India and Non-Alignment Policy - A Rethink

What is the issue?

- In separate statements, Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar laid out India's world view in the face of global challenges.
- In this context, it is imperative to look into the remarks made on non-alignment policy.

What is the current global scenario?

- There is a perceptible repositioning of the US; its influence and powers are not as they used to be.
- This has allowed many other countries to play more autonomous roles.
- It does not affect India as much because India was never part of an alliance system and it will never be.
- But countries who depended more on the U.S. are finding themselves in a place to take a call on many issues.
- However, the conditions are opening spaces for middle powers like India, Japan, the European Union and others.

What are the observations made on non-alignment?

- Non-alignment was a term of a particular era and geopolitical landscape.
- One aspect was independence, which remains a factor of continuity for India.
- Otherwise, non-alignment is an old concept today.
- Multipolarity in the world necessitates India to take a definite and proactive stand.
- It might even have to take "risks" on issues such as connectivity, maritime security, terrorism and climate change.
- However, certainly, India does not reject non-alignment in its entirety.
- Non-alignment worked for India during the Cold War era between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.
- But 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.
- So, India would no longer remain disentangled from difficult decisions.
- But it would not compromise on its independence either.
- More importantly, India has "never been part of an alliance system, nor will it ever be".

What about India-US ties?

- Mr. Jaishankar said that even the U.S. must look beyond its present alliances and engage with more multilateral arrangements.
- He spoke of Indo-U.S. cooperation in many fields, and the growing maritime collaboration in particular.
- But he left unsaid the hard reality that military collaboration with US on land would prove problematic given India's disputed boundary with China.
- There were multiple references by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to the India-China clashes at Galwan Valley.
- There were calls from him for India and the U.S. to jointly "counter" China.
- Despite this, India 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 Russia.
- This includes Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's visit and the participation of Mr. Jaishankar in the Russia-India-China trilateral recently.

What is the significance?

- A time of crisis often clarifies priorities.
- India faces a double crisis of battling the novel coronavirus pandemic and Chinese aggression at the border.
- At this crucial point of time, the message from New Delhi is one of a carefully calibrated balance.
- The statements are a clear-eyed assessment of India's constraints and avenues for its potential growth.
- This is a clear assertion of India's strategic independence and resistance to joining any alliance.
- It comes as a timely reminder amid speculation that tensions with China will push India into stronger ties with the US.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering