Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos

Analysis
Paper

44/2025 11/06/2025

Javier Fernández Aparicio

Will history repeat itself? India today, like China yesterday, risks a new Thucydides Trap for the United States

Will history repeat itself? India today, like China yesterday, risks a new Thucydides Trap for the United States

Abstract:

The Thucydides Trap, conceptualised by Graham T. Allison, describes the risk of conflict when an emerging power challenges an established one. While this analysis has traditionally been applied to the US-China relationship, India's sustained rise suggests the possibility of a new strategic configuration in which New Delhi becomes a systemic actor with the potential to alter the global balance in the future. In this context, current US foreign policy reflects a historical pattern of triangular diplomacy similar to that applied by Henry Kissinger during the Cold War. At that time, the United States approached China to isolate the Soviet Union; today, it seeks to contain China through alliances with strategic partners, especially India. However, the historical parallels reveal differences beyond the strengthening of bilateral ties between India and the United States, particularly India's objective of maintaining its strategic autonomy and the complexities of its multi-aligned foreign policy.

Keywords:

India, United States, China, Kissinger, Thucydides Trap, international relations

How to cite this document:

FERNÁNDEZ APARICIO, Javier. *Will history repeat itself? India today, like China yesterday, risks a new Thucydides Trap for the United States*. IEEE Analysis Paper 44/2025. IEEE web link and/or bie link[3] (accessed day/month/year).

Introduction: the Kissinger echo

Let us begin by recalling that the Thucydides Trap is a concept formulated and popularised by the American political scientist Graham Allison to describe the risk of conflict that arises when a rising power threatens to replace a dominant power. This dynamic is based on the established power's fear of losing its hegemonic position, such as when Athens challenged Sparta in ancient Greece, or more recently, when Germany rivalled the British Empire in the early 20th century. [1]

The concept was originally conceived to analyse the growing antagonism between the US and China in the 21st century, but in the current geopolitical landscape, India is emerging as a third great power with global ambitions and growing capabilities, which would raise a new possibility within the framework of the Thucydides Trap. While international attention has focused primarily on the competition between the US and China, India's sustained rise in economic, technological and military terms could, in the medium to long term, position it as a systemic challenger to US hegemony. In this context, it is worth asking whether the US-India relationship could evolve towards a dynamic of mistrust and strategic competition similar to that described by Allison for China, thus reactivating the historical mechanisms that lead to power confrontation.

The current strategy of US containment of China and India's involvement in it replicates, with geopolitical and temporal distances, Henry Kissinger's approach to the then Soviet Union through the alliance with China. It reflects a policy of triangular diplomacy designed by Henry Kissinger during the Cold War, while today there is talk that, for more than five years now, we have been facing another Cold War[2] . In the 1970s the United States allied with China in an attempt to isolate the Soviet Union; today it seeks to isolate the Soviet Union through alliances with regional actors in the Indo-Pacific, most notably India.

The current Trump administration appears to be attempting a “reverse Kissinger”—namely, rapprochement with Russia, for example by ending the war in Ukraine—as a means of countering China. Thus far, this seems more like a strategic illusion. Whereas in the 1970s the Nixon administration capitalised on Sino-Soviet tensions, contemporary

[1] See ALLISON, Graham: *Destined for war: Can America and China escape Thucydides's Trap?*, Scribe, 2018, ISBN 978-1911617303.
[2] ASHLEY: "Us and China Cold War". In *Columbia Engineering Hub*, 19 May 2025. Available at Us And China Cold War - Columbia Engineering Hub (accessed 3/6/2025).

Sino-Russian relations are characterised by strategic alignment and mutual interests, not least a shared rejection of Western dominance. Moreover, as set out in key documents such as the 2021 National Security Strategy—soon to be renewed under the second Trump administration—and the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept, for the United States, Russia is not an existential threat, while China is considered a systemic challenge to its dominance.

Recall that, during Richard Nixon's presidency from 1969 to 1974, Kissinger directed US foreign policy. The border dispute between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China over Zhenbao Island was cleverly perceived as an impossibility for the two great Eurasian countries to build a comprehensive union which, for Kissinger himself, would have undermined the foundations of Western power in the world. It was for this reason that Kissinger initiated secret talks through Pakistan with the Chinese government in 1970, made a secret trip to Beijing in 1971 and opened the door for Nixon to visit China the following year. The US was to befriend China and isolate the Soviet Union.

