

Smell the Coffee, It's Time to Get Real – On Indian Foreign Policy - The Wire

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The public ecstasy at India swinging two big trade deals, the India-UK FTA and the recent [deal](#) with the European Union (EU), reveals more skills at event management than in ensuring immediate economic survival after US President Donald Trump's tariff terror. Even as we hope, privately or otherwise, that we have survived Genghis Khan's devastation of our dear, comfortable world of free and open trade, we really need to get real.

We are not informed that the earliest that our agreement with the UK signed with so much fanfare last July (which actually gives us a few larger peanuts, but peanuts they are) will take at least six to nine months more to be operational. By the time, cargoes move to Vilayet and back, Trump's term will be in its penultimate year. The much celebrated "final solution" to the dreadful Trumpian tantrums, the EU agreement is just at the start stage.

It will have to be ratified, with a lot of debate and opposition, by all 27 member nations in their parliaments, one by one. By the time it's all over (successfully, we hope), Trump is slated to go. This is unless other factors intervene, or he decides to extend it with jackboots over a beaten-to-a-pulp American democracy that actually took 250 years to build. Alas.

The real problem is that India's foreign affairs are now and integral part of its assertive Hinduvadi politics and it's ingredients are the real masala that spice up a humongous but hollow halogen image of an infallible great leader. So every foreign agreement follows a four-step rollout – optics comes first, hype and catchy headlines follow, then comes either triggered celebrations or displays of collective anger and finally 'reality' trails them all – a poor last.

The cacophony let loose by enthralled ultranationalists after what they claimed was India's indubitably victorious and righteous Operation Sindoor, "that smashed Pakistan to smithereens", was greeted with an eerie, steely silence from the world community, indicating that not one country actually stood beside India.

This is precisely when Trump played a damaging, puerile spoiler, demolishing Modi's rather juvenile confidence in him as a buddy, after so many embarrassingly rustic tight hugs. Modi's much-toiled, [expensive jamboree at Houston in 2019](#) where he extolled delirious American NRIs and OCI (who are all so silent now) to holler "Abki Baar Trump Sarkar" and his triumphant ride together with him around the Narendra Modi Colosseum in Ahmedabad in February 2020 – even as the fire of a one-sided riot raged across Delhi – has all gone waste. "That's history, dude," screams a Nobel-obsessed Trump and Modi was made to suffer like Hamlet, the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" as POTUS's Nobel OCD reached psychotic proportions.

India's schoolmaster foreign minister, S. Jaishankar, who has camped in America many more times than any of his predecessors ever did (mixing familial and national obligations there) simply disappeared from the scene. His rather unflappable foreign secretary had to face the vilest of abuses for India's sudden halt of hostilities against Pakistan.

Also read: [Three Sets of Recent Events Have Damaged India's 'Soft Power'](#)

Never, never before in history has India witnessed such a vicious 'hiatus' between blood-thirsty pro-regime trolls (who'd never ever volunteer for the NCC, let alone the army) and the 'fall guys', namely, India's composed foreign secretary and the defence ministry's colonel-spokesperson, whose sins were that she was a smart woman and a Muslim as well.

Frustration at the pumped-up rage reached so high a peak that a hate-Pakistan movie like [Dhurandhar broke box office records](#), as the audience, (even the otherwise calmer lot) took vicarious pleasure in our Rambo, Ranveer Singh, killing every blighter – to avenge on celluloid what could not be done through ‘Op Sindoor’.

After cold-shouldering our ‘Sindoor’, the West was suddenly more interested in obtaining all possible information on the how Pakistan had piggybacked on Chinese state-of-the-art aircrafts and hyper-superior hypersonic missile to knock down their hubris-laden French Rafale jet fighter. Our righteous “crusade against world terrorism” met with bored yawns from across the globe, as rarely seen before.

Nostalgic Indians recalled with pride how the same world had sat up to listen to this regime’s most-hated Nehru, and later to Indira, even as the US despised the latter completely viscerally. Indo-US relations stares at the paradox of the current betrayal of love vis-à-vis the victory we had earned in 1971, despite the US’s undisguised hate.

Our present nadir in Indian foreign policy has been analysed threadbare and the consensus is that world finally revealed its pent-up annoyance at India constantly punching far above its weight. A self-loving Modi obviously radiated in this imagined glory, but it was quite mean and unprofessional of an experienced diplomat like Jaishankar to lead him down the garden path.

