

The Indian Foreign Policy: A Strategic Critique

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Abstract

Historically, the sub-continent was a world in itself where empires were raised by the invaders of Hindustan for a millennium. The last was the British Indian Empire. The Hindu consciousness outlived these empires through an impersonal dissociation to preserve its consciousness, culture, value system and worldview. Nevertheless, the legacies of the invaders remain. The Indian foreign policy is the strategic demonstration of the British imperial foreign policy legacy to establish hegemony in South Asia. In its operational expression, India within and without has gone through occupations, annexations, wars and the fomenting of ethnic and sectarian troubles along with the secessionist insurgencies in the neighbouring countries. America is India's strategic partner in its pursuit of South Asian hegemony. The post 9/11 Indo-US nuclear agreement was the beginning of this formal global partnership. It has since expanded into an Indo-US Entente over the last two decades. Meanwhile, the world has transitioned to the Great Power competition with China squared-off against America and India. Pakistan has opened the strategic door for Russia by initiating a New Frontier Policy. Russia in the perception of Pakistan is a strategic partner across the Amu River. The New Frontier Policy is to the unease of Anglo-Saxons. China, Pakistan and Russia are upgrading ties, as the New Great Game continues unfolding with the twists added by the annexation of Kashmir, the Citizenship Act and Reorganization Order, the Sino-Indian clashes and Covid-19.

Keywords: foreign-policy, great-game, new great-game, British legacy, expansionism, hegemony, Sino-Indian clashes.

Introduction

Historically, the Indian perception is an awareness that perceives itself as a successor to the British imperial hegemony. A distinct tradition in the policy of the new government of India was the foreign policy of British India (Brands, 1972: 45). This awareness includes the entire spectrum of political leadership, irrespective of political affiliations. The Hindu nationalists have incessantly perceived Pakistan as an insult to the classical unity of India. Consequently, the perception remains within India to a life of perpetual self-questioning and doubt about their true identity (Singh, 2009: 5). Pakistan too sees India with bitterness and animosity. Centuries of dedication to such diametrically opposite systems as Islam and Hinduism could not but nurture an utterly different out-look on the outside world among their respective followers (Burke, 1974: 22). There is nothing common, despite living together for centuries.

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The different worldviews and value systems were at the heart of the partition of India. The differences among the principal South Asian actors influence perceptions of their national interests and ultimately their policies (Brands: 2).

The Indian foreign policy started with the Nehruan complexity of the non-aligned leadership of the world affairs. This was precisely the policy by which a weak nation sought influence out of the proportion to its strength (Kissinger, 1979: 845). The idea was to gain weight despite the economic and strategic weakness, and without risking the Indian involvement in the risks of Cold War. Yet, the South Asian sub-continent was an exception where India was willing to gamble in the realm of *Rajnaiti* to establish its hegemony. Also, Nehru saw Europe breaking into pockets of narrow, intolerant and hateful nationalism that would engulf Germany and Italy before heading to India dressed as *Hindutva* (Naqvi, 2020: 8). Nehru was not much off the mark. The *Hindutva* has finally arrived in India. Gandhi's killer Nathuram Godse evokes an admiration in India as never before (Yasir, 2020).

South Asia has been thrust into the vortex of international politics, since decades (Ziring, 1983: 192). No power has achieved close relations with India and Pakistan simultaneously (Brands: 8). The Indians believe that the Americans will lose their friendship forever, unless America supports their hegemonic ambitions on the sub-continent (Kissinger, 1979: 880). And yielding Kashmir would weaken India's strategic position vis-à-vis Pakistan and if India gave up the Vale of Kashmir, through which its troops must pass to reach the Chinese frontier, it would be impossible to defend Ladakh (Brands: 314). Kashmir is also an anti-Pakistan buffer-zone in the north of Punjab (Lamb, 1997: 101). The basis of Indian policy is interest, not an amity (Kissinger, 2014: 201). India is devoid of moral sensitivity towards its neighbours or its own people and survived through an unusual subtlety in grasping and manipulating the psychology of foreigners (Kissinger, 1979: 879). India pursues foreign policy in many ways similar to the quest of the former British Raj as it seeks to base a regional order on a balance of power in an arc stretching half way across the world, from the Middle East to Singapore, and then north to Afghanistan (Kissinger, 1979: 879). Indian ambitions are dissonant.

