



India's Western Pivot

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This article is based on **“Act west, think east: India is sealing relationships with US, UK, Europe after the double reality check from China”** which was published in The Times of India on 16/05/2021. It talks about the growing relationship between India and western countries.

In the recent months, India took two big steps in the domain of foreign policy viz. crafting a post-Brexit relationship with the UK and reinvigorating the India-Europe relationship.

Improved trade is the bedrock of both the deals. This is significant after India decided to exit the RCEP in 2019 and calls for Atmanirbhar Bharat and resilient supply chains became the dominant narrative. Moreover, India and the US are also negotiating a mini trade deal.

Apart from trade engagement, India's strategic convergence with the EU, UK and US signals the formation of India's western pivot. This growing relationship between India and the West is also a result of rising China.

In this scenario where the global economy has been hit by the pandemic, India must seriously consider reforms that make the relationship with the western countries permanent in nature.

- **Acting Swiftly After Brexit:** Taking advantage of Brexit, the enhanced trade partnership between India and the UK will start with market access to confidence-building measures (CBMs) before graduating to an Free-Trade Agreement (FTA).
- **Reinvigorating India-EU Relationship:** In a recently held virtual summit, India and the EU have decided to resume negotiations for a comprehensive trade agreement. Further, the summit witnessed the launching of an ambitious “connectivity partnership” in digital, energy, transport, and people-to-people sectors, enabling the two to pursue sustainable joint projects in regions spanning from Africa, Central Asia to the wider Indo-Pacific.

- **Engaging With Independent European Countries:** For years, India has treated the EU as an anomaly, preferring to build independent ties with France, Germany, the UK etc.
 - For example, France has become India's go-to partner in Europe, cutting across sectors such as defence, strategic, nuclear and multilateral spheres, to the extent that it can almost replace Russia.
 - The Nordics countries are India favourites in areas like smart cities, 5G, AI and semiconductors.
 - Further, India's interest in things like clean water, sanitation, and smart cities naturally gravitated towards European countries that had solutions on tap.
- **Quad:** As a member of the Quad and at the geopolitical heart of the Indo-Pacific, India is a strategic opportunity for the West.

Challenges Involved

- **A Rigid EU:** The UK deal is likely to be much faster because of vested interests on both sides. However, the EU is much more rigid and more demanding of reciprocity.
- **Chinese Lesson:** The US and Europe were collectively instrumental in the growth of China.
 - Their idea was a prosperous China would become a more democratic China, not a threatening China.
 - However, today China's actions are a prime strategic challenge for these countries.
 - So, India should not expect that its transformation as a result of its engagement with the EU, US and UK will be anything but hard won.
- **Resistance From China:** China sees Quad as a small geopolitical grouping that wants to divide Asia and contain China.

Due to this narrative, preventing the emergence of any countervailing Asian coalition is very much the top strategic priority for China now.

Way Forward

- **Building Domestic Consensus:** For closer convergence between India and the western countries, India should bridge the supply-chain gaps and build domestic consensus on the big issues: Goods, services, agriculture, government procurement, international arbitration.
- **Alignment With Middle Powers:** India should supplement its partnership with the US with a network of multilateral groups with other middle powers, such as the India-Australia-Japan forum and the trilateral dialogue with France and Australia.
- **Natural Relationship:** India is already a robust democracy and a market economy. Further, India can leverage a lot of its strengths: Technology advances; a western-oriented pool of 21st century talent; a climate change believer to strengthen its relationship with western countries.

Conclusion

From Indian perspective, collaboration with the western countries can provide regional stability, promote peace, bring economic growth and enhance sustainable development.

Drishti Mains Question

India's recent foreign policy developments reflect the formation of a western pivot. Discuss.