What was worse, was that Jaishankar revelled in berating every western country for inappropriate behaviour, as part of his aggressive-India project. He overlooks how universal is the disapproval of India’s poor record in human rights and in tormenting minorities – more so when Christians and Muslims together account for 57% of the world’s population. Blameless India’s past daring adventures in Canada, the US and Australia and (some allege) in Baluchistan went against our victims-of-terror claim, as did our reported constant intercessions in Bangladesh.

Besides, the sudden proliferation of extravagant, eye catching (and loud) Gujarati Swaminarayan temples everywhere irked host countries a lot, prompting conservatives to demand a halt to what they describe as noisy and ostentatious displays of a foreign (idolatrous?) religion on their soil. That’s Hinduphobia to us, especially when Indians are hurt or killed by Right Wing fascists in western countries, who are incidentally the very mirror-images of our own home-grown extremists.

In all fairness, the Indian establishment did realise it’s terrifying isolation and also the need to get out of this hellhole bottom, though it never admitted it publicly. Our redneck bhakts, however, appear totally oblivious of India’s precarious position and keep chanting that Modi is the greatest ever, while the controlled media amplifies this. The first and quite praiseworthy step that India took was to [patch up with the problematic president of Maldives](#), Mohamed Muizzu – the very person who Modi, his enthusiastic national media and social media hoodlums had lambasted as devil incarnate, till then. The second was to reach out to China that has handled Trumpian torments with rare aplomb.

It had, after all, toiled for three decades to establish its very indigenous and competitive production base of its civil and military needs. India did precious little by way of design and critical product development and survives on imports and screwdriver assembly, as for mobile phones. Previous regimes are accused of having done nothing (forget ISRO, nuclear technology, IITs, AIIMS, etc) but in the last long decade, all we did was to whip up a very expensive prime minister-centric personality cult and popularise his Ad-agency produced tag lines and slogans.

None triggered self sufficiency or resulted in China-type unique desi inventions or really made-in-Indian stunners. We have not produced a single Indian tech product and are piggybacking everything on American Big Tech – who can peek into our nation’s critical data and operations in their clouds. We shudder to think of the grinding halt India would come to if the US taps and clouds are suddenly locked out of us. Our best techies are working for Americans there

(wondering what's next) and shaving for them in India, and creating great products on our soil, but for them. Tragic. We are miles away from our own chip and AI and scream we are Vishwaguru. Snap out of it.

In any case, getting to China is a good move as our message was not lost on Trump. He must have flown into a greater rage when Modi rolled out the red carpet to Putin in Delhi. This recharged a longstanding relationship, that was going hither-thither since we were determined to woo America most passionately, from the days of Manmohan Singh's nuclear deal. We have also drawn closer to Germany now, the very country from which Jaishankar had ruffled all European powers with his tick offs, a few years ago.

Also read: [India's Unique Crises: From Taper Tantrums to Trump Tantrums](#)

Though late, this a good development as we badly require to move towards technological self sufficiency, instead of cooking up hollow slogans. India's tightening relations with the UAE is also a smart move as our trade is already \$ 85 billion and can grow – provided we behave with Muslims in India and do not join US-Israeli Gaza boards.

These strides represent India's maturity in realising that it was nowhere near joining the super powers' club or getting a seat in the UN Security by playing to the domestic gallery and exaggerating Modi's importance overseas. Russia has a much lesser GDP than India's, but is self-sufficient and superior in armaments and several essential technologies. So, it can make Trump go around in circles, while India hardly matters. Now that India has started dreaming big, or at least talking of Vishwaguru, it's "blood, toil, tears and sweat" phase must begin.

Blood, incidentally and sadly, is an essential determinant of super power status and there is or was no such country that had achieved it without losing several thousands (or lakhs) of its citizens in war or in fighting foreign occupation. We do not qualify on this score as our entire nation has not gone through such tragic losses. Hope not, ever. The painful loss of civilian lives appears, however, a part of the history of all present big powers. Superpowers, Russia lost over 20 million civilians and China at least 15 million. Poland lost six million lives in the Second World War and Bangladesh may have lost anywhere between half a million to a million citizens in Pakistan's genocide and the Libertarian War – but neither qualify automatically for super power status, as other essentials are missing.

Oh, Bangladesh reminds of how India displayed adolescent petulance after being outwitted by the Americans when the pro-India Hasina regime was toppled in August 2024. The pro-Pakistani, viscerally anti-India (and anti-1971 Liberation war) Mohammad Yunus and the extreme Islamic Jammati Islami live off their aggressive and utterly provocative statements and steps taken against India. By retorting to these deliberately provocative statements (baits) and actions, we annoy even the neutral Bangladeshis and every time we hit back, the anti-Indian wave in Bangladesh gains more support – even among those who are not generally India-haters.