In the context above, India's involvement in Afghanistan has created serious implications for the national security and economic progress of Pakistan (Khetran, 2017). And the west has strategic and economic interests in India in the game against China. India is going along with the American game in Asia as an external manoeuvre; whereas, internally it has annexed Kashmir. Kashmir emerged as a

point of contention between Pakistan and India, as South Asia became the centre of America's effort in Afghanistan (Chitralkha, 2004: 331). And Kashmir's location—between India, Pakistan, the Chinese provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang, and beyond the narrow Wakhan corridor—endows it with the strategic importance for Pakistan and India (Brands: 39).

The Indian and American foreign policies are cold and unsentimental, so are their tough-minded diplomats and strategists. The two do not hesitate to use distant barbarians (Kissinger, 2014: 207). Still, the Indians lace their diplomacy with a tone of an ethical advantage, yet never opt for an evolution in diplomacy. The usual choices are the use of force, build-ups, escalations and not diplomatic or political resolutions. The use of force in the occupied Kashmir against the Kashmiris is an indicator. It is an article of faith with the Indians that their domination of South Asia is preordained. India leaves no functional alternatives and ratchets-up tensions. The increase in India's nuclear arsenal has enhanced pressure on Beijing to abandon its strategic self-restraint (Brezezinski, 2007: 172). The same is true for Pakistan.

India ensures dilemmas, instead of aiding the region to resolve muddles. It never allows cooperation to emerge. India exploits the disadvantage. It is skittish with the idea of sovereign states. It remains indifferent to amplify the chaos. India is not implicit. It is markedly explicit and inflammatory. This is deductive, not a reconciliatory induction. It reduces margins in decision-making, especially for Pakistan. India's defiance of non-proliferation was more than suspect, and the contagious impact on Pakistan was self-evident (Brezezinski, 2007: 27). The fact is that the US has been highly selective in the context of non-proliferation (Brezezinski, 2007: 189). The metaphysical test for Pakistan is to understand the Hindu conscious and sub-conscious with its roots in Sanskrit and Hindi and its culture and value system. The worldview acquired is not hospitable to other cultures either within or without.

The Hindu Culture and Value System

The explanatory model in the 21st century is culture; the way people live and think. All nations possess socio-psychological individualities that make them different from others. And these are not artificial behavioural accounts, nor ordinary fixes, but are 'high-level abstractions' that refer to steady, general outlooks or modes of functioning and may take a range of tangible behavioural practices (Inkles & Lavinson, 1969: 4, 426). In the context of India's social, philological, spiritual and national diversity, plus the economic complexity, any attempt towards generalization is a monumental task.

The Hindus are old and complex people and it is by no means an easy task to understand and explain them (Narain, 1957: 34). Reasons of the contemporary malaise in India lie hidden in the Hindu culture and personality which have shown ‘deadening-efficiency’ in preserving the *status quo*, as such, one can hardly expect the right type of social change to result naturally from inside the Hindu society (Sovani, 1963: 274). The Indian character inclines to resignation and quietism, and lives on with fortune and misfortune without grievance (Basham, 1954: 3).

The western perception is akin to a ‘model of man’ that logically integrates personality functions; whereas, Hindu culture stresses dissociation in higher and lower mental functions. Modernity is rugged individualism. Inductive individualism anthropomorphises modernism, whereas a *Hindu* is a part of the whole and sustains it. The mixture of family-dependency and filial-affection is important in the Hindu societal function. However, ‘Giving’ as a kind of repeated exchange is at the centre of the Indian natural and moral universe and the idea is formulated at many different levels of abstractions in Hindu culture (McClelland, 1975). The idea of merit is also linked with giving and is considered meritorious. It is likewise well-defined that one must amass in order to give (McClelland, 1975).

‘Giving’ as opposed to ‘sharing’ has a connection with power orientations. Giving is an indicator of power-needs. Giving has been internalized as the central value of life in Hindu culture. The resources have to be accumulated first to win merit. The implication is nothing but a superior-subordinate relationship. The superior moral position of having given to another can be used to dominate the other person directly—and Hindus know it (McClelland, 1975). The moralising of power-needs heightens the clash of perceptions internally and externally. The Hindu value system initiates and sustains the clash. It is a source of conflict in the region. This makes for the trouble and struggle. The Indian hegemonic tendencies have converged with Hindu value system.

