

Alaska Summit 2025

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Alaska Summit 2025 : A turning point without gains for India

Context

The **Alaska Summit** between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on **August 15, 2025**, was widely hailed as a potential breakthrough in the **Russia-Ukraine conflict**.

For India, however, the summit produced **limited benefits**. It highlighted India's **vulnerability** of having much at stake in U.S.-Russia talks but little direct **agency** in influencing outcomes.

Introduction

The Alaska episode underscored the **challenges in India-U.S. relations under Trump** and offered important lessons for New Delhi's foreign policy.

While expectations were high that a thaw between Washington and Moscow could reduce pressure on India, the summit instead **reinforced sanctions** and exposed contradictions in Trump's approach.

Outcome of the Summit

- India hoped for relief from **U.S. secondary sanctions** on Russian oil imports.
- It expected resumption of **stalled trade talks** and rollback of steep **reciprocal tariffs**.
- None of these expectations materialised. Washington maintained its **hard line**, with senior officials framing sanctions as a strategy against both Russian imports and India's market curbs.
- Trump's claim of mediating the **India-Pakistan ceasefire during Operation Sindoor** clashed with New Delhi's narrative, worsening tensions.

The Logic Behind U.S. Sanctions

- The sanctions reflect **power politics and leverage over India** rather than weakening Russia.
- The U.S. expanded its own **trade with Moscow** even after Trump's return.
- **China's oil imports from Russia** remain far higher than India's, yet Washington targeted India more aggressively.
- Trump's fixation on being seen as a **global peacemaker** shaped his approach more than consistent policy.
- Reports of Modi refusing to endorse Trump's claims or negotiate with Pakistan under U.S. auspices deepened bilateral strains.

Lessons for India

Do Not Overinvest in Summitry

- The Alaska summit shows the dangers of prioritising **diplomatic showmanship** over substance.
- Personal rapport with leaders, as seen with Trump and Xi Jinping, has not prevented crises such as the **Galwan clashes** or current U.S. tensions.
- India must focus on **institutional mechanisms** and concrete agreements.

Rebuild Bipartisan Engagement

- India's tilt toward one U.S. faction has **backfired** repeatedly.
- The Modi-Trump camaraderie alienated **Democrats**, while later closeness with Biden angered Trump.
- Long-term interests require cultivating **bipartisan goodwill** in Washington.

Uphold Strategic Autonomy

- Past concessions to U.S. pressure, such as reducing **Iranian and Venezuelan oil imports**, encouraged further demands.
- India should adhere only to **UN-mandated sanctions** to safeguard its economic interests and credibility as a **Global South leader**.

Prepare Countermeasures

- India must be ready with **firm responses** to U.S. actions harming its interests.
 - Possible measures include reciprocal tariffs, restrictions on **U.S. manufacturing in India**, or taxes on remittances.
 - Such steps restore India's **agency** in external relations.
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The Way Forward

- India must decide whether to continue **seeking U.S. approval** or to **diversify diplomatic bets**.
 - Upcoming engagements with **Japan, China, South Africa, and Russia** provide avenues to reinforce partnerships.
 - The forthcoming **Quad Summit** will test India-U.S. ties and reveal whether Trump intends to visit India.
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Conclusion

The **Alaska Summit** highlighted that India cannot base its foreign policy on the **pageantry of high-level meetings**.

A sustainable strategy must rest on **substance, balance, and principle**, enabling New Delhi to navigate U.S. unpredictability while preserving **autonomy and long-term interests**.