Fifty years on, China stands as a power contesting global hegemony with the United States, introducing novel factors to the battlefield—even without an armed conflict—such as globalisation, economic interdependence, and technological competition. As formerly, in a bipolar world, today's similarly bipolar reality compels the United States to secure strong, committed allies in its strategy to contain China, sometimes reversing earlier indifference towards certain regions and countries. Every partner matters in this confrontation—hitherto economic—against China. In Latin America, Africa, or the Indo-Pacific, with partners like Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, or ASEAN, yet none more so than India, perceived as the mid-term counterbalance to China.

At the close of the last century, the United States supported China's rise as a significant regional actor; similarly today, Washington has reaffirmed its backing for India's role as a regional Asian power. This support clearly stems from US strategic interests to counterbalance China's growing influence in the region, as well as to counter the reinforced China–Russia alliance. However, it is important to note that India also maintains close relations with Russia, from which it derives significant benefits.

A recent milestone in this strategic partnership was Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the United States in February 2025. He was one of the first international leaders to visit Washington at the start of President Trump's second term. As part of this

visit, negotiations were launched on an ambitious bilateral agreement called 'Bridging Opportunities for Military Partnership, Trade and Technology for the 21st Century'. Key objectives include easing trade tensions, offering mutual concessions on reciprocal tariffs, reducing the US trade deficit with India, and encouraging India to buy energy and military products, including oil, gas and fighter jets. During his visit, Modi referred to Trump's slogan, *Make America Great Again*, adapting it with his own spin: *Make India Great Again.*[3]

Subsequently, in April 2025, US Vice President J.D. Vance paid an official visit to New Delhi, coinciding with the Pahalgam attack in Kashmir on the 22nd. In his meeting with Modi, significant progress was made in trade negotiations, with India hoping to avoid the imposition of US tariffs under a 90-day moratorium. Moreover, following India's launch of Operation Sindoor on 7 May, the military response to the attack, US sources indicated that the de-escalation of the conflict with Pakistan was the result of promises of tariff reductions for both countries. The Pakistani government publicly acknowledged this US mediation, but Indian officials avoided official confirmation.[4]

The triangular diplomacy of a new Cold War

In the geopolitical context of the Sino-Soviet break-up and the US opening to China in the 1970s, after two pillars of US foreign policy that also consisted of strengthening relations between the United States and the major European powers, plus seeking opportunities for cooperation and understanding with the Soviet Union itself, a third pillar focused on fostering relations with the People's Republic of China, perceived as a crucial third actor that could play a relevant role in a harmony of world power. This global rebalancing and new alliance also helped China to become a rising power and now a systemic rival to the United States.

At that time, India was neither considered a reliable ally nor given serious regard, even being derogated by Kissinger. A day after meeting Indira Gandhi in November 1971—

[3] SHEERIN, Jude; LUKIV, Jaroslav and EWE, Koh: "Modi hails US-India 'mega partnership' in Trump meeting". In *BBC*, 14 February 2025, available at Modi hails US-India 'mega-partnership' in Trump meeting (accessed 3/6/2025).

[4] "Did Trump lie or did Modi? Questions emerge after US court affidavit on trade-triggered ceasefire". In *Mathrubhumi.com*, 29 May 2025. Available at Did Trump lie or did Modi? Questions emerge after US court affidavit on trade-triggered ceasefire (accessed 3/6/2025).

when India stood on the brink of war with Pakistan—Kissinger referred to the Indians as "bastards", though he later apologised, and was received coldly during his 1974 visit, despite US approval of $10 billion in aid to India—an act Delhi regarded as humiliating—as Pakistan and even China maintained enmity with India during the Himalayan conflict. [5]

Today, the new Trump administration, continuing the postulates of its first term, is opposed to a policy of détente towards China, similar to that of the 1970s vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The recognition that we are facing a new Cold War— as Kissinger himself defined the current global geopolitical situation in 2019 in Beijing[6]—implies the assumption that the US needs to find a strong ally that can turn a confrontation with China in its favour. Despite timid attempts at rapprochement, Russia is ruled out, as is in fact a solid Chinese ally today, while other actors are being sought that could play this role, such as the European powers or Japan, if we are referring to the Indo-Pacific area.

