

# THE USA AND INDIA, AT A CROSSROADS OR IN AN IMPASSE?

*American policies under the second Trump administration have caused political, economic, and social turmoil in the USA, and many other countries. India, had been, since the 1990s (when the country began to turn away from socialist economic policies), engaged a slow and gradual process of convergence with the USA in strategic and commercial terms, but it has been jolted by the aggressive tariffs and new trade barriers raised by President Trump and by the latter's deliberate and open gestures in support of Pakistan, which contradict his previous signals and pronouncements. The war that began on 28 February 2026 with the joint US – Israeli attack on Iran has further clouded prospects for stable relations between the two countries.*

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## INTRODUCTION: A NEW STORM BETWEEN WOULD-BE FRIENDS

**T**ump has made no mystery of the fact that he regards India as a state that places obstructions on US exports and sales and is too close, according to him, to Russia and other adversaries of the USA. (<https://www.financialexpress.com/business/obnoxious-none28091monetary-trade-barriers-what-donald-trump-said-about-india-3931556/>)

Such American grudges against New Delhi's successive governments are not new but they had been put on the backburner as the prior Democrats Clinton, Obama and Biden sought to bring India closer in the economic and geopolitical domain and, therefore, balanced their occasional criticism of the country on various grounds (human rights, economic and trade policies, alleged domineering role in South Asia) with encouraging comments and cordial allusions to the 'natural convergence between the world's two largest democracies'.

The Republican President G W Bush (the younger Bush) was unusually friendly to India, seen in the White House and Congress as a potential ally and supporter of US interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) against Chinese expansionism. In the aftermath of the '9/11 attacks' on US soil on 11 September 2001, the declaration of a 'war on terror' by the US and its allies had as a corollary the desire to enlist India's backing against Muslim radical movements and states, although Pakistan soon became an essential (albeit unreliable) partner in the operations against Afghanistan and the wider region, making relations with India a lower priority even though an Indo-US nuclear deal (the so-called '123 Agreement') was signed in 2005 to allow for full cooperation between the two countries in the nuclear area and remove some restrictions linked to India's refusal to sign the non-proliferation treaty.

The growing size, prosperity, and political weight of the Indian community in North America and its increasing role in US governance, administration and corporate leadership had earlier brought the two countries (long connected by language, post-colonial affinities, and kindred Anglo-Saxon institutions) nearer in so many ways. Much of the Indian upper middle class came under strong US cultural and political influence, even before Independence, and regarded the United States as the best nation to emigrate, and resettle in because of the quality of life, high salaries, educational and professional opportunities. Nevertheless, the coming to power of the BJP government headed by Narendra Modi in 2014

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somewhat alienated the Indian State from the American Liberal (Democrat) Establishment and electorate that generally see the current Delhi dispensation as 'Hindu-fascist' and 'anti-Muslim', in contrast to the deep-rooted and popular but superficial image—or cliché—of a Gandhian, non-violent, multi-religious and poor India.

On the Conservative Christian side of the American political spectrum, the old prejudices against 'Hindu polytheism', often verbalised as 'caste, cows and curry', never went away and got a new lease of life as the prominence of Indian

immigrants, nationalised or simply established in the USA, triggered jealousies and suspicions in the deteriorating social and economic climate of the American republic. Books like Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) and *Who Are We?* (2004) revived the sense that US ethno-religious-cultural identity was under threat and that Indians in America, among other recent arrivals, were undermining the unity and original Judeo-Christian identity of the country whereas India, as a rising power and the world's most populous country, posed a long-term threat to American supremacy, especially because it refused to enter the US global alliance system and maintained independent relations with perceived adversaries such as Russia, Iran and China.

India's role as a co-founder of the BRIC in 2006 (which became BRICS with the accession of South Africa in 2009) and its entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2017 did nothing to dispel the misgivings that a part of America's elites entertained about the veteran leader of the despised Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), (seen in the West as Soviet-backed) which now to some extent represents and guides the 'Global South'.

Trump's second election and his presidential decisions since then, in a way, manifest the widespread American resentment about the changing world order and desire to restore US primacy by all means.

