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## Strategic Consequences Of A Public Health Crisis:

*How US Domestic Drug Policy Failures are Catalyzing a Sino-Indian Geopolitical Equilibrium*

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**Abstract:** In the context of the historical crisis of overdose from the US with synthetic opioids, this article states that the political failure is the main factor that it is not an external subject, and that guilt is falsely dictated by strategic outcomes. It synthesizes data on the regulatory capture of extracts, weakening administration legislation for the fight against drugs in 2016, and the US border feedback loop-combined with the Mexican feedback loop, showing how home institutions incubated Fentanyl subsidies. Recognizing isolated cases related to India, it shows that it is inconsistent with the legal basis of India (NDP, PMLA) and the declaration, the main source of information. In combination with punitive commercial measures against the Indian sector's nephthalma, it catalyzed geopolitical compensation in New Delhi with an overemphasis on foreign delivery networks. In 2025, price shocks and the resumption of high levels of diplomacy have been permitted in a cautious yet practical way with China, including discussions on trade relief and important entries, indicating a move towards the balance between Shino and India. It is argued that external US enforcement in terms of internal control will disappear from the coalition space "Nazis in the Indo-Pacific region" and negatively rearrange the levers of Beijing and New Delhi. This article lies in the fact that sustainable reduction in fentanyl requires US internal reform and proofreading diplomacy, but India will support strategic autonomy in the context of the liquid multipolar order following dismissal.

**Index Terms** - Fentanyl crisis, Regulatory capture, FDA revolving door, DEA disempowerment, Firearms trafficking, Chinese precursors, NDPS Act, U.S. tariffs, Sino-Indian détente, Strategic autonomy.

### Introduction

The United States is facing a public health crisis of historic proportions, driven in large part by the spread of synthetic opioids, and above all fentanyl. The horrific loss of half a million lives has galvanized public debate that tends to assign blame for this crisis to outside actors, referencing a supply chain whose origins are in Asian precursor chemicals and whose endpoint is Mexican-based illicit trafficking. This document theorizes that this account is a politic strategy of misdirection, designed to conceal deep and structural failures in the US's own legislative, regulatory, and enforcement systems. While there must be some cooperation with other countries, the excessive emphasis on foreign countries, especially India, is political scapegoating. This analysis proves that India is neither a prime mover of the crisis but has been subjected to a contradictory US foreign policy consisting of unfounded charges and retaliatory trade tariffs imposed on non-pharma industries. This policy has produced a notable and unintended effect: it has made India, an important partner in the Indo-Pacific region, realized it should engage in a strategic rebalancing. This shift towards a hesitant but pragmatic period of cooperation with its old competitor, China, can reshape the regional and international balance of power.

## I. THE ANATOMY OF A CRISIS: US DOMESTIC AND BORDER CONTROL FAILURES

This article gives a fact-based, detailed account of how domestic problems in the United States, and not what foreign nations do, are the root causes of the fentanyl crisis. The crisis is not anomalous but the natural result of a sequence of American policy mistakes.

### *The Erosion of Public Trust: Regulatory Capture and the Opioid Epidemic*

The origin of the US opioid epidemic lies in the intentional actions of local pharmaceutical firms and compromised integrity of government regulatory bodies. A case in point is Purdue Pharma, which introduced the drug OxyContin in 1996 (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2025). Through intense and deceptive promotion, the firm willingly stoked widespread abuse of opioids. In one especially egregious instance, Purdue Pharma gained FDA approval to market OxyContin on a 12-hour dosing cycle, even though data suggested that the drug's effects would have dissipated hours before the next dose. This fraudulent marketing helped fuel an exponential growth in non-medical use of OxyContin, from around 400,000 users in 1999 to 2.8 million in 2003, fueling a new epidemic of addiction and laying the groundwork for the broader opioid crisis (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2025). This was not a failure of an academic or foreign partner, but a failure of the US's own domestic protections.

One key aspect of this failure is the institutional process referred to as the "revolving door," in which regulators resign government employment to secure well-paying positions within the very industries they previously regulated. This process represents a tangible conflict of interest, as the potential for future employment at a regulated company can create an existing bias that undercuts the official's public obligation. A chilling example is that of Curtis Wright, the FDA official who cleared OxyContin in late 1995 and became a Purdue Pharma employee a year later for a salary of \$400,000. This case, though high-profile, is not an anomaly. One analysis of 16 FDA medical examiners who departed from the agency discovered that 11 accepted post-government employment with the firms they had regulated, and another analysis of hematology-oncology medical reviewers discovered that more than half who left the FDA ended up working for or advising the biopharmaceutical sector (Karas, Laura, 2023). The perversion of regulatory purpose for personal profit is a foundational failure of governance and an important, self-inflicted injury at the center of the crisis.