The Japanese case presents a certain resentment in the United States, first of all from the economic point of view, since already in the 1980s there was a feeling against Japan due to its growth, which seemed to place it on the road to overtaking the United States itself, something similar to the perception that is now held with respect to China, and again a feeling that is repeated today with tariffs or in cases such as the refusal to allow Japanese corporations to take over American companies, such as US Steel[7] , not to mention the reluctance of Japan to develop a thriving military outside US supervision through mutual defence treaties, the decline of the current US military presence and the dependence of its defence industry, even though the Trump administration is now hinting to Japan that it should increase its contribution to the costs involved.

For all that, no country with India's potential to play the same pro-US role, however distant in ti, as China did vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. There is a groundswell of favourable opinion

[5] RAJGHATTA, Chidanand: 'Henry Kissinger: Man who despised India but ended up kissing up to New Delhi'. In *The Times of India*, 30 November 2023. Available at Sexist Rants: Henry Kissinger: Man who once despised India but ended up kissing up to New Delhi | India News - Times of India (accessed 3/6/2025).

[6] FERGUSON, Nial: "Kissinger and the True Meaning of Détente: Reinventing a Cold War Strategy for the Contest with China". In *Foreign Affairs*, 20 February 2024. Available at: Kissinger and the True Meaning of Détente: Reinventing a Cold War Strategy for the Contest With China (accessed 3/6/2025).

[7] LEVY, Marc: "Nippon Steel just struck a deal that guarantees an American CEO, an American-majority board, and a 'golden share' for Trump's government". In *Fortune*, 27 May 2025. Available at U.S. Steel and Japan's Nippon Steel just struck a deal that guarantees an American CEO, an American-majority board, and a 'golden share' for Trump's government | Fortune (accessed 3/6&2025).

on this issue that stems from the influence of the Indian diaspora in the United States. Comprising nearly five million people, it plays a key role in strengthening relations between the two countries. The Indian diaspora is increasingly present in US public life, with five congressmen of Indian origin and a history of support for the Democratic Party, especially visible with the endorsement of Kamala Harris, of Indian descent, but also influential figures among Republicans such as businessman and politician Vivek Ramaswamy, close to Donald Trump, or Kash Patel, current FBI director.

For the average US citizen, India's image is one of the most positive vis-à-vis other countries, according to Gallup's annual World Affairs survey, which shows that by 2025, 70% of Americans had a favourable or very favourable opinion, although it is down slightly from 77% in 2022.[8]

After a Bill Clinton presidency (1993-2001), in which the US criticised India on human rights and nuclear policy, as well as aligning itself with Pakistan, relations flourished under George W. Bush (2001-2009) and especially under Barack Obama (2009-2017), who called India an "indispensable partner" during his visit to India in 2010. However, it was not until Narendra Modi came to power in India in 2014 that an Indo-US alliance took off in the face of China's rise.

Three years later, in 2017, Trump's arrival in the White House, which was marked by personal sympathy and ideological convergence between Modi and Trump, consolidated a bilateral relationship that had been described as strategic. Moments of tension were even overcome, such as India's purchase of Russian S-400 systems in defiance of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) and Iranian oil, which is also similar to the current situation with regard to Russia. Trump also agreed with the Modi government on sensitive issues such as the situation in Kashmir and the controversial Indian citizenship law of 2019. [9]

With Joe Biden's presidency (2021-2024), the relationship between the two countries continued to strengthen, overcoming tensions when India abstained from voting in the

[8] "Country Ratings. In *Gallup*. Available at Country Ratings | Gallup Historical Trends (accessed 3/6/2025).

[9] FERNÁNDEZ APARICIO, Javier: "La India, autonomía e imperativo en su estrategia de seguridad". In *Estrategias de Seguridad Nacional: La competencia entre las grandes potencias*, Documento de Investigación 02/2023, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, 2023, ISBN digital edition: 978-84-10083-64-6, pp. 93-112. Available at 347 (accessed 3/6/2025).

