Donald Trump's imposition of steep "secondary" tariffs on India for buying Russian oil is rapidly unraveling as a strategic failure, with leading experts like John Mearsheimer warning that the policy is **backfiring** and undermining America's own interests.

Alienating India, Empowering Rivals

John Mearsheimer, a preeminent international relations scholar, has called Trump's approach a "colossal blunder" that is pushing India closer to both Russia and China—precisely the opposite of Washington's intended outcome. The core argument is that, in attempting to use tariffs as a coercive tool, the US has ignored India's priorities: energy security and strategic autonomy. Instead of bending to pressure, India has doubled down, dismissing American demands as "unjustified and unreasonable" and vowing to continue buying affordable Russian oil.

Economists such as Richard Wolff warn that the tariffs risk accelerating the formation of non-Western economic blocs like BRICS. Isolating India from US trade will not curb its economic ambitions. Instead, India is likely to deepen trade with Russia, China, and other BRICS nations, just as Russia pivoted away from Western markets to sell oil elsewhere. The endgame? The US tariffs are fueling an alternative, rapidly integrating economic order, eroding American leverage in Asia.

Rather than stymying India's Russian oil purchases, Trump's tariffs have paradoxically made it **cheaper** for India to keep buying from Moscow. Faced with the tariffs, Russia has further discounted its crude—sometimes by up to $7 per barrel below regional alternatives. Indian imports of Russian oil have surged to over one-third of all crude imports, from just 1% four years ago. On top of that, China has massively boosted its own Russian oil orders, consolidating a "Eurasian energy bloc" entirely outside US control.

Geopolitical Costs: Destroyed Trust and Strategic

Leverage

American diplomats—such as former National Security Advisor John Bolton and ex-Ambassador Nicholas Burns—caution that Trump's tariffs have **shredded** decades of US diplomatic efforts to align India with the West. Instead of building a counterweight to the emerging China-Russia axis, the US is driving India toward it, eroding trust and making future cooperation more difficult.

Trump's tariff strategy is not only failing to achieve its objectives but is actively undermining American interests. It is alienating a key strategic partner, incentivizing the creation of rival trading blocs, and ultimately boosting the very energy flows Washington sought to restrict. As Mearsheimer and others make clear, coercion via tariffs cannot compel India's compliance—instead, it accelerates the realignment of global power away from Washington.