India seems to be taken aback by the sudden hardening of the American position, illustrated by Trump's uncomplimentary comments about India's economy and commercial regulations. (<https://www.ft.com/content/390be64a-1527-4f71-a322-59af41133914>) The gradual abandonment of many socialistic provisions of the post-British 'License Raj' by India since 1991 are not sufficient to win the favour of American administration looking for big importers of its agricultural products that China is gradually replacing with other suppliers in response to the hostile US dispositions and punitive tariffs. ([https://www.business-standard.com/world-news/china-trade-war-food-security-trump-tariffs-agriculture-125030500835\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/world-news/china-trade-war-food-security-trump-tariffs-agriculture-125030500835_1.html)) Yet, protecting the Indian agriculture from imports is a non-negotiable commitment for any Indian government that wishes to stay in power, given that the livelihood of half of the population depends on the agricultural sector, numerically dominated by small, subsistence farmers. The preservation of economic and alimentary sovereignty is a pillar of India's national policy, broadly shared across the political spectrum. Trump, on the other hand, believes as a typical American capitalist, that America's interests must come first, and that refusing to accept his deal proposals, or rather to submit to his instructions, is deeply humiliating and

tantamount to a betrayal. The long-standing, polite but misleading claim from some quarters in both nations that India and the USA are allies has led some American policymakers to assume that a sense of loyalty should make New Delhi accommodate the 'Big Brother' in Washington because the United States has had no relations between equals with anyone since the disintegration of the USSR and considers its 'friends' to be subordinates who have little choice to disagree with its priorities.

#### FROM SERVICE CENTRE FOR IT TO MAKE-IN-INDIA

**F**or almost 30 years India has been the world's software and digital service centre, providing the back office of many corporations located all over the planet. (<https://www.india-briefing.com/news/india-back-office-world-india-software-hr-digitalmarketing-19476.html>) Despite the enviable reputation, expertise and considerable financial resources that this status has given to the country, it has increased its financial and technological dependence on other nations, especially the USA and led it to export some of its best intellectual and technical talent pool (unflatteringly called 'high tech' coolies by some Indian commentators) but not to become autonomous in the

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manufacturing of the basic components of the IT revolution. ([https://www.unm.edu/~varmal/print/Tech per cent 20Coolies.pdf](https://www.unm.edu/~varmal/print/Tech%20per%20cent%20Coolies.pdf)) India for example does not produce almost any semiconductors, and only now is the government trying to catch up in this sector by setting up fabrics and plants, and attracting foreign manufacturers. (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/semiconductor-mission-india-steps-up-chip-drive-revolution-athens-pace-with-major-investments-talent-push/articleshow/123077228.cms>) While it is probably too late to rival the leaders in the field such as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, China, and the USA, this effort has attracted the unwelcome attention of the US administration which does not necessarily welcome the arrival of a new contender in strategic technological areas in which its leadership is already being challenged. (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/siladityaray/2025/05/15/trump-says-he-doesnt-want-apple-to-expand-manufacturing-in-india/>) Trump's very public interventions to dissuade the giants of American digital industry from opening manufacturing facilities

in India were followed by high tariffs on Indian exports of software to the USA. (<https://leasexpense.com/blogs/are-tariffs-by-trump-affecting-the-indian-software-market/>) Those tariffs were conditionally lowered to 18 per cent from 50 per cent under the Interim deal announced on 6 February 2026, pending the conclusion of a final bilateral trade agreement but the US administration reserves the right to impose higher tariffs if India does not fulfill certain arbitrary conditions including the total cessation of oil purchases from Russia, to be replaced by imports from the USA and Venezuela, according to Trump's proclamation.

