India-US Relationship

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 propogated 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. campaigned 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.