

THE OPERATIVE WORD MUST BE BILATERALISM

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - USA

Global politics is changing at a fast pace. Thus a setting where there was a chariot of peace, joint co-operation, multilateralism and liberalism whose strings were controlled by institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Court of Justice has now become one of warhorses pulling in different directions to embrace unilateralism, protectionism and isolationism. The global order is now dipping into a vortex of disruptions largely caused by the United States, China and Brexit. India also stands at the crossroads in terms of its foreign policy approach. It has a crucial decision to make in terms of the journey ahead whether to: continue with its time-tested stable policy of non-alignment and strategic autonomy; join the bandwagon of unilateralism and be a permanent treaty ally of one of the superpowers, and, finally, embark upon a calculated trip with the objective of expansion in terms of forging new relations and exploring fresh territories by adopting a strategy of “multi-alignment and transactional autonomy”.

The answers are complex. But one domain of foreign policy which requires a serious relook is the India-U.S. relationship because the backstage reality of a no-trade deal, and continuing U.S.-Pakistan bonhomie, among other irritants, have taken the wind out of the sails of the friendship between the leaders of the two nations as seen at the recent “Howdy Modi” event in Houston. Cross-currents in the India-U.S. relationship cannot be ruled out.

India-U.S. ties have shades of the good, the bad and the ugly. The good is linked to historic terms, a key example being the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal, the ongoing defence cooperation of the past decade worth billions of dollars and the signing of three “foundational defence agreements”, i.e. the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation. The bad is 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. And the ugly is when during the 1971 war, the U.S. sent its fleet towards India to assist Pakistan.

The good outweighs the bad and the ugly but a sense of the current mood at Capitol Hill that preceded the high-profile visit to Houston in September seems loaded with scepticism as far as India’s multilateral outreach is concerned, especially in connection with the procurement of defence material from Russia and some unreal expectations such as India having military boots on the ground in Afghanistan. In this context, before taking any decision on the future trajectory of India-U.S. dynamics, the Indian establishment must 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”.

The contradictions in the U.S.’s outlook are many. First, the recent and abrupt abandonment by the Trump administration of the Kurds who assisted the Americans in fighting the Islamic State both in terms of resources and manpower should serve as a warning sign to India in terms of its Afghanistan strategy. The current Indian dispensation must prepare for the eventuality of a sudden withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan which could lead to a complete takeover by the Taliban, with potential repercussions on India’s northern front. Second, with respect to Pakistan, there is confused signalling from the official “advisers” of the White House, often creating a fog of uncertainty over stated policy. For example, Jim Mattis, former U.S. Secretary of Defence has openly lambasted Pakistan (in his latest book) even as Mr. Trump who was till

very recently calling Pakistan a “friend who he does not need” is now projecting Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan as his “friend in need” (on account of America’s Afghan ‘ejection plan’) without realising Pakistan’s bond with terrorism. Third, the 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 qua any nation dealing in oil transactions with Iran. With such a track record what is the guarantee that the U.S., which now expects India to forego its age-old friendship with Russia, will not start transactions with them later, leaving India out in the cold?

Despite these contradictions and challenges, a number of opportunities in the new world order await India. The Prime Minister must ensure that India-U.S. bilateralism survives the axe of unilateralism without sacrificing India’s “sweet spot” and tag of being “everyone’s friend”. Mr. Trump needs to realise that India at this juncture cannot afford to get derailed from the tracks of globalisation, regional alliances, trade opportunities and, at the same time, be convinced that India will never take sides hurting U.S. interests in real strategic and economic bilateral terms. When the U.S. withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty signed with Russia in 1987, the comment by U.S. Defence Secretary Mark Esper that the “U.S. is looking to deploy more missiles in Asia” has led to chatter about the start of another arms race. However, India cannot afford to get dragged into this and must 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, instead of China, can be an effective supplier rather than being an outsourcing hub. With respect to the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. views it as a platform to contain China hegemony. India, on the other hand, 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 New Delhi and Washington. What India and the U.S. could do is to forge a broad-based and productive political partnership. After all, mutual interdependence of countries is based on formal prerogatives of sovereign states. The convergence of perception between India and the U.S. on global and regional issues of common interest provides enormous opportunities for both countries to work closely in reshaping the global political order. The friendship has the potential to grow stronger by the day without sacrificing India’s global positioning at the altar of unilateralism.

Jaiveer Shergill is a Supreme Court lawyer and National Spokesperson of the Indian National Congress

You have reached your limit for free articles this month.

Register to The Hindu for free and get unlimited access for 30 days.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading our articles without intrusion from advertisements.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

Support quality journalism - [Subscribe to The Hindu Digital](#)

Please enter a valid email address.

How an idea for a 'perfect Mumbai feature story' failed to materialise

Subscribe to The Hindu now and get unlimited access.

Already have an account? [Sign In](#)

Sign up for a 30-day free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Support The Hindu's new online experience with zero ads.

Already a user? [Sign In](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

Crackin