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India's Presence Amid a Broken Template of Geopolitics

Context

- **India stands at a decisive crossroads in global geopolitics**, where its aspiration to punch its weight faces tough constraints imposed by the evolving international order.
- As **major powers re-configure alliances and recalibrate policies**, India encounters a series of diplomatic and strategic setbacks.
- These **setbacks highlight the complexities of asserting influence** while maintaining sovereignty and economic momentum.

Operation Sindoor: A Reality Check

- Operation Sindoor **exemplified India's challenge in mobilising international support** against cross-border terrorism.
- Despite clear evidence implicating Pakistan-based groups, notably, three Lashkar-e-Taiba operatives eliminated after the Pahalgam attack of April 22, 2025, **many strategic partners hesitated to openly call out Pakistan** for harbouring United Nations-sanctioned terrorists.
- **The United States, under President Donald Trump, complicated narratives** by claiming credit for brokering a ceasefire with economic leverage, conflicting with the Indian government's own account.
- In a perplexing diplomatic move, **the U.S. even welcomed Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir after the operation.**
- However, **not all signals were negative: The U.S. designated The Resistance Front (TRF), responsible for the Pahalgam attack**, as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation, and the UN Security Council Monitoring Team identified TRF's role, marking a partial but insufficient international consensus on India's security concerns.

U.S.-India Tensions: Trade, Security, and Trust

- Geopolitical friction with the U.S., long touted **as India's 'natural ally,' has grown on several fronts:**
- **President Trump's abrupt imposition of a 25% tariff** on Indian goods on the day of the flagship NISAR satellite launch transformed **a trade dispute into a tool of political pressure**, especially linking tariffs to India's continued imports of Russian oil.
- **The U.S. strategy appeared opportunistic**; while it criticized India's Russian oil imports, it continued to seek U.S.-Russian rapprochement and permitted U.S. companies to engage in select trade with China.

- **Trump's calls to U.S. companies to halt investment in India**, and instead hire only Americans, coincide with U.S. security and trade priorities that have increasingly excluded or **sidelined Indian interests in broader Indo-Pacific and global contexts**.

The European Union and Economic Pressure

- Even as India negotiates its trade pact with Europe, **the EU has sanctioned a key refinery with Russian ownership**, fully aware that stopping Russian oil flows through India inflates global prices.
- **Paradoxically, several EU states (such as Hungary, Slovakia, and Belgium) continue their own Russian oil imports** through exemptions.
- Meanwhile, **the EU's carbon taxes and digital trade barriers persist, measures India views as unfair**, particularly when compared to more lenient treatment of European trade with Russia.

China's Assertive Neighbourhood Diplomacy and India's Balancing Act

• China's Assertive Neighbourhood Diplomacy

- **China's attempted trilateral grouping with Pakistan and Bangladesh aimed to marginalize India**, though Bangladesh has so far resisted.
- **Military and strategic manoeuvres**, like helping Bangladesh revive the Lalmonirhat airbase and supporting Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, **augment the pressure along India's vulnerable northeast**.
- **China's standardisation of place names in Arunachal Pradesh and plans for a vast hydroelectric dam** on the Yarlung Zangbo (Brahmaputra) in Tibet **underline Beijing's assertive strategy to control resources and set terms in border regions**.
- Economically, China controls key supply chains affecting India's rare earths, pharmaceuticals, and machinery, giving it leverage over Indian industries.

• India's Balancing Act and the Pitfalls of Silence

- It **refrains from taking assertive positions in global hotspots such as Israel-Gaza, Israel-Iran, and the Ukraine conflict**, largely abstaining at the UN.
- **While meant to preserve autonomy** and avoid entanglement, **this approach diminishes India's geopolitical clout and leaves its interests sidelined** in global negotiations.
- The **argument that India should merely focus on becoming the world's third largest economy ignores the reality** that in today's world, economic progress is inseparable from strategic engagement.
- **Fragmenting norms, trade protectionism, and coercive geopolitics increasingly dictate economic and tech outcomes, not simply free trade or WTO agreements**.