United Nations against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. As cited in the US's 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy, India is already a key country and a preferred partner in this framework:

> India is a like-minded partner and leader in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, active and connected to Southeast Asia, a driving force in QUAD and other regional fora, and an engine for regional growth and development.[10]

The US-India strategic partnership is founded on shared values such as democracy and respect for the rules-based international order. The two countries actively cooperate in multilateral fora such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue and various bilateral platforms covering areas such as defence, trade, technology, health, energy and space cooperation. Since 2010, India has also been seeking US backing for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and it should be recalled that in 1971 China won a seat on the UN Security Council, replacing Taiwan, in a move supported by the US, which has now promised India a seat as a member.

On the economic front, the two countries have growing cooperation through mechanisms such as the India-US Trade Policy Forum, the CEO Forum and the Economic and Financial Partnership. Major Indian companies such as Infosys, Wipro and Dr. Reddy's operate in the US, while US companies such as Google, Microsoft and Coca-Cola are deeply established in India. They also collaborate on regional initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), which seeks to strengthen supply chains and foster sustainable trade in the Indo-Pacific region.

With regard to defence, bilateral agreements have been intensified, particularly following the renewed Defence Cooperation Framework of 2015. Indian acquisitions of United States military equipment exceeded $20 billion in 2024. Cooperation in cybersecurity has also expanded, with initiatives such as the Cybersecurity Framework and Indian participation in the Blue Dot Network standing out. Lastly, in the nuclear field, India and the United States share strategies concerning security and technology. Moreover, the

[10] "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States', In *The White House*, 11 February 2022. Available at U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf (accessed 22/01/2025).

United States supports India's aspiration to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group, although China blocks this due to India not being a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In January 2025, the United States lifted restrictions on over 200 Indian nuclear entities, thereby broadening collaboration in this sector.[11]

Thus, India seems to have partly abandoned its traditional non-alignment in favour of multilateralism and strategic partnership with the United States. This new diplomatic triangle (US-India-China) redefines the logic of power, at least in Asia, as another equilateral triangle (US-China-Soviet Union) did in the past. Its three sides are the same but changed in terms of the names of the allies in the face of a perceived systemic enemy. Moreover, it highlights the US need to court a new power, India, in its aim to contain another, China.

Why India? The United States needs help

In 2023, Kissinger travelled to China at the invitation of Xi Jinping, with whom he met almost fifty years after his historic trips in 1971-1972. This was followed by a visit by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other senior US officials to reach minimum agreements on trade. Among the long list of the most explosive points of contention, the sanctions imposed on the microprocessor sector and increased US interference in Taiwan top the list.

Unlike Trump during his first term, who "merely" targeted companies such as Huawei, Biden aimed at the entire ecosystem of China's industrial modernisation, seeking to cut off its access to advanced microchip manufacturing technology and obstruct its progress in the field of artificial intelligence and other domains in which China has already achieved significant success. The emergence of DeepSeek in the market was therefore a shock to the industry and to the American perception of a presumed primacy in the field of AI.[12]

Another explosive issue on which Beijing is demanding that Washington release its pressure to urge a minimal normalisation, which Kissinger seemed to sponsor during his 2023 visit, is Taiwan. Raised by Xi Jinping to the status of a national objective that cannot

[11] "India-US Bilateral Relations - A Brief" In *Ministry of External Affairs of India*. Available at Ind-US-Brief.pdf (accessed 3/6/2025).

[12] DeepSeek's market shock: What you need to know - Intuition

be renounced and whose symbolic value is non-negotiable, the goal of reunification is at the top of the Chinese agenda, whose leadership has been conjuring up the historic task of preventing the island's estrangement from the mainland.

For Beijing, Washington's attitude is confirmation that it no longer respects the terms of the "Three Communiques" issued jointly in 1972 (Nixon and Zhou Enlai), 1979 (Carter and Deng Xiaoping) and 1982 (Reagan and Deng Xiaoping) that stipulated the end of official relations with Taipei and the gradual cessation of US military aid to the island. Today, Chinese strategists interpret opposition to the one-China principle as the prelude to a conflict that the United States would like to lead it into in order to reassert its hegemony in the region and the world with its victory.