Regarding India's foreign economic and trade policies, the US administration is on a collision course with the BRICS that it wishes to dismantle before the latter can pose a greater threat to the Greenback's global dominance (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/7/donald-trump-threatens-un-american-brics-countries-with-10-percent-tariff>) and is working to break up China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and prevent the completion of the North-South Corridor between Russia, Central Asia, Iran and Iraq while wooing India and Middle Eastern states with the prospect of IMEC, an alternative corridor between India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel that is expected to be under US control and supervision. (*US, Israeli and EU backing for the IMEC Project: <https://www.imec.international/>*)

Given these facts, it appears that American and Indian interests are divergent in various areas, in terms of protection of domestic markets and manufacturing, currency use (India seeks to maximise trade in national currencies—in rupees as well—while the Trump administration has stated that the maintenance of the dollar hegemony is its paramount objective) and also regarding the global order they envision: India aspires to and works for multipolarity while the US cannot accept the loss of its hitherto unipolar primacy which Trump redefines as 'America First'. Contrary to American isolationists and libertarians who interpret this slogan as calling for the United States to mind its own business at home and eschew what George Washington called 'foreign entanglements', Trump shows by his actions that he wants to restore the nearly global primacy that his country won at the end of the Second World War. (*President Washington's farewell address: <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/george-washington-farewell-address-1796>*) His ambitions to annex Canada and Greenland as well as the Panama Canal and his attempts to force recalcitrant Latin American states like Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela into submission evince his adherence to a beefed-up Monroe Doctrine while his use of military force against Iran, combined with negotiations intended to bring that country back into the US fold, leave no doubts as to his hegemonic intentions.

Indeed, New Delhi's rejection of Trump's offer to mediate between India and Pakistan was a major irritant for a president who wants to be seen as the global umpire and peacemaker, imposing Pax Americana through a combination of 'maximum pressure' and incentives. Peace in the American understanding is, above all, an opportunity for business under US-enacted and enforced rules, in keeping with the dictum of an earlier president that 'The business of America is businesses'. (<https://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2021/01/the-business-of-america-is-business-a-famously-unfair-misquote/>)

India is apparently seen as inconveniently independent by Trump and his cabinet, in contrast with a seemingly accommodating Pakistan that has mastered the art of pleasing both China and the US by developing profitable relations with both while creating constant aggravation in India. Some powerful Republican Congressmen and senators, such as the veteran hawk Lindsey Graham, make no mystery of their antipathy for the Modi government whom they accuse of supporting Putin's government by doing brisk trade with the Russian Federation and purchasing large amounts of its oil. Trump appears to have been influenced by the pro-Pakistan, anti-India domestic lobby when adopting policies that have very adversely affected bilateral relations between Washington DC and New Delhi.

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#### HARBINGERS OF DISSENT

If we wish to identify turning points in the relational dynamics between the USA and India that have long oscillated in a seesaw pattern, in the last five years, the following events have been seminal:

1. The defeat of Trump at the end of his first term in 2020, at the peak of the strange and probably induced COVID-19 crisis, brought to power a Democrat administration generally expected to be less favourable to India than Trump's had appeared to be, at least in his public pronouncements. The 'left-wing' of the Democrat Party, said to be represented by Vice-President Kamala Harris, was seen as hostile to the nationalist conservative BJP government on

ideological grounds (alleged human rights issues, ‘majoritarianism’, military build-up) and the renewed influence of the Clinton and Obama factions in the Biden administration was feared or at least suspected in the Indian government, partly because Pakistani lobbyists such as Huma Abedin and some formerly Trotskyist neo-conservatives were believed to have leverage on the two former presidents.

2. The Biden administration was generally more constructive towards, or at least softer on, China, which was (and still) the indispensable source of consumer goods and technology to the USA, even though the rivalry between the two greatest powers in the world has become intense. Nevertheless, Washington’s feigned or real indifference to the rise of the BRICS and SCO and the Biden regime’s support for the newly formed QUAD, a cooperative platform between the USA, India, Japan, and Australia, implicitly intended to ‘contain’ China in the Indo-Pacific, were positive factors in the continuing rapprochement between Washington DC and New Delhi.
3. The ongoing confrontation between the US-led West and Russia over Ukraine, after taking a violent turn in 2014 with the Maidan protests and Western sponsored coup, during Obama’s second term in office, exploded into a full-scale Russian invasion of her former Ukrainian fellow Soviet State in February of 2022, bringing NATO member states and other US clients into an escalating war of attrition with Moscow. The direct and indirect support provided to Russia by China, Iran, North Korea, and some other countries was complemented by India’s neutrality, perceived by the Atlantic powers as a refusal to align with them. India thereby confirmed that her foreign policy was consonant with the BRICS, SCO and ‘Global South’ position on the conflict. The US depiction of India as a staunch ally, often touted in certain Anglo-American, European, and Indian political and media circles, was abruptly belied. The Biden White House expressed disappointment in muffled terms, perhaps to avoid pushing the Modi government even closer to Russia, but the distrust of India’s role in the evolving international confrontation perceptibly grew. On India’s part, the rushed and unannounced departure of US troops from Afghanistan at the end of August 2021, had demonstrated once again that America could not be trusted to take into account the interests and needs of friendly states, as the Biden Administration abandoned Afghanistan to the Taliban without regard for India’s exposure in the country. At the prompting of successive US

