



India-US Relationship

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This article is based on “The operative word must be bilateralism” which was published in The Hindu on 17/11/2019. It talks about the changing nature of the India-U.S. relationship.

Global politics is changing rapidly and it has its effects on global relationships as well. Now the focus of the nations have shifted to **unilateralism, protectionism and isolationism** from **peace, joint cooperation, multilateralism and liberalism** usually propagated by institutions such as the **United Nations, the World Trade Organisation and the International Court of Justice**.

- Global politics is disturbed by the disruptions caused by the **trade war between the US-China and Brexit** impacting other nations' relations with them and with each other. India also stands at a crossroads in terms of its foreign policy approach in these turbulent times.
- India has to make **crucial decisions** in such times to sustain and the options available are-
 - Continue with the **time-tested stable policy of non-alignment and strategic autonomy**.
 - **Follow unilateralism and be a permanent treaty ally** of one of the superpowers.
 - Forge new relations and explore fresh territories by **adopting the strategy of multi-alignment and transactional autonomy**.

Relationship Dynamics

- It can be elaborated into three main categories-
 - **Good Phase**- It is linked to the historic terms like the **U.S. civil nuclear deal**, the ongoing **defence cooperation and the signing of “Foundational Defence Agreements”** which are the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)**, the **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** and the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA)** etc.
 - **Bad Phase**- It is linked with the current trade challenges, the **U.S.’s hyphenation of India with China in its trade war** and its **call for the removal of the ‘developing country’ tag assigned by the WTO.**
 - **Ugly Phase**- It was when the **U.S. sent its fleet towards India to assist Pakistan during the 1971 war.**
- The good outweighs the other two but a **sense of scepticism** remains because of **India’s multilateral outreach**, especially with respect to the procurement of defence material from Russia and Indian military’s presence in Afghanistan.
- India also needs to remain mindful of the **unpredictability and inherent contradictions in U.S. foreign policy** and, at the same time, **capitalise on U.S. ‘isolationism and retrenchment’** by maintaining its time-tested policy of non-alignment and strategic autonomy.

Contradictions in the U.S.’s Outlook

- The recent **abandonment of Kurds**, who assisted the Americans in fighting the Islamic State, **by Trump administration** should be kept in mind by the other nations. India must be prepared, in case U.S. suddenly withdraws its forces from Afghanistan, which could lead to a complete takeover by the Taliban, with **potential repercussions on India’s northern front.**
- With respect to **Pakistan, U.S.’s policies seems very unclear and confusing** often creating misleading information. For example, the ever changing views of the U.S. on Pakistan like calling it a **“friend who he does not need”** to a **“friend in need”** even after being aware of Pakistan’s ties with terrorism.
- U.S. **campaigns for Iran’s nuclear deal in 2015**, then **withdrew** itself from the accord in **2018** and has **now adopted a blanket sanction policy with relation to any nation dealing in oil transactions with Iran.**
- India needs to be careful because of all such examples and **U.S.’s expectations from India to forego its age-old friendship with Russia.**

Possible Solutions

- India must ensure that **India-U.S. bilateralism survives the ill effects of unilateralism** without compromising India’s friendly position.

- U.S. needs to realise that **India cannot keep distance from the globalisation, regional alliances and emerging trade opportunities**. However, at the same time it can be assured that **India will never take sides hurting U.S. interests** while taking real strategic and economic bilateral decisions.
- India should not feel distracted and **focus on multi-alignment** both with the U.S. and Russia, especially in terms of getting a waiver **under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act in purchasing the S-400 missile system from Russia**.
- On the **trade front**, India can be an **effective supplier rather than being an outsourcing hub if compared to China**. Strategically also, the U.S. views India as a platform to **contain China's hegemony**. India sees it as an **opportunity for economic expansion**, with the U.S. being an equal partner.
- China's cautious pragmatism along with assertiveness needs to be factored into the decision-making process of both India and the USA. Both need to forge a **broad-based and productive political partnership** for that.

Way Forward

- It is the official right of the sovereign nation-states to make **formal ties and bonds based on mutual interdependence**.
- India and the U.S. should **strengthen their relationship on global and regional levels** and look for **issues of common interest** which can provide enormous opportunities for both countries to work closely in **reshaping the global political order**.
- Both nations have the **potential to grow together without comprising India's situation due to unilateralism** by benefitting of mutual interests and understanding each other better.

Drishti Mains Question

Analyse India-USA relationships with reference to the rapidly changing global politics.