### *Disarming the DEA: The Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act of 2016*

The crisis was compounded by a legislative assault that openly disarmed a principal federal enforcement agency. The Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act of 2016, which was passed by unanimous consent in Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama, was the pinnacle of a "multifaceted campaign" undertaken by the drug industry. The industry lobbied out more than \$100 million between 2014 and 2016 in an effort to drive the bill through Congress (Higham, S., & Bernstein, L. 2017).

The law effectively took away the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) "most powerful tool" to fight drug distribution corporations: the ability to freeze on suspicion narcotic shipments from manufacturers and distributors immediately on the grounds of an "imminent danger to public health or safety". The new law redefined the term, increasing the legal threshold for suspension and making it "essentially impossible for the DEA to freeze" these shipments (Higham, S., & Bernstein, L. 2017). This legislative capture, where influential industry lobbies drove Congress to enact a law directly weakening a federal agency responsible for protecting the public, is a deep failure of the legislative process. Despite protests from career DEA agents, the leadership of the agency at that time approved the new language, showing that political expediency and industry interests were more important than public safety (Sullum, J. 2017). This move showed that the crisis has its roots not only domestically but also fundamentally institutional and legislative.

### *The Drugs-Cash-Weapons Feedback Loop: A Porous Border*

The domestic policy failures in the US also drive the illegal trade of drugs at its borders. On the US-Mexico border, a lethal cycle of "drugs - money - guns" has become a defining characteristic of the fentanyl crisis. One of the most prominent features of this loop is the unprecedented and prolonged cross-border shipment of US-origin firearms into Mexico. Based on figures provided by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), more than 16,000 U.S.-origin firearms seized in Mexico were traced by the agency in 2022 alone (Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. 2023).

This flow of high-powered guns gives Mexican drug cartels the ability to further their strength and brutality, resulting in a visible trend of "para-militarization" in which they engage openly against national military and police units. This situation gives rise to a direct and mutual relationship between the US's unregulated gun control and the criminal groups transporting drugs back into the United States. The failure of the US to manage the flow of weapons across its own border is not a tangential domestic concern but a direct catalyst of the drug problem. The US cannot successfully fight the influx of drugs into the country without also solving the export of firearms. The failures of policy on one side (drug control) are therefore inseparably tied to the failures of policy on the other (gun control), and a self-perpetuating cycle of violence and illegal commerce is created. The failure of US authorities to successfully interdict this cycle at its origin is an important contributing factor to the deepening of the crisis.

Calendar Year	Manufactured in the United States (# of Traces)	Imported into the United States (# of Traces)	Total U.S. Sourced Firearms (# of Traces)	Total U.S. Sourced Firearms (% of all Traces)
2017	8,166	2,992	11,158	69.2%
2018	9,741	3,652	13,393	68.9%
2019	10,399	3,881	14,280	67.8%
2020	10,142	3,864	14,006	67.8%
2021	10,776	3,797	14,573	66.8%
2022	11,916	4,234	16,150	65.5%

Table 1: Statistics on U.S.-Sourced Firearms Recovered in Mexico (2017-2022) (Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. 2023)

## II. INDIA'S ROBUST COUNTER-NARCOTICS FRAMEWORK: DEBUNKING THE SCAPEGOAT NARRATIVE

Unlike the systemic failures in the US, India has built a robust and comprehensive legal and institutional mechanism to tackle drug trafficking. India is not a main source of the US fentanyl problem and that most of the US accusations leveled against it are more political than real.

### *A Comprehensive Legal and Institutional Structure*

India's drug control legal structure is also extensive and strict, with a foundation law that has existed for decades. The linchpin of this regime is the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985, which bans the manufacture, cultivation, possession, sale, and transport of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The Act prescribes harsh punishment in the form of stringent imprisonment for 10 years or more for possessing amounts over a "small quantity" but below a "commercial quantity," and 10-20 years for a "commercial quantity". The Act was the culmination of decades of US pressure to criminalize such substances as cannabis that hitherto had been in widespread use in India.

In addition to the NDPS Act, India also fights the economic root cause of drug crime through the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) of 2002. The PMLA provides for the seizure of property obtained from criminal activity, such as drug trafficking, which effectively hits the economic base of illegal networks (Directorate of Enforcement, Ministry of Finance, 2009). It is worth mentioning that though the legal framework of India is strong, it is not devoid of complications. For instance, a complaint about the NDPS Act is that in awarding the same punishment for every drug, it could have encouraged traffickers to move to more lucrative, more hard drugs.

