

India-US Relations in 21st Century And Indo-Pacific

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Introduction:

South Asia always remains an enduring part of US foreign policy interest at both positive and negative aspect. A positive Asian future without the democratic friendly nation India is quite impossible. Looking back, at the turn of the millennium, India held on as an independent nation more than half a century ago, the country has reason to be proud as well as somewhere deeply dissatisfied due to dismal failures. The consolidation of democracy is probably the ethnical perspective of a heterogeneous country in the world which is remarkably understood in international comparison. But international comparison also shows India as a country with extreme poverty, mass illiteracy and forced child labour on a large scale. In general, India has been doing better in consolidating its position as a nation in the international system than in improving the life of the mass of its citizens so she can have her reputed image in international scenario. Thereby where lies the general –positive principle relationship between India-US which remains as the debatable question. An integrated policy approach has to be based on high quality analysis due the existing complexity in connection between states. Even though Afghanistan and Pakistan have a complicated intertwined relationship with US policies even then it has to concentrate towards each. However certain issues like narcotics refugees, cross border militant groups and trade really need to be approached through a broader prism. On other hand for a multi fledged strategic relationship between India and America certain basic administration question needs concernment. Such as; firstly how can India benefitted from this Indo-US Relationship for the times ahead? Secondly, can US take New Delhi as priority through this relationship which others have to languish? Thirdly, India's policy towards Afghanistan and finally, the context of strategy approach of US towards trilateral relationship between India, Japan and US where China is also closely been liked.¹ Under such pressure and obstacles can India be the Natural Ally to US? Where all questions remains as a standby.

Relations between India and the US – the largest and oldest democracies – have invariably been tension-prone. Ideology has been superseded by interest. In their perceived interests, these two countries have many times been critical of each other. During the Cold War, these relations were ‘estranged’,¹ but in the post- Cold War years, they have tended to converge and cooperate. Personal equation between two heads of government is an important factor of bilateral relations. But relations between two democracies are also affected by internal and external dynamics. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s America policy promises to convert estrangement into alignment, if not alliance. The interplay of various factors and dynamics accounting for this in-process transformation is presented here.

When Narendra Modi launched his campaign for the victory of his party (BJP) in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, he was not yet welcomed to the US which had denied visa to him in 2005. In that year, Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Though election after election, his party (Bharatiya Janata Party) returned to power in the state, Washington’s ban on his visit to the US was not lifted until BJP’s great victory in the Lok Sabha election, 2014 followed by Narendra Modi’s appointment as the prime Minister of India. During the long period of 10 years – from 2005 to 2014 – important political changes took place in the US involving the transfer of presidency from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party and changes in the composition of the US Congress. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, the US, which remained the sole superpower, tried to expand its global influence through intervention. India, having launched liberalization and economic reforms in 1991, became a tempting target for American capture. The old India of “socialist culture” was threatened by an incipient “culture of capitalism”. But, for some years, it stood the ground mainly due to two factors. One, many Indians were still uncertain about the consequences of India embracing capitalism at home and the US – led capitalist bloc in the international sphere. It was then too early to believe that the Non-alignment Movement (NAM) was institutionalized in 1961 with the holding of its first summit in Belgrade. But India was already a non-aligned country in 1947 – the year of its independence. In that year, Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, articulated the principles of non-alignment which since, have been accepted as the core part of India’s foreign policy. India has made important contribution to the evolution of NAM which gradually grew from strength to strength. But, with the exit of the Cold War, not only the NAM but also the ideology, and policy of non-alignment has come under intense challenge

and criticism.² The validity and relevance of non-alignment, critics point out, has suffered erosion and delegitimacy.

U.S.-India Perceptions in post 9/11

9/11 attack on America in 2001 became a new parameter that began to influence the politics world over including the Indo-US relations. Stephen P. Cohen said, no part of the world has more affected by the terrorists attack of September 11, 2001 than South Asia.³ (Cohen p.p.1). Terrorism, nuclear proliferation, rise of China and economic and environmental concerns became major factors determining the ties between the two states at the dawn of the new millennium. While the terror attack on Pentagon and World Trade Centre created suspicions against Pakistan, China's rapid rise became a major cause of concern for the US as it turned towards India as the safety valve in South Asia. Bill Clinton's love for India catapulted the position of a 'strategic partner'. There were a number of factors which made South Asia a central point in US war against terrorism. On other side American foreign policy began to develop a feeling of threat from the Islamic revivalism after the end of cold war as Afghanistan and Pakistan shared the regime of Taliban. As the United State prepared to launch its global war it put a tough choice before the states that "Either you are with us or against us". Which indicate a decisive message in regard to the future course of relationship between US and Pakistan? Thereby in 2000, India and the USA agreed to establish a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism. In the same year Bill Clinton's visit to India changed the equations between the top leaderships of the two countries. In 2001, Bush lifted post-Pokharan II sanctions imposed on India. In 2002, the Indo-US High Technology Cooperation Group came into being. In 2005 an Open Skies Agreement signed between the two countries. In the same year Manmohan Singh visited America and many agreements, including the civil nuclear deal, were inked. In the 21st century, the US has become India's largest investment partner with American direct investment of \$9 billion accounting for 9% of total foreign investment into India. The end of the Cold War freed India-U.S relations from the constraints of global bipolarity, but interactions continued for a decade to be affected by the burden of history, most notably the longstanding India-Pakistan rivalry and nuclear weapons proliferation in the region. Recent years, however, have witnessed a sea change in bilateral relations, with more positive interactions. As President Bush calls India a "natural partner" of the United States and his Administration seeks to assist India's rise as a major power in the new century.