The Road Ahead: Towards Multi-Alignment

- **Recognising the shrinking space for manoeuvre, India has started calling out Western double standards**, especially the hypocrisy in the U.S. and EU's own trade and energy dealings with Russia while criticising India for similar partnerships.
- **India's recent call for a ceasefire in Gaza signals a willingness to assert itself in global conflict resolution**, seeking to safeguard its autonomy while pushing for more equitable engagement with allies.
- **The need to finalise an India-U.S. trade pact, re-engage with multilateral groupings like BRICS (hosting the 2026 summit), expand ties with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and revisit strategic relationships with East Asian economies (after missing out on RCEP)** are now urgent priorities.

Conclusion

- **The shifting tectonics of global politics require India not just to adapt, but to assertively pursue national interests through diversified partnerships**, robust diplomatic outreach, and an unapologetic defence of its economic and security imperatives.
- The era of quiet economic focus without proactive geopolitical engagement is over.
- **India must now claim its role as a decisive actor** in shaping the rules and outcomes of the new international order.

India's Presence Amid a Broken Template of Geopolitics FAQs

Q1. What was Operation Sindoor's significance for India?

Ans. Operation Sindoor highlighted the difficulty India faces in gaining international support against terrorism linked to Pakistan.

Q2. How has the U.S. strained its relationship with India recently?

Ans. The U.S. imposed tariffs on Indian goods and showed inconsistent support regarding India's security concerns, weakening mutual trust.

Q3. Why is China increasing its influence in India's neighborhood?

Ans. China is leveraging India's strained Western relations to advance its strategic and economic interests in South Asia.

Q4. What is India's stance on global conflicts like the Israel-Gaza war?

Ans. India has largely remained silent or neutral, which risks reducing its geopolitical influence.

Q5. What strategy should India adopt going forward in geopolitics?

Ans. India should adopt a multi-alignment strategy and engage more assertively to protect its economic and security interests.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

The Technocratic Calculus of India's Welfare State

Context

- **India's approach to welfare governance is undergoing a profound transformation**, moving from traditional rights-based models towards a technocratically-driven, data-centric system.
- **As illustrated by massive Aadhaar enrolments**, the integration of over 1,200 schemes into the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanism, and the proliferation of digital grievance platforms, **the Indian state is redefining how social welfare is conceived, delivered, and experienced.**

The Promise and Perils of Technocratic Governance

- On the surface, **the digitisation of welfare promises greater efficiency** and reach.
- By tracking beneficiaries through databases and bypassing traditional leakages, **such as ghost beneficiaries, the state claims more effective targeting and coverage.**
- **However, this transition brings into focus critical questions** about the very nature and purpose of welfare, and whether democratic ideals are being subordinated to the demands of algorithmic rationality.
- **Recent developments in political theory** and game-theoretic research **underscore that technocratic governance often flourishes where political polarisation is high.**
- In such contexts, **elected leaders, regardless of party, tend to offload difficult policy** choices onto data-driven systems.
- The **discourse shifts noticeably** from the moral and philosophical question, **'Who deserves support and why?'** to a managerial concern: **How do we minimise leakage and maximise coverage?**
- This shift, **while rationalised as progress, often avoids grappling with constitutional complexities** and lived realities.

Theoretical Lenses: Habermas, Foucault, and Agamben

- This transformation can be illuminated through critical perspectives.
- **Habermas's notion of 'technocratic consciousness'** and Foucault's 'governmentality' both describe **how state rationality becomes increasingly measurable, auditable, and resistant to political challenge.**
- Welfare schemes **like E-SHRAM and PM-KISAN exemplify a push for unidirectional, innovation-driven interventions that value measurability** and error-intolerance above democratic dialogue or ambiguity.
- Conversely, **participatory planning and community feedback, bedrocks of democratic deliberation, are receding.**
- **Agamben's concept of homo sacer is particularly resonant:** the citizen is reduced to a mere auditable beneficiary, stripped of agency and rights, visible to the state only as data.

Democratic Deficits and Declining Social Investment

- The **data-driven approach risks reducing citizenship to computable metrics**, with substantial implications.

