

India's Foreign Policy Shift: SCO Summit, U.S. Tensions, and Strategic Autonomy

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India Foreign Policy Shift Latest News

- Modi began attending the SCO summit in Tianjin, where a photo with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin drew global attention.
- It seemed to upset U.S. President Donald Trump, who made sarcastic remarks while the U.S. increased tariffs to 50%, imposed sanctions on India's Russian oil imports, and urged the EU to do the same.
- Despite the tensions, Modi and Trump struck a conciliatory tone recently.

Power Play at the Tianjin SCO Summit

- The 10-nation SCO summit in Tianjin showcased China's growing influence, with leaders from Turkey, Nepal, Maldives, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Indonesia, and Malaysia in attendance.
- The focus then shifted to Beijing, where President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin led a grand military parade marking 80 years since World War II's end, joined by North Korea's Kim Jong Un and others.

- The summit's declarations criticized "**coercive, unilateral**" **economic measures**, targeting U.S. tariffs and European sanctions.
- China promoted a "Global Governance Initiative," while PM Modi called for "civilisational dialogue" among SCO members.

Modi-Xi Bilateral: Steps Toward Normalisation

- PM Modi's first China visit since 2018, and first direct meeting with President Xi since the 2020 Galwan clashes, marked a cautious thaw in ties.
- Xi called India and China "**partners, not rivals**," while India softened its earlier stance of linking broader ties strictly to border normalisation.
- Both sides agreed that Special Representatives — Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and India's NSA Ajit Doval — would continue talks on the boundary issue.
- Besides revival of flights, visa facilitation and the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra, they agreed to resolve the trade issues between them.

U.S. Reaction to India's SCO Engagements

- In Washington, images of the Tianjin "troika" with Modi, Xi, and Putin — alongside other leaders from Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan — were viewed as **India drifting away from the West**.
- Former U.S. President Donald Trump posted that America had "lost India and Russia to deepest, darkest China," while Trade Adviser Peter Navarro criticized India for aligning with Russia and China.
- Some even dubbed the Ukraine conflict "Modi's war," a claim India's MEA rejected.
- Despite tensions over tariffs, visas, and trade, Trump later softened his stance, calling India-U.S. ties a "special relationship" and praising his friendship with Modi, who in turn welcomed Trump's positive remarks.

The Road Ahead for India's Foreign Policy

- Despite perceptions of India swinging between East and West, its approach continues to reflect its **long-standing policy of strategic autonomy and balance**.
- PM Modi's China visit for the SCO, following the Xi-Modi meeting in Kazan in 2024, was aimed at normalising ties after years of tension, though the Modi-Xi-Putin interaction carried limited weight without a revival of formal RIC talks.
- India-U.S. ties remain strained over tariffs, Russian oil imports, and market access, but military cooperation and official exchanges continue.
- The upcoming UNGA visit by External Affairs Minister Jaishankar and discussions on the Quad summit, with Trump expected in India later this year, will be key in shaping the trajectory of India-U.S. relations.

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