Moreover, since the 1990s, China has emerged as an economic and technological superpower, with American support playing a role in this through the outsourcing of production and industrialisation, without reconsidering the objective of establishing a strong counterweight to the Soviet Union—a friendship policy that continued even after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Three decades of growing global influence, spectacular domestic growth, military capability development, Indo-Pacific ambitions—with Taiwan as the primary issue—and powerful foreign projection, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, made it evident to the United States that China's rise to global hegemony was imminent. Consequently, Washington shifted from a strategy of engagement to one of active containment, the so-called *decoupling*, based on alliances with partner countries and the imposition of sanctions against China.[13] .

In recent years, various voices within the American strategic establishment—including that of Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defence for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs (2021–2025)—have argued that it is imperative for the US to establish such a collective defence alliance in Asia, countering Chinese influence in the region that could lead to a new international order led by Beijing[14] . In this context, the formation of an association that would group like-minded countries such as Australia, Japan, the Philippines and India, perhaps imitating the AUKUS agreement, which since September 2021 has united

[13] ESTEBAN RODRÍGUEZ, Emilio; MARTÍN RODRÍGUEZ, Rafael: Introducción a la China actual, Alianza, 2024, ISBN 978-8411487443, pp.

[14] RATNER, Ely: "The Case for a Pacific Defense Pact". In *The Foreign Affairs*, 27 May 2025. Available at: The Case for a Pacific Defense Pact: America Needs a New Asian Alliance to Counter China (accessed 4/6/2025).

Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, sharing projects such as the development of nuclear-powered submarines, or the QUAD, composed since 2017 by Australia, India, Japan and the United States, which has recently intensified cooperation to improve regional maritime surveillance.[15]

India has assumed an increasingly important role in this US strategy, at least in the Indo-Pacific region, helped by its own strategic necessity in the face of the threat posed by China. It also guarantees access to a huge and growing market, with multiple investment possibilities, especially in the technology industry with the arrival of US companies relocating precisely from China, while maintaining its strategic autonomy and without significantly altering its network of partnerships, especially with Russia, with reservations against an excessive ideologisation of the global strategic conflict[16] . Does India therefore want to play the same role as China did in the 1970s as a US ally vis-à-vis the Soviet Union?

India's position in the strategy of containment towards China

Although India might play the same role that China did from the 1970s with respect to the Soviet Union, it features structural differences specific to a different era. Compared with the role played by China, today's India shares certain similarities, particularly its strong annual economic growth. In this regard, India posts better figures than not only the United States but also China, and additionally benefits from the momentum of the largest population globally, with approximately 40% of its 1.43 billion inhabitants under the age of 35.

Similarly, the government narrative promotes national pride and re-emergence as a historical power, leadership in what is now called the Global South, and active participation in various international fora. The main difference between today's India and

[15] BHARDWAJ, Antonio: 'Underestimating China: Why America Needs a New Strategy of Allied Scale to Offset Beijing's Enduring Advantages'. In *Foreign Affairs Forum*, 22 April 2025. Available at Underestimating China: Why America Needs a New Strategy of Allied Scale to Offset Beijing's Enduring Advantages (accessed 4/6/2025).

[16] KAURA, Vinay: 'India's Stake and Role in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition'. In *Connections: The Quartely Journal*, 23, no. 2 (2024), pp. 92-105. Available at India's Stake and Role in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition (accessed 4/6/2025).

yesterday's China, on the other hand, is the internal path to be taken to reduce social inequality, poverty and ethnic tensions in India.[17]

When it comes to the US's consideration of India, leveraging its influence in the Indian Ocean is a strategic objective, as Robert Kaplan anticipated in 2010 in *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and The Future of American Power*[18] . This priority is now reflected in the geopolitical vision for the Indo-Pacific region, even to the point of being considered a strategic partnership during Trump's first term in office. The link between the two countries rests primarily on a shared rivalry with China and, theoretically, the defence of common democratic values. However, this narrative has limited reach in New Delhi, whose foreign policy is guided by strategic pragmatism rather than ideological adherence to Western liberal democratic principles.

