



India Sceptical over US Relations

The US pulled out all the stops as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited at the end of June US on an official state visit. Modi, who was once denied a visa to travel to the US because of concerns over human rights, was wined and dined at the White House and even addressed a joint session of Congress. The US has coveted deep and strategic relations with India ever since partition, which has only taken on more importance with the rise of China. But the US-Indian relationship has not lived up to its potential as New Delhi continues to harbour a variety of misgivings.

When the US emerged as a world superpower after World War 2 and as the Cold War was beginning, in South Asia US policy makers came to see India as the power in the region and a critical nation the US needed to contain the spread of communism. But India's founding fathers didn't want to take a side in the Cold War and sought cordial relations with both the US and the Soviet Union. Both Gandhi and Nehru envisaged an India that was secular and followed European enlightenment ideas, whilst on the economy they were impressed with the Soviet model, and they envisaged deep economic relations with her. On foreign policy the founding fathers hid behind non-alignment in order to not take a side in the Cold War.

As a result of this the US was forced to settle with Pakistan as its ally in the region who then joined US led Cold War organisations and received US military aid and equipment. US officials however continued to reach out to India in order to gain her trust and integrate her into her Cold War alliance structure. When India went to war with China in the Himalayas in 1962 the US flew in arms to India to aid her war effort.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, India's main trading partner was now gone which precipitated an economic crisis, which forced New Delhi to turn to the IMF. Due to the IMF conditions that required liberalisation and India's need for capital and investment during the 1990's India underwent a major liberalisation drive. In the peace dividend after the end of the Cold War US policy makers saw a new opportunity to win over India.

With the rise of China in the 2000's, the importance of India became more urgent for the US. In 2005, the then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that helping India become a global power was an American policy objective. By 2006, the US Congress passed the historic India—United States Civilian Nuclear Agreement that paved the way for transferring civilian nuclear technology to India. This also removed all US sanctions on India after the 1998 nuclear tests.

But despite the US drive to normalise relations with India, there have been many challenges. India and the US do not have a free trade agreement between them. US companies have for long wanted access to India's huge domestic market and successive administrations in New Delhi have protected the domestic market with protectionist policies. The primary US complaint against India is her use of tariff and non-tariff barriers to shield agricultural producers and select manufacturing industries.

But despite these problems the US has in recent years made many tentative economic agreements which she hoped will pave the way for a deeper relationship. The US has said it plans to provide funding for Indian technology startups and infrastructure projects from its \$200 billion Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) Fund. In January 2023 the national security advisors of India and the US announced the launch of the U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). This strategic technology partnership is obviously related to US concerns about China, which India seems to share. But it remains to be seen if India will integrate its technologies with those of the US and shun Chinese and Russian technology altogether.

As Modi visits India, the US finally is in a place where it has deepened relations with India, after decades of being left in the cold. But this relationship, despite all the economic and military agreements, is not an alliance and still suffers from many problems. India just doesn't see the world as the US does. For a long time, the major obstacle to closer India-US ties was that both countries have a history of being friendly with each other's adversaries. India resents continuing American material support to Pakistan. It is also sceptical of current US attempts to simultaneously contain and engage with China. Whilst India has a border dispute with China it also has economic relations with her and wants these to continue. India doesn't look at China the way the US does. India in fact doesn't see many things the way the US does, but it wants to benefit from US investment, technology and trade.

India rulers historically have not become American agents like many of the Muslim rulers did. Many of the Muslim rulers either joined the US for their own personal gains or were brought to power by the US. They justify the US presence and promote its necessity, whilst other nations see the reality of the US and are sceptical of supporting her.

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