Emerging 'Strategic Autonomy'

What is the issue?

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- The idea of “strategic autonomy” was for long central to Indian foreign policy discourse after the Cold War.
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- But now, there is a new enthusiasm for independent foreign and security policies among many other countries.
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What are the recent developments?

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- **Idea** - The debate on strategic autonomy has been most vocal in the European Union.
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- It is also beginning to acquire some traction among Asian allies like Japan, South Korea and Australia.
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- Europe feels that it could no longer rely on U.S. alone for its security.
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- It is felt that Europe should take its destiny into its own hands and become a credible sovereign actor on the global stage.
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- **Measures** - The EU has unveiled an ambitious agenda for common defence.
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- This includes -
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i. Permanent Structured Security Cooperation under the common security and defence policy
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ii. development of a joint interventionary force

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iii. the establishment of a $15-billion European Defence Fund
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- Moreover, strategic autonomy and nuclear weapons are often seen as two sides of the same coin.
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- France and the U.K. have been talking for a while of pooling their nuclear resources for a “European deterrent force”.
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- Germany, despite its long-standing nuclear aversion, has now begun to debate the merits of a German nuclear option.
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How is the U.S. a reason for these?

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- The new emphasis on autonomy is more a result of unprecedented pressure from the U S.
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- The U.S. President Trump is questioning the need for America's efforts and costs in protecting its rich allies in Europe and Asia.
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- The importance of America paying for the maintenance of the “liberal international order” is given least thought.
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- Trump is also conscious of ensuring US alliance commitments in Europe and Asia.
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- This has begun to compel the US allies to reflect on the need for strategic autonomy.
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What is the case with India?

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- It is claimed in India that “strategic autonomy” is a general and fundamental principle of India’s foreign policy.

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- However, it tends to be invoked only in relation to the United States and never in the discussion of the ties with Russia or China.
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- U.S. is now more aligned with India on key regional and global interests than Russia or China.
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- These include the issues on Pakistan, cross-border terrorism and security in the Indo-Pacific.
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- Under the present government, India has begun to take a more practical view of “strategic autonomy”.
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- It has shed some of the inhibitions against security cooperation with the West.
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- The Defence partnerships with the US and France have finally begun to gain progress.
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- Nevertheless, the residual legacy of “strategic autonomy” is raised to limit India's deeper engagement with the US.
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What is the significance now?

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- In India's case, it is the fear of American “entrapment” that was a driving factor for its thinking on “strategic autonomy.”
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- On the other hand, it is the fear of US “abandonment” that shapes the present European debate.
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- Trump’s “America First” policy would not have mattered for US allies if Europe and Asia were at peace with themselves.
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- But they are not at present.
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- The assertiveness of Russia in Europe and China in Asia and the deepening alliance between them are evident.

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- These add to the pressures on not just the US allies but also India.
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What is the way forward?

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- India must end its neglect of existing European structures like NATO, and pay attention to the emerging defence institutions.
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- The EU, on its part, must begin to integrate India into its security framework.
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- Deepening defence partnership is a good way to enhance the strategic autonomy of India and Europe in an uncertain world.
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Source: Indian Express

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