A third factor is India's perception of a declining US leadership, which creates uncertainty about its ability to offer real support in peak crisis situations, such as another possible border clash with China or a conflict with Pakistan, as witnessed in the escalation of warfare following Operation Sindoor on 7-9 May, India's response to the 22 April Pahalgam attack. If in the Himalayan flare-up with China in 2022, Indian forces had the invaluable assistance of US intelligence and diplomatic support[19] , the same does not seem to have been true of the actions following Sindoor, even if India claimed it was an anti-terrorist operation against Pakistani-backed Islamist organisations in Kashmir, a narrative that undoubtedly attracts US interest.

For New Delhi, this may be evidence that US involvement in matters of exclusive strategic interest to India is not secure unless it is aligned with the counterweight to China in Asia. For the Indian government, this raises doubts about the scope of this common strategic partnership, despite the good relations between the two countries, which is why it continues to emphasise India's multilateralism in order to avoid a possible economic,

[17] CHELLANEY, Brahma: "India's Leading India: A Counter-Power to China? In *The Power of the Global South*, Vanguard Dossier, 89, October-November 2023, pp. 46-51.
[18] English translation in KAPLAN, Robert: *Monsoon. A voyage through the future of the Indian Ocean*, El Hombre del Tres, 2012, ISBN 978-8494016158.

[19] SHINKMAN, Paul D.: "U.S. Intel Helped India Rout China in 2022 Border Clash: Sources". In *U.S.News & World Report*, 20 March 2023. Available in US Intelligence Helped India Repel Chinese Border Incursion in 2022: Report (accessed 4/6/2025).

political and security dependence on a single power, and to move towards strategic autonomy and a greater specific global Indian weight.[20]

Finally, one must ask whether China truly constitutes a "structural enemy" for India, as the Soviet Union did for the United States during the Cold War, and as China currently does for the United States. After Russia, China is India's second-largest trading partner, and the decoupling of their economies is not easily achieved. Moreover, the historic rivalry in the Himalayas is marked by recent signs indicating a possible easing of the threat of major conflict. In October 2024, within the BRICS summit framework, the creation of bilateral technical committees and the establishment of oversight mechanisms, such as joint patrols, were agreed upon to reduce tension along this vast 3,500-kilometre border. Additionally, China's decision not to align with Pakistan during the recent Indo-Pakistani clash in May—limiting itself instead to calls for restraint by both parties—and although Pakistan used Chinese-made weaponry, suggests a strategic calculation by Beijing aimed at avoiding direct confrontation with New Delhi.[21]

Historically, India is the only Asian country that has challenged China in the past, even militarily and without the direct backing of a third power. To date, neither the United States, Russia, nor other Indo-Pacific actors have shown a willingness to confront China directly to the extent that India has, which moreover has the capacity to exert genuine deterrent pressure. Above all, because both powers possess nuclear weapons, this contributes to China's strategic perception of India not as a permanent enemy, thereby reducing the risk of a simultaneous front involving the United States in the Pacific and India in South Asia.

Conclusions: future scenarios

The new Trump administration's rapport with the Modi government in India makes a substantial change in the Indo-US partnership seem unlikely, but there are some unknowns that will gradually unravel. The first is whether India will finally be affected by

[20] ABRAHAM, J. C.; PURUSHOTHAMAN, U.: 'Limits of India-US Relations: Balancing Through Strategic Autonomy and Multi-alignment'. In *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, *11*(4), 2024, pp. 496-514. Available at https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970241282071 (accessed 4/6/2025).