The Indian Foreign Policy

India after partition perceived itself as the rightful heir to British imperialism. Metaphorically, India began in 1947 with *Rag Bhairvi* of a new dawn of Indian hegemony in South Asia. The choices India made on its independence and in the following decades indicate power orientations. India had opted for power struggle and hegemony in South Asia by abandoning reconciliation with neighbours (Kidwai, 2020). Take for example the Indian non-alignment that culminated in the disastrous 1962 war with China (Dalvi, 2011). And John F. Kennedy had warned Ayub Khan against seizing Kashmir during the

1962 Sino-Indian war. This was followed by Shastri opting for the nuclear option in response to the China's 1964 nuclear test. Shastri had initiated the Subterranean Nuclear Explosions Project culminating in the first Indian nuclear test of 1974 (Ganguly & Blarel, 2016: 6). In between were the wars of 1965 and 1971 with Pakistan. The Soviet demise, end of the Cold War and the fiscal problems at home forced India to challenge the assumptions of its policies. India chose to fundamentally abandon the economic paradigm that had undergirded the country's foreign and domestic policies (Ganguly & Blarel: 7). What India did not abandon was its lasting taste for power and hegemony.

India has internalized the British legacy (Embree, 1978: 15), though Pakistan has abandoned the legacy of Frontier Policy by opting for a New Frontier Policy. Unless India opts for the reversal of the legacy, the geographically-structured conflicts left by the British will remain. The pursuit of hegemony in South Asia is a dangerous mix e.g., the Indian occupation of Kashmir (Burke & Ziring, 1990: 83), its use of force in former East Pakistan (Mahdi, 1999: 83), in Sri Lanka (Menon: 129), its continuing involvement in Bhutan (Mehta, 2018), Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives (Chaudhury, 2020), and in the Pakistani Balochistan, plus, the Indian policies in Afghanistan and the recent annexation of Kashmir (Coll, 2018). The silence of the global establishment is remarkable. The problem is that any diplomatic interaction with India has limits. There is yet again a situation created by India, and this time as never before. There are no possible diplomatic answers to the Indian moves except for the sub-conventional from the north deep into south without losing the sight of induction. And living in the Now-Moment is critical in statecraft and strategic-management. India is a soft-state, more so after the rise of *Mahasabhais* involving resentful Indians and estranged neighbours.

Strategy is a practical affair; it is about achieving one's goals with the means available (Menon: 188). There are enough analogies in the region and beyond. Not to forget that verb is everything. Verb is action oriented. The Indian decisions have reduced Pakistan's foreign policy choices with regard to India, not that earlier were many picks. Hardly any but the sub-conventional, because, India will not mean anything in South Asia except hegemony. Pakistan has to be insightful in choices, as also cautious and restrained. Pakistan is an original one in the midst of nuclear and conventional heavy-weights. It needs to display its originality and wisdom in its foreign policy. India is manageable in the new Eurasian context. The management of India is not an impossible task with equalizers around. India will have to be careful.

India has capacity issues in the implementation of foreign policy and lacks the institutional depth to see policy through (Menon: 192). The centre of gravity of Indian foreign policy is an individual and not an institution i.e., the prime minister of India. The long-term policy remains the hegemony. Only the individuals differ in the degree of assertiveness, both internally and externally. The Indian foreign and domestic policies, with a *Mahasabhai* in the prime ministerial office, are a source of conflict at the regional and global levels. Pakistan has the willingness and capacity to see through it, both in the east and west. Pakistan is an inconvenient strategic reality to which India has not yet reconciled. Indian ambitions persist. The world needs to be reminded again and again of the consequences of Indian foreign policy (Mario E, 2016: 21).

British left behind two sources of conflict i.e., the Frontier Policy and hegemony (Embree: 15). Pakistan has reversed its share of the inheritance by opting for a New Frontier Policy since 2018. Pakistan-Russia special forces joint exercise (2020) and Pakistan's acquisition of Russian gunships (Gady, 2018) are indicators of an evolving strategic partnership. Moreover, the \$10.3 billion trade agreements (Bhutta, 2019) and the offshore gas pipeline deal (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2018-2019: 121) are additional pointers of cooperation between the two states. Nonetheless, India is clinging to the hegemonic British imperial legacy. Pakistan is a strategic challenge for Indians to overcome for an eventual link-up with the Anglo-Saxons in Afghanistan (Coll: 663) and Central Asia. The Indo-US Entente is meant to encircle China. India tore-off the veil in the context of Kashmir. And America has inserted itself deeper into the China-India-Pakistan triangle (Rafiq, 2020). Pakistan's economy of national security should respond on the basis of its strength. Pakistan on these bases is an Asian power. The perspective should encompass Asia. Pakistan should neither get carried away nor have doubts, for creating doubts is one of the tasks of hegemony. All are dealing with an uncertainty.