governments, India had invested extensively in the stabilisation of the regime set up in Kabul by Washington and its allies and was left in the lurch by the semi-clandestine pullout of the American military, seen as a tacit surrender to radical forces backed by Pakistan and perhaps by China.

When Joe Biden declined India's invitation to be the State Guest at India's annual Republic Day parade in January 2024, many suspected that it reflected the estrangement between the two countries, although the diminished psychosomatic state of the aged American President may have been his main reason for bailing out. 2024 was also the year when the American government and some human rights NGOs affiliated to the USA played an important and not so hidden role in the early August overthrow

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of the pro-Indian Bangladesh government led by Sheikh Hasina Wazed which it openly disliked, (<https://www.orfonline.org/research/american-aid-and-regime-change-in-bangladesh-a-primer>) and its replacement by a transitional regime headed by Dr Mohammed Yunus, long associated with American interests and politicians, particularly the Clintons and other members of the Democrat Party's leadership. (<https://www.mediamatters.org/associated-press/muhammad-yunus-decades-long-clinton-friend-and-nobel-prize-winner-donations-arent>) The interim dispensation chaired by Dr Yunus was outspokenly hostile to India and sought closer relations with Pakistan and China, while showing its permeability to radical Islamist movements, particularly the local Jamaat-e-Islami.

The successful insurrection and coup in Bangladesh were interpreted by India as another manifestation of the American Deep State's indifference or hostility to India's regional interests, just as the US official tolerance of the Khalistani separatist anti-Indian and anti-Hindu militancy on American soil evinced Washington's willingness to shelter subversive elements accused of carrying out terrorist activities against India at home and abroad. (<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/india-to-discuss-pro-khalistan-extremist-pannuns-presence-in-us-presidential-events-with-america-1856413>)

4. The re-election of Trump at the end of 2024 was greeted with a mixture of

hope and misgivings by India's political and economic elites. Nationalists generally distrusted his rival contender Kamala Harris's 'woke' propensities, her prejudice against what is often called 'RSS Hindu Fascism' by the political Left and by Islamists, and her general ignorance of and lack of interest in foreign policy and economic issues. Trump was regarded as pro-business and transactional, and it was expected that his conservative 'America First' jingoism would have no qualms about the BJP's nationalist agenda. There was some fear of the Christian Evangelical Conservatives who backed the new president and a concern about their disdain for 'pagan' Hinduism, although Trump's distrust of Muslims was expected to make him unsympathetic to Pakistan and, conversely, supportive of India in the longstanding feud between the two neighbours. It was not known to all then that Trump's outspoken 'white supremacist' prejudices would dictate his attitude to the outside world as to his own citizens.

5. The plans for high tariffs announced by Trump were a cause for concern in India, but his vocal condemnations of China's trade and military policies and his resolve to curb the rise of the Asian giant seemingly promised to benefit India's economy and larger interests; however Trump's declaration of a tariff war against the rest of the world on the 'Day of Liberation' of 2nd April 2025 caused dismay and opened a Pandora's box of uncertainty. India has had to reassess and review all expectations and dispositions regarding the United States, given the mercurial unpredictability of Trump's decisions and the resulting global instability.
6. The last 'turning point' was the -four-day conflict in May 2025 between India and Pakistan called Operation Sindoor, launched by the former country against the latter in response to a ghastly massacre of tourists by Pakistan-connected terrorists in the Pahalgam valley of Kashmir. Trump was looking for an opportunity to act as peacemaker somewhere, as he had not kept his foolhardy electoral pledge to bring to an end the protracted Russo-Ukrainian conflict 'within 24 hours' of his coming to power. While indirectly supporting Pakistan (the US backed the accelerated grant of a new IMF loan to the embattled country during the hostilities) he seized the occasion to work the phone and claim that he had arranged for a ceasefire between Delhi and Islamabad even before either of the contenders had announced it. Pakistan was happy to give Trump credit but India steadfastly denied the US government's claim for bringing about the cessation of hostilities.

