Geopolitical Realities Favor China

What is the issue?

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- PM Modi is scheduled to visit Beijing soon for the “Shanghai Cooperation Organisation” (SCO) summit.
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- More importantly, an informal bilateral with China (on the sidelines) is on the agenda, which assumes significance in the current global geo-political context.
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What is the emerging geopolitical context in the international arena?

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- In the backdrop of turbulence in global politics and some domestic concerns about India “softening” its China policy, PM Modi is slated to visit China.
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- **Confrontation -** Tensions between major international players has been mounting with the “US (and allies) vs. Russia” standoff arguably getting worse.
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- Both countries have been confronting each other through proxies in major conflict zones like Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan.
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- The recent U.S.-French-British missile strikes in Syria were a significant flare up although it has now emerged that the Russians were intimated in advance.
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- This prompt intimation helped in moving out people and equipment in time.
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- But there is always a serious risk of miscalculation at the local level that might spark off a direct confrontation between the major powers.
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- **US Sanctions -** The U.S. has passed a new law called “Countering America’s

Adversaries through Sanctions Act" (CAATSA).
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- This empowers the US President to impose sanctions on any company/entity which has business ties with a country that is already facing US sanctions.
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- Notably, Russia is currently under US sanctions - which implies that counties like India, which have deep defence ties with Russia, could also be implicated.
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- Significantly, US had recently widened its sanctions ambit by cracking down on Russian multinationals whose stocks are internationally traded.
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- **China's Detente -** While the U.S. has been increasing pressure on Russia, it has strikingly started soft peddling its dealing with China.
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- Notably, India is being asked sternly to make efforts to address its trade surplus of about $25 billion with the U.S. repeatedly.
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- But on the contrary, China holds a humongous $375 billion trade surplus with the US, which is now being meekly requested to addressing this issue.
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- More at odds is the fact that 2017 alone saw China enhance its trade surplus with the US by about $28 billion.
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- **Agreements -** USA's decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), has effectively benefited China in the "Pacific Rim".
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- This has given China more leverage in negotiating the "Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership" (RCEP) to its advantage.
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- Notably, RCEP is being envisioned as a trade block comprising of the "ASEAN + six" countries of which India is also a part.
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- **Unpredictability –** Uncertainty prevailing in the seemingly impulsive U.S. foreign policy is driving even its closest allies to hedge their options.
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- Japanese PM Abe and Mr. Xi are to exchange visits soon, which is a significant development for the countries that were at the brink of war some 5 years ago.
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- Japan (like India) is also concerned about China's global assertiveness and the geopolitical implications of its "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI).
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- Yet, Mr. Abe seems to have seen merit in engaging with China as US is has

been very inconsistent in its commitment to the region.
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- China on the other hand derives a positive from the fact that a longstanding stated close US ally is open to engaging with it on significant domains.
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What are the implications for India?

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- The escalation of the US Russia acrimony could put India under intense pressure, which could prove detrimental in sustaining its defence arsenal.
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- Russia has already upgraded its defence ties Pakistan and China, and it could become bilaterally catastrophic for India to disengage with Russia.
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- **Chinese Outreach -** As the Russia-China axis has strengthened lately, it is prudent for India to engage now China to hedge its diplomatic manoeuvres.
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- Additionally, it is also a positive that, the US policy focus is presently engaged elsewhere, and that the Chinese frontier is seeing a worldwide easing.
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- **Core Interests -** A softening stand towards China doesn't mean that India will have to compromise on its core economic and strategic interests.
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- We can't overlook China's foray into the Indian neighbourhood, the border skirmishes, and the China-Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC).
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- But we can seek to cooperate on other areas despite these thorny issues with, which could eventually help in resolving these core concerns too.
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- While asymmetries in relationships are inevitable, it is the responsibility of the policymakers to address them – which is often better when done discreetly.
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- **Public Outreach -** The course of India-China relations in the past couple of years had created a politicised narrative of bilateral frictions.
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- CPEC, Doklam, NSG, BRI and confrontations at the UNSC have all been areas led to the build-up of a strong anti-China opinion among the Indian masses.
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- There is hence a public disconnect to India’s current political outreach towards China, which needs to be addressed through people-to-people engagements.
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- The geopolitical reality demands India to maintain an equidistant engagement will all major powers for the time being.
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Source: The Hindu

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