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Q20

**"What introduces friction into the ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find for India a position in its global strategy, which would satisfy India's National self-esteem and ambitions" Explain with suitable examples.(15).**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS II · 15 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

**Core demand of the question**

- "What introduces friction into the ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find for India a position in its global strategy, which would satisfy India's National self-esteem and ambitions" Explain with suitable examples

**Revision summary**

India wants **strategic autonomy** and major-power status; the US organises the world through allies and sanctions.

That mismatch, not only personality, introduces friction.

- **Examples:** Pakistan-Afghanistan hyphenation, **CAATSA** and Russian arms, Iran oil sanctions, **2019 GSP withdrawal**, H-1B, and incomplete nuclear-normalcy.

China and Indo-Pacific cooperation reduce friction without solving the role problem.

The practical path has been issue-based partnership, not a single grand-strategy slot.

**Introduction**

India-US ties have thickened through the civil nuclear understanding, defence logistics, and a shared China problem. Friction remains because the United States builds strategy around alliances and issue-hierarchies (Pakistan, China, Iran, Russia, trade), while India wants recognition as an autonomous pole - not a hyphenated junior partner. The quote is a good map of that mismatch; examples make it concrete.

**Body****What India wants in the relationship**

- **Strategic autonomy:** partnerships without a treaty that commands Indian votes, energy, or defence inventory.
- **Status:** a de facto major-power place - NSG membership, support for a permanent UN Security Council seat, and an end to technology-denial habits from the nuclear-sanctions era.
- **Self-esteem:** no hyphenation with Pakistan, no public lecture that treats India as a client on Kashmir or on Russia, and a trade terms-of-trade that is not only market access for US firms.

## Where Washington's global strategy sits

- US strategy is still organised around alliances (NATO, treaty allies in Asia), extra-territorial sanctions, and, in South Asia for a long period, a Pakistan channel for Afghanistan.
- India is valuable as a China balancer and a large market, but it is not a US ally. Finding a "position" that is neither ally nor ordinary emerging market is the design problem the quote names.

## Examples of friction

- **Pakistan hyphenation and Afghanistan:** US military aid and political use of Islamabad repeatedly collided with India's terror and Kashmir concerns; New Delhi read this as Washington ranking its Af-Pak war above India's self-image as the region's democracy.
- **Civil nuclear deal unfinished business:** NSG waiver politics and the nuclear-liability law showed status gain with residual technology and supplier caution - ambition met by a partial, not full, place in the non-proliferation order.
- **CAATSA and Russian systems (including the S-400 decision):** US law treats major Russian arms as a sanctions trigger; India treats Russia as a historic defence partner. Washington's Russia strategy has no comfortable slot for Indian autonomy.
- **Iran:** US secondary sanctions after leaving the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action** squeezed India's oil and Chabahar diplomacy; India's West Asia equities were expected to follow US strategy.
- **Trade:** the **2019** withdrawal of India's Generalized System of Preferences benefits, disputes on medical devices, agriculture, and data, showed that "strategic partner" did not mean a trade identity that matched India's development-status claim.
- **Immigration and talent:** H-1B tightening hits Indian professional self-esteem and the services model, even while Quad speeches praise Indian human capital.
- Foundational defence agreements (**LEMOA** and, in the same era, COMCASA) increased trust and still left India refusing a NATO-like role - ambition for technology without alliance discipline.

## Why a satisfying position is hard

- If the US offers an ally's privileges, India refuses the ally's obligations.
- If the US offers a normal trade-and-rights agenda, India hears a status demotion.
- China is the overlap that reduces friction (Malabar, Indo-Pacific); Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and trade are the files that reopen it.

## Explanation

- **The quote is right:** friction is not only tariff lines; it is a missing role-definition that feeds Indian amour-propre and US alliance habits.
- The working substitute has been issue-based partnership - defence logistics, Indo-Pacific, people-to-people - without a grand strategy label that both capitals would sign.

## Flow diagram

US alliance sanctions strategy alliance sanctions strategy -> No fitting chair for India  
 Indian autonomy and status -> No fitting chair for India  
 No fitting chair for India -> Friction  
 Pakistan CAATSA Iran GSP -> Friction  
 China overlap Quad defence -> Issue-based partnership

## Conclusion

India-US friction persists because Washington's alliance-and-sanctions strategy has no ready chair that matches India's demand for autonomy and major-power esteem. Pakistan hyphenation, CAATSA and Russia, Iran oil, GSP withdrawal, and unfinished nuclear-normalcy are examples. The relationship advances where China and technology overlap, and it grinds where US global hierarchy expects India to behave like a partner-ally.

## Facts & figures

### India-US civil nuclear cooperation

Status-raising bargain of the 2000s; leftover liability and supplier issues show incomplete placement in US non-proliferation strategy.

### CAATSA

US sanctions law on significant transactions with Russian defence and intelligence sectors; collided with India's S-400-era purchases.

### GSP withdrawal (2019)

United States ended Generalized System of Preferences benefits for India, a trade-status shock inside a 'strategic' relationship.

### LEMOA (2016)

Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement; deepened defence trust without making India a US ally.

### Strategic autonomy

Indian doctrine of multi-alignment; the self-esteem claim the quote says US strategy has not fully accommodated.

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