In contrast, the wily Chief of the Pakistani Defence Staff, General Asim Munir, who took the opportunity to promote himself as a Field Marshall and increase his powers, eagerly nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize at the latter's public demand.

Prime Minister Modi did not accept the American Head of State's invitation to come to Washington and—presumably—support the Nobel nomination, thereby angering Trump. (<https://in.mashable.com/entertainment/95856/pm-modi-declines-donald-trumps-invite-after-g7-reiterate>)

As a result of this sorry sequence of events, India remains in the bad books of a US President guided by a combination of personal interests and feelings fuelled by a narcissistic egomania. Trump made it public that he wanted to negotiate a permanent peace deal between Indian and Pakistan, according to his familiar

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'art of the deal' methods, and that he was deeply offended by India's rejection of a US mediation. He should have known that India's historic and unyielding position is that the dispute with Pakistan is bilateral and that its resolution should not be entrusted to any third party, and even less to one whose impartiality is suspect in principle.

#### DIVERGENCES BETWEEN US AND INDIAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS

In February 2025, the month following Trump's inauguration, India began trade negotiations with the United States to reach a new agreement about tariffs and regulations on imports and exports, in services and digital markets and also the major sectors of jewellery, textiles and pharmaceuticals. In 2024, the US was India's biggest trade partner, accounting for 18 per cent of its exports and imports and almost 11 per cent of its total foreign trade, with an annual volume of about 129 billion in US dollars and a surplus for India of 46.7 billion. The more contentious issues are about IT, financial, and healthcare products and services, but as detailed studies reveal, Trump's goal is to reduce the import of software, generic drugs and raw minerals from India through punitive tariffs while putting pressure on New Delhi to open its domestic market to American

agricultural exports and raise its military procurements from the United States. (*Trade Talks at Crossroads: An Assessment of India-US Positions on Services and Digital Markets – August 2025*: <https://www.esyacentre.org/documents/2025/08/08/trade-talks-at-a-crossroads-an-assessment-of-india-us-positions-on-services-and-digital-markets>) The negotiations were protracted and stormy as Prime Minister Modi swore to protect ‘farmers, small traders and fishermen’ from the threatened flood of American grain, soya, fruits, dairy and GMOs. (<https://www.telegraphindia.com/business/pm-modi-vows-to-protect-farmers-fishermen-livestock-rearers-in-face-of-us-tariff-push/cid/2118065>) The implicit contradiction between the Indian quest for greater industrial autonomy and exports, as a future high-tech hub, and the Make America Great Again (MAGA) project for restoring US manufacturing supremacy and reducing market access to surplus foreign exporters effectively hampers the growth of bilateral economic relations. Specifically, Trump wishes Indian drug manufacturers exporting to the US to pay very high tariffs unless they move their manufacturing facilities to America.

India’s multilateral engagements in the G-20, BRICS, and with the GCC, the ASEAN, and the EAEU run counter to Trump’s focus on bilateralism and rejection of international organisations that, like most American conservatives, he regards as threats and hindrances to his country’s supremacy and uninhibited freedom of action. Although the MAGA president is known to change his mind and indulge in course corrections when he deems it necessary, he is unlikely to give up the general orientation of his industrial and commercial policy as it is supported by a core group of aides in the White House and backers in Congress so far. Even a future Democrat administration may not be willing or able to drastically back away from some of the principles enacted by the current dispensation about tariff policies, trade barriers, and ‘reshoring’ of US manufacturing industries which attract wider support as long as they seem to work.

