



India-US Relations

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Recently, the **US President, Donald Trump visited India**. While only three of the nine US Presidents during 1947-2000 visited India, every President in the last two decades has visited India at least once.

Many **reasons** could be ascribed to the higher frequency of visits — **a shift in global geopolitics in the post-Cold War era, India's economic ascent, the rise of an assertive China, and India's place on the global high table**. Relations between India and the US have transformed from being **Estranged democracies (during the cold war) to Strategic partners (in the Post-cold war era)**.

Note:

- **Estranged democracies:** US and India, though being the oldest democracy and largest democracy respectively, remained detached during the cold war.
- **Strategic partners:** US and India, in the post-cold war era (after 1991) turned into strategic allies.

During the cold war, India got tilted towards the Soviet Union after If the 1971 Friendship Treaty, which was a response to the continuing U.S. tilt towards Pakistan and the beginnings of convergence between US and China. At present, India and US convergence is due to potentially hegemonic China in the Indo-Pacific region.

In this context, the visit of the US president further cements the **strategic convergence** between India and the US.

Key Takeaways From the Visit

- The agreement signed for defence purchases worth \$3-billion, including **American helicopters (MH-60 Romeo helicopters)**, has led to both sides signalling more cooperation in defence, military exercises and technology sharing.
- MoU signed for **Petronet to invest in American gas company Tellurian**.

- A commercial agreement for **Westinghouse to build six nuclear reactors in Andhra Pradesh.**
- Along with these two leaders shared strong language in references aimed at **China's hegemony in the South China Sea** as well as the **Belt and Road Initiative.**
- However, there was no agreement on the trade deal.

Divergence In India-US relations

- **Trade Deal:** **Trade has been a major bone of contention between India and the US.** India has been referred by the US, as “**tariff king**” that imposes “**tremendously high**” import duties. Donald Trump formulated **America First policy**, on the economic dimension, it means reducing the U.S. 's trade deficits with major trading partners, including India. In pursuance of this:
 - In June 2019, the Trump administration decided to terminate India's benefits under the **Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) scheme**, which provides preferential, duty-free access for over \$6 billion worth of products exported from this country to the US.
 - Removal from the GSP list amidst rising trade tensions prompted India to finally impose retaliatory tariffs on several American imports. **This made the US approach the WTO against India.**
 - The office of the **US Trade Representative (USTR)** has underlined India's measures to restrict companies from sending personal data of its citizens outside the country as a “key” barrier to digital trade.
 - Also, the US has long demanded greater access to American agriculture and dairy products. For India, protecting its domestic agriculture and dairy interests was a **major reason to walk out of the RCEP agreement.**
- **US-Pakistan Equation:** US has softened its position on Pakistan in the last seven months, due to the role Pakistan can play in the **Afghan deal** (between the US and the Taliban), likely to be signed on February 29, 2020.
In return, Pakistan wants the US to engage with India on the Kashmir issue (**internationalising the Kashmir issue**). Whereas India maintains the view that Kashmir is a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan and no third party can be engaged in it.
- **Internal Issues in India:** India-US strong strategic partnership is also based on an idea of “**shared values**” of democracy, rule of law, religious freedom and protection of minorities. However, the revocation of Article 370, the new citizenship law and the NRC is testing this “shared values” principle.

Though the US president maintained that these matters are internal to India, criticism from the US Congress and some parts of US civil society is pushing the US administration to tell India to bring Kashmir to normalcy and not go ahead with the new citizenship law followed by the NRC.

Convergence in Indo-US relations

In the post-cold war era, India's relationship with the US on defence and strategic issues has strengthened. This can be reflected in the following:

- A foundational military agreement that allows for the sharing of encrypted communications and equipment (**COMCASA- Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement**).
- A change in U.S. export control laws that places India in a privileged category of NATO and non-NATO U.S. allies.
- The signing of an Industrial Security Annex that will allow for greater collaboration among the two countries' private defence industries.
- A new **'2+2' foreign and defence ministers dialogue**.
- The bilateral Strategic Energy Partnership was launched in April 2018 under which India has started importing crude and LNG from the US. Now, the US is India's sixth-largest source of crude oil imports and hydrocarbons.
- Inauguration of the first India-US tri-service military exercise and expansion of existing military exercises.
- Inclusion of India and South Asia in the US Maritime Security Initiative.
- These intense engagement has helped achieve robust support from the US against terrorism.
 - This was evident after the Pulwama attack, leading to the designation of Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist under UN Security Council Resolution 1267.
 - Also, placing Pakistan on the grey-list of the **Financial Action Task Force**.
- The US under its Pivot to Asia policy views India as an ideal balancer to check the aggressive rise of China. Therefore, the US has formulated the concept of Indo-Pacific to counter China in the South China Sea and the Indian ocean.
- The US has designated India as an integral part of the **Indo-pacific** narrative by the conception of **Quad**.

Way Forward

- Despite the historic nuclear deal (2008), civilian nuclear cooperation has not taken off, but the agreement with Westinghouse to build six nuclear reactors will finally bring US nuclear energy on Indian soil.
- In order to counter China in the maritime domain, India needs to fully engage with the US and other partners in the Indo-pacific region, in order to preserve the freedom of navigation and the rules-based order.
- In international politics, there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, only permanent interests in such a scenario India must continue to pursue its foreign policy of **strategic hedging**.

India-US relation remains critical for the shaping of world order in the 21st century. In order to realise the full potential of relations, the two governments must now strive to complete the unfinished agreements and set the course for a **Comprehensive Strategic Global Partnership**.

Drishti Mains Question

In the 21st century, India-US relations have found many reasons for strategic convergence. However, there is also a pressing need to weed out the divergences. Analyse.