The Drugs, Medical Devices, and Cosmetics Bill, 2023 would aim to modernize the current legal framework and bring into regulation fields like e-pharmacies and medical devices, illustrating India's continued attempt to keep pace with the shifting landscape of drug regulation (Hirani, A., Majumdar, S., & Isaac, A. (2023). The difference between a passed Act and a pending Bill is critical for an expert-level analysis and points to India's ongoing, if bureaucratic, legal development in this area.

Legal Framework	Key Provisions	Enforcement Agencies
<b>Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985</b>	Prohibits cultivation, production, possession, sale, purchase, transport, and consumption of narcotic and psychotropic substances. Establishes a multi-tiered punishment system based on drug quantity (small, less than commercial, commercial).	Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Border Security Force (BSF), Indian Coast Guard (ICG), Railway Protection Force (RPF), State Police, and other Central Government agencies.
<b>Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002</b>	Provides for the confiscation of property derived from criminal acts, including drug trafficking. Aims to target the financial infrastructure of illicit networks.	Directorate of Enforcement, Ministry of Finance.
<b>Pending Legislation (e.g., Drugs, Medical Devices, and Cosmetics Bill, 2023)</b>	Aims to replace the 1940 Drugs and Cosmetics Act. Seeks to regulate e-pharmacies, medical devices, and other new challenges in the pharmaceutical landscape.	(Future) Relevant Central Government bodies.

Table 2: India's Key Drug Control Legislation and Agencies

### *Proactive International and Domestic Cooperation*

India's commitment to drug control is also reflected in its active engagement in regional and international cooperative strategies. The government has pursued a "whole of government approach" to fight drug abuse, encompassing a zero-tolerance policy and stressing structural, institutional, and informational reforms (Press Information Bureau, 2025). India has given several agencies, such as the Border Security Force (BSF), Indian Coast Guard (ICG), and Railway Protection Force (RPF), powers to make searches, seizures, and arrests in cases of drug trafficking (Press Information Bureau. (2025).

Furthermore, India actively participates in multilateral drug control mechanisms. It is a principal member of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). India chairs a sub-group on counterterrorism in this forum and has participated in law enforcement and drugs cooperation with fellow member states. India participates in cooperative dialogue via regional institutions such as the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2023). Let it be noted, however, that although India is a member of the MGC, the individual

Mekong Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Drug Control has six countries—Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam—plus the UNODC but not India (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2023). This separation is important to a correct understanding of India's position in the region.

### *Contextualizing US Allegations: Isolated Incidents vs. Scapegoating*

The claim that India is the main source of the US fentanyl crisis is a narrative contradicted by US government reports and discredited by the real cooperation between the two countries. Although the US government has singled out specific charges and has taken legal action against Indian groups, these incidents must be placed within the larger context of the crisis.

The DEA, for example, shared intelligence with India's Directorate of Revenue Intelligence that resulted in the shutdown of a clandestine fentanyl lab in 2018 (U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, 2020). Still more recently, the DEA and the Department of Justice charged an India-based chemical firm and its staff in 2025 with conspiring to bring fentanyl precursor chemicals into the US and Mexico (U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. 2025). Such cases, although real, are singular examples within a wider global supply chain. They do not support the claim that India is a primary source of the crisis, especially when US government agencies consistently identify other actors as the main culprits.

## **III. THE GEOPOLITICAL BACKFIRE: THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF US POLICY**

The US's inconsistent foreign policy—mixing misplaced finger-pointing on the fentanyl problem with retaliatory trade tariffs on disparate industries—is having a strategic backfire that is now manifest in India's dealings with China. This paper dissects how US policy has by default become a driver of a new balance of power.



### *The Tariff Tussle and a Shift in Strategic Calculus*

One of the main sources of contention has been the Trump administration's imposition of up to 50% tariff on a wide array of Indian products. The tariff, one report said, is one of the "most severe trade shocks India has experienced in several years," placing a "serious threat" on 70% of Indian exports to the US, and disrupting important sectors such as textiles, gemstones and jeweler, and footwear. Although the pharmaceutical industry was temporarily exempted, this action highlights India's crucial and irreplaceable position in supplying cheap medicine to the US market (TOI Business Desk. 2025). The economic impact on India is significant, though the US justification for the tariffs is commonly seen in New Delhi as a retaliatory move for its ongoing purchase of Russian oil (TOI Business Desk. 2025).

### *China's Role in the Fentanyl Narrative: The Geopolitical Opportunity*

The US has aimed rhetoric at India, meanwhile the US' own government agencies and a special House committee have cited China as the "ultimate geographic source" of the fentanyl crisis. The House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party's investigation found that the CCP subsidizes directly the production and exportation of illegal fentanyl material through tax rebates, does not prosecute traffickers, and censors domestic drug content while leaving export-oriented narcotics content alone. These findings accuse the fentanyl crisis as being a strategic and economic advantage for the CCP, profitably enriching its chemical industry and enabling partner criminal entities to become lead money launderers (U.S. House of Representatives, 2024). The US has retaliated with targeted sanctions legislation against Chinese entities.