#### SOME PREDICTABLE TRENDS

The current diplomatic and commercial situation between the USA and India is probably worse than it has been in several years as the deliberately disrespectful and unfriendly attitude of President Trump and of some of his close advisers like Peter Navarro, Scott Bessent and Howard Lutnick towards India has deeply offended the Indian prime minister and his government and upset the Indian population at large. (<https://singjupost.com/transcript-why-trumps-tariffs-on-india-are-part>

*of-a-wider-geopolitical-game-george-friedman/)* According to George Friedman, the present administration in Washington is using India as a pawn in its confrontation with China and Russia because, in Friedman's view, India is seen as less important in the global scheme of things and can, therefore, be manipulated and even hurt for the sake of putting pressure on China (by showing that Washington does not see India as a necessary ally in the plan to 'contain the PRC'). The Trump administration seeks to worry Russia by raising the prospect of the possible loss of its second largest energy client. The question is whether India can bear the brunt of Trump's hints and threats without succumbing to his diktats as other governments have. There are weaknesses in the Indian economy that its rapid growth in recent years has not cured, as social scientist Pratap Bhanu

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Mehta argues in an article on the Indian Express. (*P Bhanu Mehta, Failure of India Inc. Indian Express, 29 August 2025*) His stinging critique of the state and character of Indian capitalism is dissonant with the often hollow assessments of many financial media. Other experts also expose the insufficient level of scientific and innovative technological R&D in the private sector. The public sector still suffers from the trammels of bureaucracy, routine and red tape that the Modi government has tried to break without fully succeeding. Mehta evokes the novel high-tech free-wheeling yet regulatory imperialism of the emerging global order and warns that the Indian financial and industrial leadership and infrastructure may not be strong and flexible enough to adapt and reach a commanding position in that power hierarchy.

The surprise attack on Iran staged by Israel and the United States, which began with the mass assassination of the Islamic Republic's leadership, on 28 February 2026 was not only deceitful and treacherous. It also put the entire West Asian region at risk by provoking an expected and violent Iranian retaliation. India also is exposed to major economic and political damage in this unwarranted war of aggression which has put its diplomatic relations with the West Asian countries under stress, given the delicate balance between Arab states, Israel, and Iran that the Modi government had strived to maintain hitherto in a very tense and sensitive geopolitical environment. The resulting 'de facto' closure of the Strait

of Hormuz has already, at the time of this writing, done perceptible damage to the Indian economy that may suffer from a sharp fall in its growth rate this year, and to the Gulf energy-producing nations as well as to many other parts of the world. The Middle Eastern states could take a long time to recover, and the inevitable decline in the volume of transactions with India will deal a major blow to all of them. This situation evinces the utter indifference of the Trump and Netanyahu regimes to India's economic and political interests. In this regard it is apparent that the Israeli strongman's invitation to Prime Minister Modi to visit Tel Aviv just before the planned attack on Iran was intended to damage India's relations with other regional countries by making New Delhi look like an ally and an accomplice of the Israeli-American 'Siamese twins' in their project to annihilate the Iranian state. Israel seems to have once again used its habitual 'Kompromat' technique to dupe another country into unwittingly supporting its devious stratagems, in keeping with Mossad's motto: 'By deception Thou Shalt Prevail'.

The mantras of India's traditional foreign and economic policy: non-alignment and now multi-alignment, strategic autonomy, engagement with all states that are not fundamentally inimical, resilience and patience, affirmation of a unique, composite civilisational identity must be complemented by pragmatic realism and the capacity and will to innovate and adapt rapidly to the changing global context and circumstances. (*Col. Manoj Channan, The Geopolitical Realignment, India at the Centre of a Changing World, frontierindia.com*) If India holds on to those principles, we can expect that it will follow the following policies:

- Not yield to the pressure of US tariffs, betting that some at least are temporary and will be eventually lifted under judicial, economic or political pressure, given America's limitations and needs. (<https://www.euronews.com/2025/08/30/us-appeals-court-rules-trumps-global-tariffs-are-unconstitutional>) The tariffs hastily imposed by Trump's executive fiat have been declared constitutionally invalid by the Supreme Court and struck down on 23 February 2026.
- Probably not impose reciprocal tariffs to avoid making the situation worse, but try to lower export prices through greater manufacturing and logistical efficiency. The process of lowering high tariffs and trade barriers must continue.
- Build up alternative markets in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe to compensate for the likely loss of US market share.
- Cancel various planned high-cost arms purchases from the US and go for more economical options.