Unipolarity is over, and with it the illusion that other nations would simply take their assigned place in a US led international order (Allison, 2020). The global financial crisis initiated the collapse of unipolar moment. It also began the emergence of a multipolar world. It was also the formal beginning of the Indo-American strategic embrace, which since then has metamorphosed into an Indo-US Entente. The idea is to contain China, check revanchist Russia and keep an eye on Iran and Pakistan. The Sino-Pak equation is a strategic challenge. Pakistan is at the crossroads of great-power competition. Trump's legacy is not the meaningless trade war with China, but the cultivating of an intel and data sharing deal with India and selling

weapons to Taiwan, the two pivot points of future Asian grand strategy (Maitra, 2020).

The idea that the strategic behaviour of nations has cultural roots has become increasingly popular in recent years (Menon: 194). The popularity of the idea is an Indian reality. India instead of harmonious transformation has transformed into an authoritarian Hindu entity. The task of resolution of disputes with the neighbours is now complicated. Pakistan maintains the full-spectrum strategic balance to ensure strategic stability in the face of Indian challenge, whatever the cost (Kidwai, 2020). For India is now an extremist political entity pursuing an aggressive foreign policy with a wink from America. The Indian and American exceptionalisms are exceptional in the sense of power-struggle. The *Realpolitik* is the policy in the Indo-Pacific region. The word 'prevail' is popular with the Indo-American leaders. The Indian perception is that 'this will not be through the exercise of soft-power' (Menon: 202).

The Indian priority is not human development, but a great-power status. The perception is that India should first achieve the capacity to shape the regional and international strategic environment, and only then concentrate on the economic and human development. India wants to create outcomes through hard-power, and not soft-power. It has not won so far. India has not enough power to force favourable sequels, even through the use of force. India is not different from any usual military power playing power-politics. If an initiation of war is an Indian option, responding with full-might is Pakistan's choice.

With its Caesarean beginning, myths, ambitions and hegemonic priorities, India has dragged South Asia into a nuclear quagmire from which there appears to be no escape. Torn from within and with an impact on the rest of the region, India's priorities in the 21st century are of an imperialist power. Instead of new beginnings, India has worked-out *new-engagements*, once again at the expense of progress. India is now a major geo-political and geo-strategic problem on the Eurasian Chessboard. The constant rise in India's defence spending disproves the principles on the basis of which people were mobilised for the freedom. Ghandi and his non-violence are finally dead. India today is an entity where minorities within and the neighbours without are not safe because of Indian domestic and external policies.

The assimilation in the global economy via Structural Adjustment Programmes is serving its geo-strategic agenda, and not the Indian human development. India validates a growing breach between its destructive capacity and the declining grip on the developmental problem that has consequences for South Asia. India's

new-strategic-partners bring with them *new-strategic-engagements* indicating desires for power and not the principles of progress investing in people. The Indo-US Entente is encouraging the right-wing policies, plus the authoritarianism in India.

India is an indicator of the global trend towards authoritarianism. Instead of opting for reconciliation and integration, the two most prosperous and largest democracies have created an atmosphere of scuffle for world domination, thereby endangering the peace of South Asia. India is again waltzing to the tune of *Rag Bhairvi*, as in the 1950s, that resulted in the 1962 Sino-Indian war. India did not learn from the ‘Himalayan Blunder’ (Dalvi, 2011) and its *Realpolitik* pursuits are unceasing. India continued with its strategic games in South Asia creating extra-regional tensions at the cost of efforts to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. China finally responded.

The Clashes in the Karakoram and Himalayas

The Indian establishment persisted in stirring mischief after the annexation of Kashmir e.g., the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Order or “the legislation over domicile to alter the demographics in Kashmir” (Bringing the Israeli model to Kashmir, 2020). Alongside, the build-up of the military infrastructure by India in the Sub Sector North (SSN) has been impactful in the strategic sense. It gave India a capability to match intentions. The capability threatened the strategic NH-219 highway linking Xinjiang and Tibet, Aksai Chin, the Karakoram Highway (KKH) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). India had altered the strategic environment and the climate by its leanings and bents. The 3rd May 2020 Sino-Indian clashes in the western theatre of Ladakh took place at Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso Lake and the Demchak village in Aksai Chin captured by China in 1962 war. Similarly, there were clashes in the east at the two ends of Sino-Nepalese border at Lipulekh Pass and Naku La Pass where gloves went off and fist-fights took place. The Naku La Pass connects Tibet too. No shots were fired. The 1993 agreement is over not firing at each other. Still, the reality turned operational.

