostile China, resorting to large-scale espionage, poses a serious threat to the U.S.-dominated international order. The Washington establishment, which had fought Trump's overtures towards Russia and several other policy measures, is in line with the President in his confrontational policy towards China, which has already done serious damage to bilateral relations that cannot be reversed easily. Incidentally, the U.S.-China crisis is unfolding at a time when Beijing is also acting more assertively in Asia, picking fights with countries in its neighbourhood, from India to Vietnam and Malaysia. The message from China is that it is ready for a long game of escalation, as long as the U.S. keeps playing it. This is a cyclical trap — measures and countermeasures keep taking ties to new lows with no possibility of an exit. If this deterioration is not arrested immediately, the U.S. and China risk a total breakdown in diplomatic relations. That is bad news for the whole world.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **escalate** (verb) – increase, intensify, become more serious.
- ❖ **mission** (noun) – embassy, consulate; the diplomatic office building in a foreign country where the ambassador & team live and work.
- ❖ **downward** (adjective) – descending, sliding, slipping, falling.
- ❖ **spiral** (noun) – deterioration, decline, degradation.
- ❖ **ties** (noun) – bond, association, relationship.
- ❖ **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
- ❖ **escalation** (noun) – intensification; an increase in the intensity of something.
- ❖ **espionage** (noun) – the act of spying; obtaining secret or confidential (political or military) information of a country and/or disclosing it without the permission of that country; undercover work, infiltration, counter-intelligence.
- ❖ **sanctions** (noun) – action taken, or an order given to force a country to obey international laws by limiting or stopping trade with that country, by not allowing economic aid for that country, etc (Courtesy: VOA Learning English).
- ❖ **National Security law/Bill** (for Hong Kong) (noun) – a draft by the Chinese Legislature under which it will write a new national security law for Hong Kong that would prohibit “acts of political secession (separation from a federation), subversion (overthrow/undermining government), sedition (illegal rebellion against government) that seriously threaten national security and foreign intervention”.

- ❖ **deteriorate** (verb) – decline, degenerate, degrade.
- ❖ **allegation** (noun) – charge, accusation, complaint.
- ❖ **reportedly** (adverb) – supposedly, seemingly, apparently, allegedly.
- ❖ **sweeping** (adjective) – complete, total, extensive, wholesale.
- ❖ **by far** (phrase) – undoubtedly; significantly, noticeably.
- ❖ **measure** (noun) – course of action, action, step, procedure.
- ❖ **normalise** (verb) – modify, alter, regulate, balance.
- ❖ **trade/tariff war** (noun) – a condition in which a country increase tariffs on foreign goods and impose quota restrictions to restrict other countries' trade.
- ❖ **retaliate** (verb) – hit back, counterattack, take revenge.
- ❖ **hostile** (adjective) – opposed, inimical, averse.
- ❖ **refuge** (noun) – protection, shelter, place of safety, place of security.
- ❖ **snowball** (verb) – increase, rise, escalate rapidly.
- ❖ **geopolitical** (adjective) – relating to the study of the geographical factors (a country's position on the earth, size, climate, and natural resources & etc.,) in world politics and inter-state relations.
- ❖ **superpower** (noun) – a nation which is very powerful and possesses military, political or economic might (power) with dominant status on the globe. (like the Soviet Union (erstwhile) or United States of America).
- ❖ **The Cold War** (noun) – The Cold War was a state of political and military tension after World War II between powers in the Western (Capitalist) Bloc and powers in the Eastern (Soviet) Bloc.
- ❖ **at home** (phrase) – at someone's own place (a country, city, town).
- ❖ **ramp up** (phrasal verb) – increase (in amount or number).
- ❖ **growing** (adjective) – increasing, intensifying, amplifying.
- ❖ **consensus** (noun) – an idea or opinion that is shared by all the people in a group, agreement, concurrence.
- ❖ **resort to** (verb) – use, utilize, turn to, have recourse to.
- ❖ **pose** (verb) – raise, ask, put (a question/matter for consideration).
- ❖ **global/world/international order** (noun) – the arrangement of power and authority that provides the system for the conduct of diplomacy and world politics in relation to the entire world.
- ❖ **the establishment** (noun) – the powers that be, the authorities, the system, the ruling class.
- ❖ **overtures** (noun) – approach or proposal/suggestion (made with the intention of starting negotiations).
- ❖ **in line with** (phrase) – in alignment with, in accordance with.
- ❖ **confrontational** (adjective) – hostile, argumentative, aggressive/belligerent.
- ❖ **bilateral** (adjective) – involving two groups or countries.
- ❖ **reverse** (verb) – undo, repeal, cancel; withdraw, take back.
- ❖ **incidentally** (adverb) – by the way, by the bye, coincidentally.
- ❖ **unfold** (verb) – occur, happen, take place.
- ❖ **assertively** (adverb) – forcefully, insistently, arrogantly.
- ❖ **neighbourhood** (noun) – surrounding country.
- ❖ **cyclical** (adjective) – recurrent, recurring, regular, repeated.
- ❖ **trap** (noun) – trick, ploy, deceptive plan.
- ❖ **countermeasure** (noun) – solution, answer, antidote.
- ❖ **deterioration** (noun) – breakdown, degradation, worsening, decline.
- ❖ **arrest** (verb) – stop, halt, end, prevent, restrict.