- Reinforce various trade relations and payment arrangements in national and other currencies with Russia, China and other BRICS members.
- In particular, work to bring manufacturing from China to India to lower the trade imbalance and facilitate the import of rare earths, critical minerals and other key industrial raw materials while developing the mineral resources available at home and in other countries.
- Regarding relations with the USA, India would attempt to attract support from political sectors that are in favour of a stable partnership, not expecting India to behave like a tributary state or a military ally. Potential advocates for India in America can be found in the moderate (not woke) liberal left, and among the old-style nationalists and genuine MAGA believers (like Tucker Carlson, Marjorie Taylor Green, and many others) who are neither Christian fundamentalist evangelists nor hawkish neo-conservatives requiring loyalty to the American imperial agenda and permanent war with whatever Axis of Evil it needs to conjure up. The

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large, educated and prosperous US Indian diaspora in which India has put much trust in the last decades as a powerful ally has shown the disappointing limits of its influence in the domestic politics of the host country, but Indians who have become American citizens or permanent residents are expected to support, or at least not to challenge the policies of its government as they strive to assimilate in their new homeland; on the other hand, in parallel with or in opposition to the radicalism of Christian, Jewish, Khalistani and Islamic extremists, a growing number of Americans, often in privileged positions, are deeply attracted to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism in their various denominations and can, therefore, also be supportive of India’s legitimate interests and choices. There are such persons even in the ‘America First’ Trump camp and, if India cultivates and informs them about its polity and objectives, they could help restore some of the lost cordiality and trust between the two countries. The Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, usually a Trump appeaser, evoked that prospects in the last days of August 2025. However, heavy damage has been done by him and many others in the

White House and in Congress, and India should remain sceptical of the real American intentions and less optimistic about the prospects of cementing a mutually beneficial stable relationship, especially with a US president who boasts about an unpredictability that he regards as his chief negotiating asset.

- Finally, according to most observers, between a rising and increasingly preponderant China, a globally assertive Russia and a United States tempted by isolationism, in economic decline and political turmoil, India wants to create its own circle of regional influence while remaining open to collaboration with all other powers. (<https://www.rammadhav.in/articles/making-america-small/>) The need to protect its domestic market and industry and the policy of *atmanirbhar* (self-reliance) with the goal of becoming *vikshit* (comprehensively developed) by 2047 (the centenary of independence), will incite India to remain rather protectionist in its commercial strategy at a time when many other countries are also trying to limit their exposure to international vagaries and safeguard or rebuild their domestic manufacturing and agriculture in important sectors.

## CONCLUSION

India and the USA now have in common a perceived need for protectionism in economic terms, supported by nationalistic ideologies willing to use hard power in pursuit of their interests. India's quest for faster economic growth, greater strategic autonomy, broader power projection and regional primacy is not congruent with the US policies under Trump who wants to rein in potential contenders for international leadership, while keeping traditional vassals in line and forcing 'recalcitrant' states such as Brazil, Iran, North Korea and Venezuela, inside or outside BRICS, into compliance with American interests through threats, force or allurements. In Trump's colonial mindset, shaped by memories of the world as he knew it in his younger days, American superiority will be unquestionable if the country regains its post-Second World War military and industrial strength. In Trump's view China and Russia have to be managed as they are too strong in economic and military terms respectively, to be brought to heel, but India, a former possession of the British Empire and a democratic part of the English-speaking world, can become a junior partner of the USA if enough pressure is applied.

Many in the Indian economic and political elite have internalised the superficial kinship of their country with the USA, hitherto their preferred destination for study and immigration, where they frequently have permanently settled relatives. However, the recent negative domestic trends and the overall degradation of conditions for most denizens of the USA, especially the poorer, non-European immigrants, are rapidly clouding that idealised picture of America in the Indian mindset. Faced with an unwelcoming, more unpredictable, suspicious and repressive US government, India is perhaps gradually realising, at the level of its upwardly mobile classes, that the best opportunities for national development and stability lie with the wider Asian-African neighbourhood, rather than in the pursuit of a hypothetical and elusive equitable partnership with a far-away and declining hegemon whose uppermost concern is to prevent emerging powers from posing critical challenges to its dwindling supremacy. ❧

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