- **India's social sector spending has fallen to 17% in 2024-25**, down from an average of 21% over the previous decade.
- This **drop is not merely statistical**: minorities, labour, nutrition, and social security programs have suffered a dramatic decline from 11% of spending pre-COVID-19 to just 3% post-pandemic.
- Behind the numbers are real consequences for the most vulnerable.
- Further accentuating the democratic deficit is **the mounting crisis within the Right to Information (RTI) framework**.
- With **over 400,000 cases pending across information commissions** and key leadership vacancies, the RTI, once a powerful transparency tool, is struggling to fulfil its role.

The Centralisation Trap: Accountability and Algorithmic Insulation

- The **Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System** is emblematic of **both progress and peril**.
- While **it expedites the routing and tracking of complaints, it also risks centralising visibility** of grievances without ensuring true responsibility or accountability.
- This **algorithmic insulation makes it increasingly difficult** to hold power to account, undermining democratic checks and balances.

The Way Forward

- **Towards Democratic and Anti-Fragile Welfare Systems**
 - Acknowledging these challenges is not to dismiss the value of digital innovation, **but to urge a reimagining of welfare that foregrounds democratic antifragility**.
 - The **state must empower local knowledge**, participatory institutions like gram sabhas, and frontline officials with discretion and reflexivity.
 - **Community-driven audits, institutional support for platform cooperatives**, and robust offline fallback mechanisms have all been cited as crucial reforms.
 - **Embedding the right to explanation and appeal in digital governance is essential** to countering the opacity and rigidity of automated systems.
 - **Drawing on international best practices** and domestic successes like Kerala's Kudumbashree, a plural, responsive welfare regime is possible.
- **Re-centring the Citizen**
 - Ultimately, **a welfare machine that operates efficiently but ignores democratic deliberation will serve everyone except those most in need**.
 - For India to achieve the vision of a Viksit Bharat, **digitisation must be reoriented around democratic and antifragile principles**, transforming citizens from ledger entries into full partners in governance.

Conclusion

- **India stands at a crossroads where the pursuit of efficiency must not come at the expense of justice**, agency, and democratic accountability.
- The challenge is not to slow technological progress, but **to harness it in ways that deepen democracy, expand participatory governance, and safeguard the rights** and dignity of every citizen.

The Technocratic Calculus of India's Welfare State FAQs

Q1. What is the main shift in India's welfare governance discussed in the analysis?

Ans. India's welfare governance is shifting from a rights-based model to a technocratic, data-driven system.

Q2. What is one key risk of relying solely on digital welfare systems?

Ans. Relying only on digital systems can reduce political accountability and weaken democratic participation.

Q3. Which philosophers' ideas are used to analyse the current welfare changes?

Ans. The parallel can be drawn from the ideas of Habermas, Foucault, Agamben, and Rancière.

Q4. What is happening to India's social sector spending according to the analysis?

Ans. India's social sector spending has declined significantly in recent years.

Q5. What is suggested as a crucial step for future welfare reforms in India?

Ans. Strengthening local participation, community audits, and citizen rights in digital governance.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India's Technological Journey - From SITE to the Age of Techno-Capitalism

Context:

- The article marks the **anniversary** of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (**SITE**) of **1975**, a landmark Indo-US collaboration.
- It also traces the **evolution of technology cooperation** from **Cold War idealism** to the present-day era of **American "techno-capitalism" under Donald Trump**, assessing implications for India.

SITE - A Pioneering Indo-US Technological Collaboration:

- **Launch year:** A pioneering collaboration launched in **1975**.
- **Partners:** Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**) and the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (**NASA**), using ATS-6 satellite.
- **Coverage:** 2,400 villages across six of India's most underdeveloped states to beam educational programmes in local languages.
- **Content focus:** Primary education, health awareness, agricultural practices, and national integration.
- **Significance:** Landmark in India's **developmental technology vision**; expression of US **"scientific internationalism."**

- **Setback:** Indo-US tech cooperation stalled after India's 1974 nuclear test due to US non-proliferation concerns.