[21] "What does China think of Operation Sindoor? The official word is 'restraint'". In *FirstPost*, 7 May 2025. Available at What does China think of Operation Sindoor? The official word is 'restraint' - Firstpost (accessed 4/6/2025).

the imposition of tariffs or the signing of a trade agreement favourable to US interests, then whether it will compromise on the relationship with Russia and above all China itself, since Trump's entourage has suggested a possible change of perception with respect to India as a result.[22]

Other potential friction points include energy cooperation, where India could benefit or, conversely, be harmed if the United States ultimately replaces Russia in the supply of oil and gas, or defence cooperation, as Trump could assist India in modernising and enhancing its military capabilities but also pressure it to assume greater responsibility for security in the Indo-Pacific, which could lead to greater confrontation with China.[23]

Washington is pragmatic and does not want to fall into a possible second Thucydides Trap with respect to India, as betting on its rise today may be setting the stage for another systemic rival tomorrow. India is expected to overtake Japan as the world's fourth largest economic power by 2025 and to stalk Germany as the third largest in the coming years. India and its large demographic potential is betting on a structural expansion focused on industrialisation, infrastructure development and the consolidation of its booming services sector, but unlike the United States represents an emerging economy with a longer development path, absorbing foreign investment and deploying a multi-alignment that positions it as one of the economies with the greatest capacity for long-term sustained growth[24] . It is not only the United States, as India offers better data on its economic evolution than China, striving to implement its own connectivity projects, especially in South Asia, and to compete with China's projection on the geopolitical chessboard, although it is currently a long way ahead. [25]

This time factor could work against India's ascent as a global power. Since the 1990s, China enjoyed sufficient calm to develop internally and project itself externally. Today,

[22] DUTTA, David: "India's Russian arms purchases 'rubbed America the wrong way'; bilateral trade deal close: US Commerce Secretary Lutnick". In *The Indian Express*, 4 June 2025. Available at India's Russian arms purchases 'rubbed America the wrong way'; bilateral trade deal close: US Commerce Secretary Lutnick | Business News - The Indian Express (accessed 4/6/2025).

[23] SIDDIQUI, Huma: 'Trump and India: How will Modi and Trump engage in the new era'. In *Financial Express*, 15 January 2025. Available at Trump and India: How will Modi and Trump engage in the new era - World News | The Financial Express (accessed 18/2/2025).

[24] "India prepares to overtake Japan and move closer to the global economic podium". In *Infobae*, 29 May 2025. Available in India prepares to surpass Japan and approach the global economic podium - Infobae (accessed 4/6/2025).

[25] UDAY, Bharadaz: "ridges or bargains? Examining India and China's infrastructure expansion in South Asia'. In *World and New World Journal*, 26 May 2025. Available in Bridges or bargains? Examining India and China's infrastructure expansion in South Asia - World and New World Journal (accessed 4/6/2025).

however, geopolitics is polarised along ideological lines and strategic interests, and the pressure to align with one bloc or another also affects India. In this global disorder, it is difficult to remain neutral or act independently. Faced with rising tensions, India may have no choice but to seek security through militarisation and alliances with partners who are reliable in light of its own interests.

Thus far, most of these allies are liberal democracies such as the United States, countries of the European Union, Japan, or Australia. India prides itself on being the largest democracy in the world, but the issue of genuine values and rights could become a source of friction at some point. Impatient with the slow or absent alignment of Indian foreign policy with that of the United States and its allies, the current Prime Minister Modi may face criticism over the regression in the country's democratic indices, although the prevailing climate of realism makes this unlikely in the medium term, considering that it could also lead to greater Indian alignment with Russia and China. Today, multi-alignment is not an option for India; rather, it is an imperative.

Returning once more to Kissinger, declassified records reveal that as early as 1972 he had advocated for India to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. From his quote "No one in D.C. wakes up to New Delhi", the great American foreign policy strategist since the last third of the 20th century became a major advocate of Indo-US bilateral engagement[26] . During Prime Minister Modi's official state visit to the US in June 2023, despite his deteriorating health, he travelled to attend the Indian prime minister's speech at the State Department. In his book *World Order*, he portrayed India as 'a pivot of the 21st century order: an indispensable element because of its geographic location, resources and a legacy of sophisticated leadership'[27] .

Javier Fernández Aparicio
IEEE Senior Analyst
@jafeap

[26] MISHRA, Vivek; PANKAJ, Fanase: "On India, Kissinger changed his mind". In *Observed Research Foundation*, 15 December 2023. Available at On India, Kissinger changed his mind (accessed 4/6/2025).
[27] KISSINGER, Henry: *Orden mundial. Reflections on the character of countries and the course of history*, Debate, 2016, ISBN 978-8499925714, p. 241.