The Chinese now overlook the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat-Beg-Oldi (DSDBO) Road from one end to another. The Chinese also control the junction of Galwan and Shyok Rivers. They equally threaten the Daulat Beg Air Base and Siachin Glacier. The base also has a brigade size presence. It is located in the close proximity of KKH and connected with the Indian infrastructure. The logistics of the base are insecure because of the vulnerable DSDBO Road. China disputes the McMahon Line and claims sovereignty over Tibet. Not to mention Pakistan’s disputes with India. The Indians perceive the Sino-Indian

border as 3, 488 kilometres, whereas, China takes it as 2000 kilometres. Opposite to China in the west is Ladakh, in the centre is Himachal Pradesh, and Arunachal Pradesh in the east. Chinese refer to Arunachal Pradesh as southern Tibet.

The Chinese now control the key points of Western Ridges with 10,000 troops. The concentration of forces indicated serious stand-off. President Xi asked PLA to be prepared for war. Pakistan too reinforced the troops on the LoC and warned India. The new Chinese presence in Aksai Chin acts as a flank protection for CPEC and KKH. Besides, the South Asian Balance of Power stood restored. It had earlier tilted in India's favour after the annexation of occupied Kashmir. The PLA presence in Aksai Chin also ensures the defence-in-depth of Gwadar Port. China co-financed the port, which opened in 2007, and Beijing maintains a naval base there (Baumer, 2019: 297). The perceived threat to NH-219 and Aksai Chin is contained too. The Sino-Pak military leadership remain in touch on the situation in Kashmir and the region (General Bajwa, Chinese military leadership discuss Kashmir, regional security, 2019). The moves are calibrated and an integrated whole. India is up against two fronts. Nepal is equally meaningful. The Nepal-India territorial dispute is an additional causal factor to the Sino-Indian tensions. The Gurkha nationalism is on the rise.

On 6th June 2020, the Sino-Indian military commanders decided to deescalate in the Karakoram and Himalayas. Lieutenant General Harinder Singh, Commander 14 Corps at Leh and Major General Liu Lin commanding the South Xinjiang Military District agreed to continue with the military and diplomatic negotiations (China, India to seek peaceful resolution of border impasse, 2020: 12). Though, India had effectively ceded to China where PLA was present on the ground, thereby consolidating the new status-quo (China says 'consensus' with India over border tensions, 2020: 10). It was a meaningful, because Americans recognize the LAC and the LoC, as opposed to China and Pakistan disputing it. Still, India could only wish away the developments in the Karakoram and Himalayan Mountains. The operational tensions continued. It was a just a matter of time before more fighting took place.

On 15th June 2020, yet another Sino-Indian clash in the Galwan Valley left 20 Indian soldiers dead and many were captured (Gettleman *et al*, 2020). Chinese assault teams armed with iron rods as well as batons wrapped in barbed wire hunted down and slaughtered [Indian] troops (Ramachandran, 2020). The Chinese posturing was assertive. Indian leaders found it hard to retaliate. The perplexity was palpable. India could not do what it wanted to. The Chinese blamed India for the assault resulting in deaths and injuries. On 18th June 2020,

China released Indian Army personnel including a lieutenant colonel and three Majors (China frees 10 Indian soldiers after military talks, 2020: 10). China demonstrated to defend the restored South Asian Balance of Power and far more. It was a *fait accompli* (Ramachandran, 2020).

It was worth pondering if India could re-think of aligning itself with the US-led anti-China Quadrilateral Initiative (quad) that Beijing has frowned upon (Ramachandran, 2020). Instead, India is strengthening other relationships—notably with the US—as the border dispute with China took the centre stage (Kazmin *et al*, 2020). Concurrently, Pakistan's joint and services chiefs were briefed by the Inter-Services-Intelligence (ISI) at its headquarters (Services chiefs attend rare briefing at ISI headquarters, 2020: 1). The ring-side perspective is that the briefing was unprecedented and the mosaic was wide-ranging. Timing was calculated too. On 20th June 2020, China declared the Galwan Valley to be located on the Chinese side of the LAC (China says brawl with Indian troops occurred in its territory, 2020, 1). China truly defends its interests. There will be no *détente* with China, and India needs to be ready to face more trials in the future (Pillalamarri, 2020). Pakistan too needs to be prepared for the fallouts. It is already in the crosshairs.

