

India at the UNGA

What is the issue?

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- India called off the planned meeting with Pakistan in New York ahead of the United Nations General Assembly's annual session.

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- In this backdrop, it is essential that India looks beyond Pakistan and engage with structural changes in the international system.

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How have the roles changed?

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- There was a time when the voices of both Pakistan and India mattered on the world stage.

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- Pakistan was a key member of the Western alliance system in Asia.

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- It rightly saw itself as a pragmatic Islamic nation capable of exercising influence in the Middle East.

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- It had the prospects of acting as a bridge between America and China.

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- But today, Pakistan's diminished diplomacy drags on the Kashmir issue.

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- India's political voice too mattered a lot at the UN, long back, when its economic weight was rather limited.

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- India is now on its growing economic prominence and expanding global footprint.

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- But despite this, India seems obsessed with a few issues rather than engage with the larger international issues.

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Why has India become so?

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 - India persists with the quest for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, when all indications are that it is unlikely to happen.
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 - It has also devoted too much energy in the pursuit of the international convention against terrorism.
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 - However, this is unlikely to do very much in addressing India's security challenges.
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 - More so, the UN resolutions are honoured by nations more in breach than in observance.
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 - What have benefited India are key partnerships on counter-terrorism. E.g. with the US and Arab Gulf partners
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 - This is more workable than the endorsement of general principles under multilateralism.
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Why should India look beyond Pakistan?

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 - India's relationship with Pakistan is not in its god phase at present.
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 - India blamed 'Pakistan-based entities' for the recent killing of three special police officers in Kashmir.
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 - The prospect of a diplomatic encounter between India and Pakistan has remained a focus in many multilateral gatherings.
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 - For more than two decades now, this question seems to sensationalize the Indian public interest in multilateral gatherings.
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 - The strained relations have deepened the inability of the two countries to engage with the larger global issues.
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- So if India looks beyond Pakistan, terrorism and a UNSC seat, it could discuss much more in the UN.

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What are the global issues to be resolved?

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- **Sovereignty** - The foremost is balancing between the questions of sovereignty and multilateralism.

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- Defending sovereignty was a key priority in India's UN diplomacy since the end of the Cold War.
- This is now being revived by the developments in regards with the decision of U.S. President Donald Trump.
- E.g. withdrawal from the Paris agreement, the UN Scientific and Cultural Organisation, the UN Human Rights Council, etc
- The essence of Trump's "America First" has been the promise to liberate US from the "globalist trap".
- He insists that he will not let multilateral organisations restrain America's pursuit of its national interests.
- Given these, sovereignty will once again be the dominant theme in this year's session.
- **Global Trade** - Trump is threatening to pull out of the WTO and choking its dispute-settlement mechanism.
- Key trading nations are already beginning to respond with proposals for reform.
- If it does not change, the WTO and the international order in trade may not survive the Trump era.
- **Middle East** - Trump is making big moves in the Middle East that breaks away from the conventional thinking on the region.

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- He has ended the 2015 [nuclear agreement](#) with Iran negotiated by the Obama administration.
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- He is promising to press for a change in “regime behaviour” in Iran.
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- There is also effort on constructing a new Middle East Security Alliance of Arab nations threatened by Iran.
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What lies before India?

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- The geopolitics of the Gulf region is undergoing unprecedented change.
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- This is a significant concern for India as it has massive economic and political stakes there.
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- A similar issue is the world trading system and the nature of multilateralism.
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- India’s diplomatic engagements at the UN should be about crafting a new strategy to address these challenges.
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Source: Indian Express

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