Modi's Foreign Policy

After a historic election victory, Narendra Modi was sworn in as India's 15th prime minister on Monday, May 26, ending two terms of rule by the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Modi's political vehicle, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), advocates a strong India that can resist pressure from world powers or regional rivals. Indeed, when in power previously, it was a BJP-led government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee that made India into a nuclear power and underlined its independence by refusing to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. After being sworn in as India's prime minister, speculation is mounting about what impact Narendra Modi's brand of Hindu nationalism will have on his country's foreign policy. India's foreign policy has long been determined by a triple bottom line—interests, values and public opinion. All three are relatively impervious to changes of government. Each BJP policy will adhere to at least one of those drivers, and the degree of change from previous policy will be determined by how the government interprets each driver and how readily changes can be pushed through a strong-willed foreign service. PM Narendra Modi began his tenure with a diplomatic coup of sorts, securing the attendance of all South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) heads of states and Mauritius at his swearing-in ceremony. One guest who stood apart from all was the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The Indian PM inviting Pakistan for his big day was meant to be a chance to reset ties. But three months after this historic event, there is a definite freeze in the India-Pakistan relationship.

Modi And Indo-US Relations

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's forthcoming visit to Washington will provide India and the United States with a golden opportunity to repair their faltering partnership. Bilateral relations have deteriorated in recent years because of poor policy choices in India on nuclear liability, taxation, and trade. More importantly, India's recent political paralysis and crumbling economic growth have suppressed the opportunities for more robust commercial ties. In these circumstances, the latter-day approach to India pursued by the administration of US President Barack Obama has not helped. By permitting sectoral interests to define the content of US engagement with India, Washington has allowed a pernicious transactionalism to gradually replace the strategic vision that previously guided the evolution of bilateral relations. This mistake was compounded by the obsessive complaints of senior US

government officials about India's economic policies. The Indian Ocean has four of the six major maritime chokepoints and serves as a maritime super highway for in-demand energy resources that drive the world's largest economies. Almost 68 percent of India's, 80 percent of China's and 25 percent of the US' oil is shipped from the Indian Ocean Region. While important in its own right, the Indian Ocean's Eastern border with the Pacific is increasingly irrelevant as shifts occur in the global balance and the Indo-Pacific Region grows in geo-strategic significance³

As Shreya Upadhyaya observed, it is often argued that the 'Indo-Pacific' region is too vast to be a coherent strategic system. However, in the last few years it has come to be associated as the region where global fulcrum of power is shifting. The post-Cold war period has been experiencing a shift in wealth and power towards Asia. In 2012, for the first time in modern history, Asian states spent more on their armed forces than European ones.

The concept has gained wide currency among the foreign policy pundits, security analysts and government officials particularly from the Australia, United States, Japan and even India. Interestingly, it is the Australian strategic community that has routinely employed the concept widely to characterise Asia's evolving strategic geography. The Australian Defence White Paper of 2013 officially terms 'Indo-Pacific' as a new region: a strategic arc connecting the Indian and the Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia.

The term 'Indo-Pacific', is not a new creation. This essay seeks to analyse a few questions. How is Indo-Pacific different from the earlier concept of Asia-Pacific? Why does the US need this new geo-political construct? How should India define its role in the region so that it serves national interest?

Indo-Pacific as the US Grand Strategy

For the United States, Indo-Pacific becomes strategic as it provides a more integrated approach to the region that is fast gaining prominence on the global map. Maintaining influence in the Indo-Pacific forms a central part of the US grand strategy.

Every country's grand strategy is protection of its homeland. However, US grand strategy includes more. Firstly, it involves preventing external hegemonic control over critical geopolitical areas of the world and prevent rise of other threats to the global commons. The second goal is to expand the liberal political order internationally. The third goal is to

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sustain an open economic regime (Tellis 2012). The Future Directions International (2011) has defined the grand strategy with regard to the Indo-Pacific. Preventing extremist groups from threatening US interests and those of its allies; employing diplomatic relations network for influencing military and trade relations; ensuring access to natural resources and markets and ensuring the security of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and maritime checkpoints. The US remains focused to prevent rise of any power that can control critical geopolitical areas of the world.

India's role in Indo-Pacific

India's inclusion in the Indo-Pacific has largely been promoted by a broader network of Australian and American think tanks. Promoters of the concept talk about how countries in the region 'should take a leading role in shaping the economic and security architecture of the Indo-Pacific' and seek to tie India more closely with the US, Australia and Japan.

Conclusion

The potential for clash in the Indo-Pacific in the next decade and beyond is high and each nation can do more to mitigate the risk. In an environment where China fears Indian rise and US containment, India fears Chinese containment and the US fears Chinese dominance, there is the potential for many friction areas to develop into potential areas of conflict. The nations of the Indo-Pacific strategic triangle will need to be careful not to stumble into a conflict born of perceptions and misunderstandings.

One need only examine the factors of the Cuban missile crisis between the US and USSR to understand the effects that a lack of clarity and transparency can have at the political level and the consequences of misunderstood intentions. Ties between the U.S. and India have been steadily improving since Modi took office last May. He and Obama met for the first time late last year in Washington, and officials from both countries say they quickly developed an easy chemistry. That came as something of a surprise to regional analysts given Modi's difficult history with the U.S. He was denied a visa to the U.S. in 2005. "I think Modi surprised everyone by, with very little hesitation, embracing the United States," said Milan Vaishnav, a South Asia expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

References:

- [1] See Dennis Kux,
- [2] India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, University Press of the Pacific, 1993.
- [3] Dr. Amulya K Tripathy, Former Associate Professor & Head Political Science, Science College (Autonomous), Hinjilicut, Affiliated to Berhampur University, Odisha