Conclusion

The crises in Kashmir, the Middle East or the Korean Peninsula affect security in every continent and are the concerns of everybody (Cooper, 2004: 120). The dividing line between India's foreign and domestic policies is both different and far more tenuous (Kissinger, 1994: 807). A common thread in the Indian approach to the international system is the quest for strategic space (Varadarajan, 2010: 167). Still, over half a million Indian troops are bound in Kashmir along the border with Pakistan (Saikal, 2014: 79). India and Pakistan are in a struggle over Kashmir that has become a battleground (Korbel, 2002: xi). India has escalated geo-politically and geo-strategically. Overawing others will not work, especially the Sino-Pak equation. The problem is that the Indian perception of itself may be anything, but South Asia is *jejune* like, half-baked and raw. It is vulnerable. The Real-World of *Rajnaiti* is shadowy and sinister. The Indianness of India is an illusion. There are millions who are not tied to the soil, culturally. They are tied to an idea. They float with the wind on an occasion. A curious passion moves them. To grow-up in a prejudiced India is a problem. It is a problem for Muslims, as it was on the eve of partition. A sense of alienation prevails among Muslims (Myrdal, 1968: 259).

India has failed to make an escape through an act of imagination. It is not secure. Its soul lays bare. India has to be cautious. It is drifting apart. It is all very interesting. The partition is still smouldering. It can get ablaze. The sailing was never smooth. Even small events flared-up tensions, not to mention the annexation of Kashmir, the “Citizenship Act” (The Gazette of India, 2019), and more. India faces uncertainties regarding its long-term national unity (Brzezinski, 2004: 3). Hindustan was one only under Ashoka, Mughals and the British. And an India without Indus is a painful-reality. The *Mahasabhai* worldview has a problem of cognitive dissonance. It has impacted the Indian Union in numerous ways. The worldview given in *Mahabharata* is a template ingrained in the collective consciousness that continues to shape the view of the world, as it has through centuries, irrespective of the rise and fall of empires (Saran, 2017: 9).

The ‘*Akhand Baharat*’ calls for the reunification of the subcontinent as it existed before the partition of India in 1947 (Sadiq, 2016: 131). Pakistan voiced alarm at the Indo-US defence accord (Pakistan voices alarm at India-US defence accord, 2020: 14). Americans should not dream—as neo-conservatives are apt to do—that India can somehow be used by the US to control Pakistan (Lieven, 2014: 481). Whether current—and future—US leaders can fashion policies toward India, Pakistan, and other nations of the Third World periphery that ultimately prove wiser, more judicious, and less divisive than those of the past will constitute one of the great challenges of the post-Cold War era (McMahon, 1994).

American challenge to forge wiser policies has soared since 9/11, especially in case of neo-cons. And India’s magnificently short-sighted approach has exacted its toll on India and its global ambitions (Pant, 2016: 82). The NATO too will have to decide how it evolves to embrace a Pacific century (Cornell, 2014: 212); whereas, the US relations with China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia are at their lowest point since 2001 (James, 2020). Besides, the shift of focus to China brings in Pakistan too. Pakistan is China’s strategic-flank, as geography dictates strategy. In many ways, the road to the Sino-Pakistani all weather friendship runs through Lhasa (Small, 2015: 21). The way forward for Pakistan is to further strengthen its relationship with China and continue to cultivate its newfound strategic partnership with Russia. Moreover, Pakistan can project CPEC with a potential to link South Asia with the energy and resource rich Central Asia.

The Chinese footprint in the Indian Ocean is getting bigger and will continue to expand even further in the future (Pant: 178). China has modernized its armed forces with force multiplier technologies way beyond India’s capability (Bhadrakumar, 2020). When time becomes space and space becomes time, the tangible

factors along with intangible time become the centre of gravity. Nevertheless, wars are not fought by banking on others. Pakistan has learnt it the hard way and is not indifferent to the goings-on in Asia. Imagine a Pakistan without nuclear weapons at the mercy of Indo-US-Israeli nexus. Pakistan is David squared-off against the Goliath(s). It is admirably democratic and dangerous.

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