

Current Issue

US Geopolitical Turmoil and India's Policy

Question 01

In the contemporary global order, the India-US relationship is characterized by a 'strategic paradox' deepening defence integration coupled with intensifying economic and geopolitical friction. Examine how the geopolitical turmoil in the United States and its shift toward transactional diplomacy are testing India's doctrine of Strategic Autonomy. Suggest a recalibrated approach for Indian foreign policy in 2026.

Question Understanding - Finding Information

- **Precise Syllabus Mapping:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.
(GS Paper – II)
- **Marks and words limit:**
 - The marks-oriented approach to answering **(10-mark, 150-word)** questions in the question is to use **Bullet Points** (one idea per bullet point), **Brainstorming**, or a combination of both.
 - The way to score good marks in questions worth **(15 marks. 250 words)** is to use the **Heading** and **Subheading** method while writing your answers.
- **Directive words:**
 - "Examine" → Analyse causes, nature, and implications with balanced judgement.
 - "Suggest" → Forward-looking, practical policy recommendations.
- **Focal points of the questions:**
 - Explain the "strategic paradox" in India-US relations.
 - Analyse how US internal turmoil + transactional diplomacy test India's Strategic Autonomy.
 - Suggest a recalibrated Indian foreign policy approach for 2026.

Answer Writing Structure (Outline)

Introduction Paragraph

- Use a conceptual hook or contemporary framing.
- Avoid historical narration.

Body Paragraph

A. Explain the “Strategic Paradox”

- **Defence Convergence (Deepening):**
 - Foundational agreements (LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA)
 - Interoperability, joint exercises (Malabar, Yudh Abhyas)
 - iCET, defence co-production, semiconductor & AI cooperation
 - Shared Indo-Pacific threat perception (China)
- **Friction (Intensifying):**
 - Trade protectionism, visa & tech restrictions
 - Sanctions pressure (CAATSA), export controls
 - Divergence on Russia, West Asia, Global South
 - Climate & supply-chain conditionalities

B. Testing India’s Strategic Autonomy

- **Geopolitical turmoil in the US:**
 - Polarised politics → policy volatility
 - Weak bipartisan consensus on global leadership
 - Reduced predictability for partners
- **Transactional diplomacy:**
 - Issue-based quid pro quo (trade, defence, sanctions)
 - Expectation of alignment without alliance benefits
- **Impact on India:**
 - Pressure to dilute “multi-alignment”
 - Constraints on Russia ties, energy security
 - Risk of becoming a security partner but economic subordinate

C. Recalibrated Indian Foreign Policy Approach (2026)

Key Points:

- Issue-based alignment, not bloc politics
- Defence diversification (US + indigenous + non-Western)
- Economic ballast – trade resilience, digital public goods diplomacy
- Strengthen minilateralism (Quad+, I2U2, IMEC without exclusivity)
- Norm-shaping role in Global South (climate finance, AI governance)
- Strategic communication to avoid misperception of alignment

Conclusion (max. 40 Words)

- Normative + optimistic.

Dos & Don'ts

• Do for Maximum Marks

- ✓ Use terms like “multi-alignment”, “minilateralism”, “strategic hedging”
- ✓ Write answer in the context of MEA doctrine: “India’s choices will be based on its national interest”
- ✓ Maintain analytical neutrality
- ✓ Balance cooperation and friction
- ✓ Use current geopolitical vocabulary
- ✓ Offer realistic policy suggestions

• Don't do these Common Mistakes

- ✗ Don’t glorify or demonize the US
- ✗ Don’t write Cold War-era Non-Alignment clichés
- ✗ Don’t list agreements without analysis
- ✗ Don’t suggest alliance-style commitments

Notes Oriented Content for Writing Answer

The India-US relationship in 2026 has transitioned from a 'natural alliance' to a 'complex interdependence' marked by a strategic paradox: while defence ties have reached unprecedented levels through foundational agreements (BECA, iCET), economic relations face severe 'friction points' due to aggressive US protectionism. This shift toward transactional diplomacy characterized by high-tariff regimes and conditional cooperation is fundamentally testing India's long-standing doctrine of Strategic Autonomy, forcing a transition from 'passive non-alignment' to 'interest-driven multi-alignment'.

The Strategic Paradox (2025-26)

- **Deepening Defence Integration:** The 10-year "Framework for the U.S.-India Major Defence Partnership" (signed late 2025) solidified cooperation in technology transfer, critical AI, and the Indo-Pacific, treating India as a premier defence partner rather than a mere buyer.
- **Intensifying Friction:** Simultaneously, a 25% tariff hike by the US and pressure on India's energy ties with Russia have created turbulence. US transactionalism under the "Donroe Doctrine" (referring to the Trump 2.0 administration) has led to threats of 500% tariffs on countries purchasing Russian oil/uranium and pressure to wind down the Chabahar port.

Testing India's Doctrine of Strategic Autonomy

The shift toward transactional diplomacy in the US has put immense pressure on India's ability to maintain an independent foreign policy:

- **The "Donroe Doctrine":** The US has adopted a blunt, power-centric approach, replacing "strategic altruism" with transactional alliances.
- **Limiting Choices:** Washington's pressure to curtail ties with Iran and Russia limits India's strategic autonomy in West Asia and energy security.
- **Geopolitical Turmoil & Distrust:** India's exclusion from the inaugural "Pax Silica" (critical tech initiative) in late 2025 and closer US-Pakistan ties in 2026 highlight the volatility of the partnership.
- **Economic Coercion:** Steep US tariffs (up to 50%) on Indian goods threaten labour-intensive sectors, creating an "asymmetric vulnerability".

Recalibrated Approach for Indian Foreign Policy in 2026

To maintain strategic autonomy in 2026, India must shift from passive balancing to active, proactive management:

- **Operationalizing Strategic Autonomy:** Move beyond rhetoric by building indigenous capabilities in defence production (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and technology, reducing dependence on US, Russian, or Chinese supplies.
- **Diversification of Partnerships:** Intensify economic and diplomatic ties with the European Union (a potential FTA), Japan, and the Global South to offset US tariff shocks.
- **Compartmentalization of Relations:** Continue to leverage the Quad for strategic security while insulating economic disputes from defence cooperation.
- **Pragmatic China Engagement:** A calibrated reopening of ties with China addressing low-hanging fruits while demanding reciprocity can serve as a bargaining chip against US transactionalism.
- **Institutionalising "Small Tables":** Increase reliance on minilateral arrangements (e.g., I2U2, Quad) that provide speed and flexibility, reducing reliance on slow, large multilateral frameworks.

The India-US partnership is no longer anchored in "strategic altruism" but in "transactional realism". While the India-US 10-Year Defence Cooperation Framework (2025–2035) solidifies India as a key security pillar in the Indo-Pacific, US shifts toward protectionism and unilateralism marked by 2025–2026 tariff hikes and transactional demands directly challenge India's sovereign decision-making. India's survival as a global power in 2026 depends on its ability to leverage its massive market and technological talent to ensure the US remains "invested" in India's success, even as New Delhi refuses to become a formal ally.