In spite of these allegations, China has stoutly denied the US's fault-finding, with its Foreign Ministry declaring that the problem of fentanyl is "the US's problem, not China's" and asking the US to concentrate on internal reforms. This media posturing coupled with the US's diversion of punitive policy to India has opened a strategic window. China has taken advantage of the US-India tension as a chance to enhance relations with India. The crisis of fentanyl, purportedly a domestic public health dilemma, has thereby become a leading driver of geopolitical reorganization.

### *The New Dynamic: From Quad to SCO*

The consequences of the US's contradictory policies have brought about an Indian foreign policy realignment. This is not a turn away from the US but a pragmatic shift, for India tries to diversify its bilateralism and reduce its vulnerability to external coercion. The most evident manifestation of this can be observed in the upgrading of the relationship between India and China.

The renewed diplomatic engagement began with the Chinese Foreign Minister's visit to India in August 2025, which culminated in an invitation for Prime Minister Modi to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin. Modi's attendance, 31 August 2025, and his first visit to China since 2018, was a significant signal that India is "hedging Against the West" (TOI Business Desk. 2025). The timing of the meeting, held amid the US tariff hike, further underscores this point. Detente has already delivered concrete and incremental gains, including China lifting export restrictions on key agriculture and industry inputs like fertilizers and rare earths vital to India's economy and agrarian society. The two nations also ultimately agreed in principle to revive shut-down border trade lines and pilgrimage centers shut down since the 2020 border standoff, reflecting shared interest in de-escalation and economic interaction (TOI Business Desk. 2025).

The US policy of coercion has therefore boomeranged to push two of the world's most populous nations towards one another. The move defies decades of bipartisan US efforts to construct India as a significant counterweight against China (TOI Business Desk. 2025). It announces to the world that there are alternatives to a US-led order and that countries can and will assert their strategic autonomy, particularly when faced with what they perceive are counterproductive and conflicting US policies in Washington.

Date	Event	Causal Relationship
Early 2025	The Trump administration announces and implements up to 50% tariff on a broad range of Indian goods.	This policy, perceived as a punitive measure for India's purchases of Russian oil, triggers a strategic shift in India's foreign relations.
August 2025	Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visits India and PM Modi's China visit for SCO summit.	This visit opens a direct line of communication between New Delhi and Beijing, offering an alternative to the US-centric geopolitical framework.
August 2025	China lifts export curbs on vital materials like fertilizers/urea and rare earths.	This economic goodwill gesture demonstrates a willingness to de-escalate trade tensions with India, in direct contrast to the US's tariff policy.
August 2025	PM Modi attends the SCO summit in Tianjin, China.	This is PM Modi's first visit to China since 2018. It is a public signal that India is hedging against the West and prioritizing a strategy of "strategic autonomy."
Late 2025	India and China agree in principle to reopen border trade routes, including the Shipki-La pass, that were closed since the 2020 border clash.	This tangible outcome demonstrates the deepening of the detente and reinforces the idea that shared economic interests are driving the new relationship.

Table 3: Timeline of Key Geopolitical and Economic Developments (2025), (TOI Business Desk. 2025)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that the American fentanyl crisis is the result of deep and systemic failures in the US's own legislative, regulatory, and enforcement systems. The crisis has domestic roots, based on regulatory capture and legislative weakening of federal enforcement. The crisis is also perpetuated by a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle of illegal drug and weapons trafficking through an open southern border.

Against this background, the US attempt to scapegoat India for the crisis, and at the same time impose retaliatory tariffs on it, is a strategic blunder. The US government's own agencies offer evidence which contradicts an India-as-primary-source narrative, with Chinese-origin precursors consistently identified by all of them as the "ultimate geographic source". This coercive and contradictory policy has inadvertently and counterproductively had the effect of driving India and China, the world's two most populous countries, towards a new pragmatic balance. This détente, though not a "bromance," is a salutary reconfiguration of power balances in the Indo-Pacific that contradicts the idea of a US-guided, unipolar world order and gives legitimacy to India's commitment to strategic autonomy.

The long-term change is undoubtedly deep. The US's inability to attend to its own public health crisis and its resultant misallocation of blame has therefore emerged as a leading driver of geopolitical transformation, potentially restructuring the world order for many decades to come. It seems that the United States no longer has the ability to lead an anti-China alliance, India should carefully formulate its own foreign policy to deal with the uncertainties brought by the United States in the current complex multipolar world.

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