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Stormy Weather Awaits India in 2019

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(The editorial is based on the article “Stormy weather awaits India in 2019” which appeared in The Hindu for 31st January 2019. In this editorial, we’ll see fast-changing global orders and mixed challenges for India.)

As the world enters 2019, the global outlook looks gloomy on the front of changing diplomatic contours in the world. Amid these rapid changes, India prepares for the general election this year, and all signs point to 2019 being a difficult year. Whether this would directly impact the poll outcome is uncertain, but the country needs to remain alert to unexpected developments. The country already faces a difficult external and internal situation and there is also a need to show more proficiency on the diplomatic front.

Global Disorder has become a Dominant Imperative of Unsteady Developments across the world.

- Nations are today working at cross-purposes across the globe.
- **A global leadership vacuum is leading to chaos** concerning rules governing the international order.
 - For Example, **U.S. President Donald Trump’s utterances and actions are provoking strong counter-reactions**, especially from China and Russia.
 - Mr. Trump has threatened to pull out of a major arms control treaty with Russia. Russia has also been talking of building stronger deterrence. **Cold War 2 seems for real now.**

Global Diplomacy On different Dimensions

- **Russia**
 - **Russia is vigorously pursuing its focal point to Asia** and for greater influence in Eurasia.
 - It has deepened its partnership with China, and enhanced relations with Japan and South Korea. **Growing tensions in the Sea of Azov (following Russia's seizure of Ukraine's ships) could well lead to a major conflagration** between Russia and the West.
- **China**
 - **China is consolidating its position in Asia.** In addition to its strategic partnership with Russia, China has mended fences with Japan as well(*China-Japan relationship became better*).
 - Its Belt and Road Initiative has become the most potent weapon in China's armory, with Vietnam and Japan endorsing this concept. **India finds itself increasingly isolated in Asia as a result.**
 - Economic portents during 2018 for most of the world proved highly daunting. The most challenging was the specter of an all-embracing U.S.-China trade war.
 - This had triggered highly unsettled conditions, and the situation was further aggravated by signs of a weakening Chinese economy.
 - **In 2018, China had initiated certain moves to create a China-Myanmar Economic Corridor on the lines of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).**
- **U.S**
 - **The likelihood of the U.S. moving into a period of slower long-term growth,** one that is likely to continue for a fairly long time, is aggravating this situation. India cannot hope to remain insulated from these trends.
 - **At the beginning of 2019, it is amply evident that politics is conflicting with business across the world.** Hence, normal economic calculations are getting disrupted.

- **Pakistan**

- **This year could see a further consolidation of the 'all weather friendship' of China-Pakistan.** During 2018, Pakistan facilitated China's involvement in Afghanistan (and also succeeded in co-opting Russia to be a party to talks with the Afghan Taliban). The CPEC having weathered quite a few storms in 2018, seems well set to progress this further in 2019.
- The prospects of India-Pakistan relations improving, on the other hand, are extremely limited. Cross-border terror attacks are likely to continue, as also sponsorship of terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed. Where India will face even rougher weather, is in Afghanistan, where the Afghan state is perilously close to imploding. India has been kept out of talks with the Afghan Taliban by all countries concerned, including the U.S., China, and Russia, apart from Pakistan. This is making India's position here highly invidious.

Mixed challenges for India

- The strengthening of the **Russia-China strategic relationship** and the recent warmth in China-Japan relations could impact India's relations with both countries.
- Notwithstanding the warmth displayed in public by the leaders of **India and Russia, and India and Japan**, the character of our relations with these two countries could **undergo a change**.
- The outlook for India in the rest of South Asia is also mixed. India will need to work harder in 2019 to check China from weaning away its neighbors, including Nepal and Bangladesh, with offers of economic and military aid.
- **The return of Sheikh Hasina as Prime Minister after the general elections in Bangladesh has been a welcome relief.**
- India retrieved its position in the Maldives. It also succeeded in re-establishing its influence in Bhutan.
- The more challenging internal security problems ahead will be Kashmir and the Northeast. In 2018, the situation in Kashmir sharply deteriorated, and the year witnessed some of the highest levels of violence since 1989.
- **The deadlock between the Jammu and Kashmir administration and militants is unlikely to be resolved.** President's rule has made little headway in sorting out the conflict-prone situation.
- **Left extremist violence went up marginally in 2018, but the movement remained circumscribed within a core area in Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Jharkhand.** Ideologically, the movement has remained vibrant, and in 2019, both ideological and militant aspects will need deft handling.
- The Chinese Navy is also poised to challenge India's position in the Indian Ocean.

- **China is preparing to outflank India by seeking control of the Kyaukpyu Port on the Arakan Coast in Myanmar,** and planning a canal (the Kra canal), connecting the Andaman Sea with the Gulf of Thailand.

Considering these difficult external and internal situation, peace in 2019 may prove elusive. On the diplomatic front, India will need to be more capable. 2019 will not only be about India's elections – the world is changing even as we speak. India needs to step off the treadmill and on to the escalator.