Revival of Technology Cooperation:

- **Renewed engagement:** It took three decades to overcome these disputes and rebuild bilateral trust.
- **2023 milestone:** Launch of Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (**ICET**) under President Biden to boost cooperation in advanced technologies.
- **Challenges:** Bilateral frictions over Russia, trade, Pakistan; divergent tech ecosystem paths.

Contrasting Global Technology Models:

- **US model:**
 - Shift from state dominance (NASA) to private sector leadership (SpaceX).
 - The state acts as a catalyst through defence procurement, standard-setting.
- **China model:**
 - Centralised, mission-driven **technological modernisation** since late 1970s.
 - Heavy state investment; global reach via **Digital and Space Silk Roads**.
- **India's position:** Hybrid approach; **reforms** in space sector but **lag in mobilising private sector** and upgrading higher education/research.

Trump's Techno-Capitalism:

- **Philosophy:** Deregulatory, nationalist, expansionist, pro-entrepreneur.
- **AI Policy (2025):** Remove regulatory barriers, build AI infrastructure, boost AI manufacturing, mobilise massive public-private investment.
- **Cryptocurrency Policy (GENIUS Act):**
 - Dollar-backed stablecoins with full reserves.
 - Strategic Bitcoin Reserve.
 - Rejection of central bank digital currency.
 - **Aim:** To reinforce US dollar supremacy, to counter de-dollarisation.
- **Ideological architect:**
 - **Peter Thiel** – a venture capitalist and co-founder of PayPal and Palantir, and a staunch supporter of Trump's tech agenda.
 - Thiel insists that true innovation arises not from state mandates or regulatory frameworks, but from **visionary entrepreneurs** liberated from liberal-democratic constraints.
 - His worldview **blends libertarian individualism with a muscular nationalism** that sees **China as America's principal technological adversary**.

Global Shift in State-Tech Relations:

- This marks a decisive break from the **techno-optimism of the 1990s**, when the rise of the internet was seen as heralding a borderless, decentralised world where the state would gradually recede.
- However, **this dream proved short-lived**. Governments reasserted themselves through regulation, surveillance, and digital sovereignty.
- **Today**, the world is witnessing the rise of a new state-capital compact—a “**tech broligarchy**”.
 - **Trump’s approach**: Aligning Silicon Valley elites with US geopolitical objectives.
 - **Objective**: To pursue **technological supremacy** not for utopian ends, but for **strategic advantage**.

Implications for India:

- **Risks:**
 - AI automation threatens IT outsourcing jobs.
 - Possible decline in H-1B visa approvals.
 - Rise of techno-nationalism in the West affecting India’s tech exports.
- **Required actions:**
 - Overhaul domestic tech sector.
 - Increase R&D investment.
 - Integrate private enterprise into innovation strategies.
 - Prepare workforce and regulations for rapid tech transformation.

Conclusion:

- **India stands at a pivotal juncture** where strategic investment in research, innovation, and private sector integration can transform it into a leading technological power.
- **By proactively adapting to global shifts** in AI, space, and digital finance, India can secure its competitiveness and resilience in the emerging techno-capitalist world order.

India’s Technological Journey FAQs

Q1. What was the significance of the 1975 SITE programme for India-US cooperation?

Ans. It showcased technology for development via ISRO-NASA collaboration but was disrupted by post-1974 nuclear tensions.

Q2. How do US and Chinese technology models differ, and where does India stand?

Ans. The US fosters private-led innovation, China drives state-led missions, and India is a hybrid but lagging in scale and R&D.

Q3. What is meant by US “techno-capitalism” under recent policy shifts?

Ans. It is a nationalist, deregulatory alignment of Silicon Valley with state strategy, boosting AI and crypto dominance.

Q4. What risks do AI and US visa changes pose to India's IT sector?

Ans. They threaten job automation, reduce market access, and limit mobility for Indian tech professionals.

Q5. What steps should India take to face the global techno-capitalist order?

Ans. Invest in R&D, reform higher education, scale private tech, adapt regulations, and skill the workforce.

Source: IE

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