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“The pitfalls and promise of a US-Indian partnership driven by China”

Indian-United States relations also known as Indo-American relations refer to the international relations between India and The United States of America. In the twenty first century, India’s Foreign Policy has provided leverage India’s strategic autonomy in order to safeguard its sovereign rights and promote its national interests globally. Under the administrations of George W. Bush, Barack Obama and now Donald Trump United States has demonstrated accommodation to India’s national core interests and acknowledged outstanding concerns



The increase in bilateral trade and investment, co-operation on global security matters and inclusion of India in decision making on matters which need global attention as well as incorporation of India in various multilateral export trade regimes and joint manufacturing through technology sharing arrangements have become some of the major key milestones which also act as an estimation of the speed and advancement on the path to closer India-US relations.

These relations between India and the US were not warm since the beginning. Instead, India and US have to undergo a number of drastic changes before becoming close allies. It all started since World War II when India served as a major base for the American soldiers on its war against Japan. Since then India and America have seen many ups and downs but the relationship between India and US have seen considerable improvement over the last two decades with convergence of views on many issues.

If you look at the politics of this relationship, including security and defense both India and the US have moved from a very hostile and cold relationship to a comfortable state at numerous levels. Having said that India now views the US as one of its key strategic partners and has bought \$18 billion worth of defense equipment in little than a decade. Whether it's education, whether it's culture, whether it's tourism this is a relationship which is ready on a roll.

Trade & Economic Relations:

Trade relations between India and the US have seen strides of improvement and mutual growth in the last two decades. This relationship between two largest democracies of the world has not only affected them but also other countries including Iran, China, Japan, Russia and more. The below mentioned points make the image of the blooming trade relations between India and US clearer.

- The United States is one of India's largest direct investors. The stock of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) inflow has increased at a rate of 57.5 percent, compounded annually. On 3rd August, 2018 India became the third Asian nation to be granted Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1) status by the United States. STA-1 enables the export of high-technology products in civil space and defence from the US to India.
- The United States is India's second largest trading partner and India is its 9th largest trading partner. In 2017, US exported \$25.7 billion worth of goods to India, and imported \$48.6 billion worth of Indian goods. Major items imported from India include information technology services, textiles, machinery, gems and diamonds and other edible food products. Major American Items imported by India include aircraft, fertilizers, computer software, metal and medical equipment.
- Americans have made notable investments in the Asian Country's power generation, telecommunications, ports, roads and mining industries.

China's Role in the India-U.S relations:

It would not be wrong to say that China has been driving the India-US relations for the past many years. The People's Republic of China has shaped this relationship since 1949 since it came into existence fifty-five years ago. It has been crucial for US to side with India in order to compete with China in the trade and economics. Both US and India acknowledge that a rise in China's stature not only affects the dollar and yen relationship but also affects the entire Asia region. US on one hand plans to give India more say in the Indo-Pacific scenario, China on the other plans to give USA minimal decision-making power in Asia. At present both US and India have relationships with China that has elements of co-operation, competition and potentially conflict though in different degrees. Each country has a blended approach of engaging China, while preparing for a turn for the worse in Chinese behavior. Each sees the role of other in its China strategy.

There have been majorly three incentives for US to establish a rather robust relationship with India and for supporting its rise:

- Strategic Interest, especially in the context of rise of China
- Economic Interest
- Shared Democratic Values

Indian Policymakers recognize the interest shown by the US in India has some share of concerns regarding the China's growth. Likewise, New Delhi's own China strategy involves planning and strengthening India both security wise and economically (Internal balancing) and building a range of partnerships with major developed countries (External balancing) and this all requires US as a key partner. Both India and US have concerns when it comes to China, but both countries have shown a divergent opinion in each other's capacity to play a role in Asia-Pacific Situation.

The Heated Triangle:

As things stand, neither India nor the US is interested in their relationship with China being too hot or too cold. There seems to be a triangular relationship between the three countries as:

- ❖ *For New Delhi, a good Sino-US relationship leads to India freezing out and impinging its interests and leading to hindrances in carrying out the trades. It would also eliminate Washington's rationales for a strong relationship with India.*
- ❖ *A China-U.S conflict or crisis on the other hand is leading to destabilization in the region and causing worldwide economic slowdowns.*
- ❖ *From the US perspective, any deterioration in the Sino-India relationship would cause instability.*
- ❖ *Too much Sino-Indian bonhomie, on the other hand would potentially create complications for US in carrying out bilateral, regional and multilateral activities.*

Conclusion:

Both India and U.S do not share same interests in managing China's rise and neither would like to become a part of what is said President Xi Jinping's vision of Asia, with a dominant Asia while U.S playing a minimal role. India and U.S acknowledges that China will play a crucial role in Asia and its rise threatens both. Clearly, the US-India-China triangle is hindered by their contradictory and divergent opinions and that is what roils their relationships and waters of Indo-Pacific. Donald Trump's visit to India gives the two leaders a chance to discuss and resolve their differences and move the Indo-Pacific agenda forward. But if India and US do not get their houses in order, Beijing's behavior would not be sufficient to power their partnership.

