

Warm Glow of India-U.S. Ties Turns Cold

WASHINGTON—In a matter of months, President Trump has gone from praising India as a major strategic partner to saying he wouldn't care if its economy implodes.

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The Trump administration still values the U.S.-India partnership, officials say. But ties between Washington and New Delhi have steadily soured over disputes about trade, Russia and whether Trump deserves credit for brokering a cease-fire following a four-day conflict in May between India and its rival Pakistan.

The standoff, fueled by the president's public broadsides against India, threatens to sink a key but complex geopolitical relationship and break the bonds Trump has forged with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The fractures have appeared as U.S. ties with Pakistan have grown in recent months, culminating in a White House meeting between Trump and the country's powerful army chief, Asim Munir, in June.

Modi "must be very, very unhappy," said Manoj Joshi, a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, an Indian think tank.

India, viewed by the U.S. as a bulwark against China, has rankled Washington with its



India's Narendra Modi visited President Trump in February.

relationship with Russia. New Delhi purchases Russian oil and weapons, propping up Russia's economy, and along with Moscow is part of a loose, five-nation grouping known as the Brics.

As Trump has turned against Russian President Vladimir Putin for not ending the war in Ukraine, he has vowed to impose tariffs on countries that do business with Moscow. India, Trump said on Wednesday, would incur a "penalty" for its continued purchases of Russian goods.

Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesman Randhir Jaiswal told reporters on Friday that the U.S.-India relationship "has weathered several transitions and challenges. We remain focused on the substantive agenda

that our two countries have committed to and are confident that the relationship will continue to move forward."

He said India would continue buying oil from Russia despite Trump's threats.

Still, Trump's comments are a stark shift from the early days of the administration, when officials in Washington and New Delhi hoped to build on the Trump-Modi relationship established during the president's first term.

Trump hosted Modi at the White House in February and praised him as a "much better negotiator," while Modi mirrored Trump's campaign catchphrase and said he wanted to "make India great again."

Yet the warm glow faded in the following months, when

efforts to swiftly clinch a bilateral trade deal foundered. Trump, current and former officials said, is deeply frustrated by the lack of progress with New Delhi.

A point of contention in tariff negotiations is the U.S.'s push to open India's agricultural market, which employs over 40% of the country's workforce. Opening up the sector would anger India's farmers, a powerful voting bloc. That presents a political risk for Modi, who abandoned an effort in 2021 to deregulate the agricultural sector after facing nationwide protests from farmers.

Trump said the U.S. and India are still negotiating a trade deal even after the Aug. 1 deadline for an agreement.

U.S.-India ties hit another snag in May when India and Pakistan, both nuclear powers, clashed over a four-day stretch.

Trump posted on social media that his team brokered a deal that led to a cease-fire on May 10. Pakistan embraced the announcement, praising Trump and nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

India, by contrast, bristled at Trump's assertions and insisted no outside power dictated the cease-fire. India's insistence that the U.S. role was overblown has privately angered Trump, who has told aides he is upset with Modi for not thanking him.

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