We created this wave by blindly supporting Hasina's corrupt and authoritarian regime and giving crony Adani an opportunity to exploit power consumers there. But it was an absolute act of asininity by the pompous Board of Cricket Control in India, headed by our aggressive number two's so-entitled scion, to [ban Bangladesh's iconic cricketer Mustafizur Rahman from the IPL](#). This single inane act, followed by India-dominated International Cricket Council's roughing up of Bangladesh Cricket Board's pleas, have hurt the entire nation and has managed to unite all of Bangladesh (even decent moderate folk) against India's crass bullying. We handed a dream-come-true opportunity to the genetically anti-Hindu/India Islamic Right there to surge ahead in the upcoming polls, at a time when more sensible Bangladeshi voters were/are undecided whether to go with such religious rabidity.

India just cannot afford this 'one step forward, one step back' game, after panicking at the sight of the bottom of the world's diplomatic barrel post-Sindoor, and also staring with trepidation down another barrel, that of Trump's trade gun. So, while expressing righteous indignation at

Trump's order to stop buying Russian oil, which stand earned Modi some recognition for unusual firmness, India quietly complied with US's arm twist, by tapering down its purchases decisively.

In the bargain, the Indian oligarch who gained unprecedented profits from importing Russian oil and exporting its products (and was accused by Trump by name) appears to have ingrained himself into POTUS's good books, while the rest of the country reels under the US's punitive 50% tariffs. How utterly patriotic.

India's never-ending trade talks with the US can be resolved favourably by one knock from Trump or if only we bend backwards or forward to tickle Narcissus himself. But Modi knows full well the fallout ruckus he has to face in India. In fact, his hounds have now swung to the other extreme – of painting Trump in the vilest of shades through their WhatsApp university, countless X handles and on Facebook – all of which certainly do not please Mogambo Trump. At the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, we must realise that diplomacy operates not in tuxedos and in clicking glasses any more, and not all through panchayat-level bear hugs, but that it subsists on information gleaned by all ruling groups from every massaging forum.

Now let's get real and realise that part of our low position in the pecking order in the 'super powers' list is because we are not designers, developers or producers of critical and knock-out armaments, like F 35 or Rafale level aircrafts or Boeings. We do not build aircraft carriers of any consequence (we reutilise old foreign carriers) and we are not capable of producing state-of-the-art jet engines that power today's advanced aircraft.

True, India's aerospace capacity has some strengths as a manufacturer of military aircraft structures and a trusted global supplier of aerospace components, but its strategic dependencies on others is much too much, where complex subsystems and high end jet propulsion are concerned. Both Safran & Rolls Royce has offered 100% collaboration for fresh bed engine development and India is about to go with France's Safran so that DRDO (Gas Turbine Research Establishment) can collaborate to co-develop and manufacture a 120-kN jet engine for India's fifth-gen AMCA fighters, with a 12-year timeline. Even though this project includes 100% technology transfer, it is the timeline that matters a lot. It starts this year, but prototype testing will take us to 2030 and full production is expected by 2035. Till then, we are just "not there" and no rhetoric can compensate this.

The new engine co-development proposals or the indigenous AMCA (fifth-gen fighter) programme both matter more now, since India's first throw of its hat into the ring was not found acceptable. There is no point in bhakts or 'the party' producing videos with Yankee or British voices telling us everyone is jealous of India's rise and circulating these over WhatsApp and the social media. Trump's sudden wake-up call has kickstarted some good developments as well. IIT Madras's laboratory has finalised a high-speed D-Propulse technology, which is widely seen as the first major indigenous architectural shift in aero-propulsion, in decades. Let's see.

Coming back to the unreal joy at the EU deal that we all support, we may note not only the long time it will take to fructify (if it does), it is realistic to understand that if India's \$ 80 billion exports in 2024 to the US crashes by half, we cannot ramp up exports to the EU dramatically to make up – because its already high \$76 billion.

Only when the EU treaty gets operational, probably in 2027, can we go up somewhat. We struggle to export \$20 billion to China while we import a whopping \$136 billion – mainly of electronics (integrated circuits, telecom, displays), machinery, organic chemicals (including pharma intermediates) and plastics. This is totally one sided and India is more dangerously dependent on China than on the USA, with every Chinese mobile or CCTV camera gaining access to India's data. It is time to cajole the Chinese to invest in India. components and capital goods industries on technology transfer basis.

Let us smell the coffee and realise that Trump is actually a god-sent message for us to quit or cut

down drama and get moving on solid technological and armaments fronts, or give up the Modiesque ambition of being a world power.

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