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US Security Cooperation with India



The maiden visit of US President Donald Trump in February 2020 led to a progressive shift in the Indo-US strategic ties with signing a \$3 billion security deal with respect to military helicopters. Thus, adding a new chapter in the Indo-US foreign relations. In the backdrop of this visit it is evident to examine the historical shift in the Indo-US strategic partnership.

The end of the Cold War along with the disintegration of the Soviet Union provided India and US with an opportunity to redefine their bilateral relations. United States for long had been looking forward to improve its bilateral relations with India. India saw defence cooperation as one of the best means to progress Indo-US bilateral relations. India conducted its second series of Nuclear Testing (Pokhran II) in 1998 but these nuclear tests gave a setback to Indo-US relations as US imposed sanctions on India for the same. It was in 2001 under the Bush Administration that these sanctions were waived off and US recognized India as an important ally as well as an emerging player in Asia.

21st century has been a turning point in progressively defining Indo-US relation. Under the Bush Administration Indo-US relations reached new heights. The Bush administration considered India as an emerging economic and military power and therefore India occupied an important position in the US foreign policy. After the terrorist attack of 9/11, India was recognized as an important defence and strategic partner.

In 2000 during his visit to US the Indian Prime Minister of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and US President George Bush signed a strategic partnership, which included military to military cooperation as well as bilateral collaboration in civilian nuclear technology. In January 2004, the India and the US signed the 'New Steps in Strategic Partnership', which was an outstanding beginning in bilateral relations. The United States has given special preference to India in its South Asia foreign policy. Thus, since 2004 New Delhi and Washington have been pursuing shared geopolitical interests through strategic partnership. With the goal of expanding security and defence cooperation both the countries signed a ten- year defence framework agreement known as the "New Framework for the Indo-US Defence Relationship".

Both the countries started engaging in military exercises along with an increase in major US arms sales to India. Open Skies Agreement was signed in April 2005, enhancing trade, tourism, and business via the increased number of flights, and Air India purchased 68 US Boeing aircraft at a cost of \$8 billion. In 2009 under the Obama Administration eight P-8 Poseidons worth US\$2.1 billion were sold to India along with a \$5 billion agreement to provide General Electric F414 engines and Boeing C-17 military transport aircraft, thus making US one of the major military suppliers to India. India has been trying to resolve performance related issues with Boeing P-8I that have been delivered to India already and has also been negotiating clauses with regard to offensive uses of the defence equipments purchased.

India and US reached Civilian Nuclear Agreement Henry J. Hyde US–India Peaceful Atomic Cooperation Act, in 2008. Also referred to as the 123 Agreement, it was made that would facilitate concrete civilian nuclear cooperation between India and US. This agreement can be used to tie up with Nuclear Suppliers Group and International Atomic Energy Agency Guidelines. This was a major breakthrough for India and US in terms of Energy Cooperation in the 21st century. In 2010, the Indian Parliament voted the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act to address concerns and provide civil liability for nuclear damage and prompt compensation to the victims of a nuclear incident. In 2019 India and US further strengthened security and energy cooperation by signing agreement which include the construction of six American nuclear reactors in India.



In February 2020, Donald Trump visited India for the first time and his visit was a testimony to the strengthening of strategic and defence ties between the two countries. India and the US signed a \$3 billion military helicopter deal. The US President described the deal for 24 MH-60 Sikorsky Romeo multi-role helicopters and six Apache attack choppers as a highlight of the visit and said it would contribute to interoperability. Mr. Trump stated that the deal would enhance the joint defence capabilities of both the countries, thus suggesting Indo-US bilateral relations are progressing day by day.

Military Relations:

The United States tend to sign “four foundational agreements” with its defence partners, while India is party only to three. The first agreement General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was signed by both the countries in 2002 which enabling both the countries to share military intelligence along with protecting each other’s classified information. The second agreement is the LEMOA: Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (signed in 2016) which permits either of the country to use military bases for carrying out repairs and re-supplying, though the agreement does not make the logistical support binding for any of the country. The third agreement is Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) signed in 2016 while its Indian specific variant was signed during the 2+2 inaugural dialogue in 2018. The agreement enables the two countries to share secure communication and exchange information on approved equipment during bilateral and multinational training exercises and operations. The fourth agreement, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) has not been signed yet due to India’s reservation with regard to national security.

Conclusion:

The disintegration of Soviet Union proved to be a turning point in Indo-US relations. While in the 21st century the Global War on terrorism along with “Peaceful Rise of China” were major factors in defining Indo-US bilateral relations. The rise of China gave impetus for US to strengthen cooperation with India. Redefining the region from Asia Pacific to Indo Pacific can also be seen as a strategic move by the US to incorporate itself in the region as well as engage with India to strategically challenge the rise of China.

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The Centre of Policy Research and Governance (CPRG), India strongly believes that in the 21st century an India deprived of gainful opportunities, necessary for the flourishing of a young and emergent India, will prove to be an impediment in the development of human capital and preservation of global security. CPRG thus works towards providing gainful opportunities in an effort to promote the involvement of young people in policy making and politics.



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