

US-India Strategic Partnership and Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract

India has always been driven by one aim and that is how to dominate and remain as a viable entity in South Asia? American dream to engulf the natural resources of Central Asia made it possible to happen. Their mutual interests offered an opportunity for both India and the US to join hands for a strategic partnership in South Asia. The route to Central Asia from warm water goes through Afghanistan. With this partnership, the US is trying to neutralize China in the region and making its access viable and safe in Central Asia. India is also pursuing its hegemonic designs against Pakistan in particular and other regional states in general. This partnership has allowed the US to become active against China and dominate its presence in the Indian Ocean. Accordingly, this study has focused on the importance of South Asia for the US, its strategic partnership with India and its implications for Pakistan.

Keywords: United States, India, Pakistan, China, South Asia, strategic partnership, interests.

Introduction

South Asia is a huge mass of land that homes about more than a quarter of the world population today. It is located at a very strategic position with its borders connecting the South East Asian, Central Asian and Middle Eastern states. The narrow Wakhan strip separates China from accessing Central Asia. China also has the easiest link to the most strategic regions of Central Asia and South East Asia which border the Pacific Ocean. Considering the above, the US, being a Super Power cannot be left behind without establishing vital interests in its favour in this whole dynamic region.

The US adopted the policy of isolation and non-interference in 1823 under the Monroe Doctrine and was bound to be isolated throughout the century, however since the post-world war when the world divided into two different ideological blocs, United States need to assert its power through regional alliances across the region to counter Soviet influence. In the meantime, India pursued a balanced role in the region and maintained a non-aligned policy between the two rival giants. Although, China was

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ideologically under the influence of socialism; a struggling power entity could become a serious threat to the US interests.

To compete ideologically, militarily and politically with the Soviet Union, the involvement of the US in South Asian affairs increased significantly. The strategy and interests of the US were based on the reality of both the Soviet Union and China; potential major powers of the world. They were expanding their interests in the region and the US cannot stay behind while these two countries were struggling to enhance their dominance in the region. The significance of the Indian Ocean through its vital sea lanes of communication increased the strategic importance of the region. It is considered as the basis for global economic maritime activity for twenty first century (Arjun, 2020). Therefore, the interest of the United States was to gain economic benefits through the establishment of its superiority and dominance against the Soviet Union and China in this region.

It is predicted that the future of Asia is to be dominated by both China and India who are currently seen as rising powers in this part of the world and are considered to be the competitors of the United States. The cooperation and competition between China and India and with the US are expected to shape the future of Asia (Gojree, 2015).

The US has always been driven for better development of technology and economy, which certainly has an impact on social fiber, political culture, military might, status and position of the individual state or country (Kenedy, 1989, p. 566). Highlighting the US interest in the South Asian region, we will briefly discuss the strategic importance of India in the South Asian region and its strategic alliance with the US to minimize the possible influence of China and Russia. In the last, we will analyze Pakistan's strategic role to counter the growing influence of India in the region.

The Strategic Importance of India in the South Asian Region

India has a major geographical share in South Asia which strengthens its significance in the geo-politics of the region. Traditionally it's assumed that the increased US-India defence cooperation started after the collapse of the Soviet Union but the facts are vice versa. The US helped India's nuclear programme during the mid-60s to counterbalance the Indo-Soviet alliance, which subsequently enhanced its influence in the region and gave India the technology to become a nuclear weapon state. Moreover, during

the Sino-India border war of 1962; the United States offered discreet support to the Indian side through effective diplomacy to assert pressure on China to refrain from further escalation of the conflict. Although, China inflicted a huge loss to India the US intervention for the ceasefire provided a face-saving opportunity and prevented India's image particularly at the regional level.

The US objective was to promote its influence as it already had defence agreements with Pakistan, but these did not provide any benefit against India in the time of conflict to Pakistan. Furthermore, the sanctions imposed by the US after the 1965 war was more critical for Pakistan as the Soviets continued their assistance to India and the US also continued its veiled support to the Indian nuclear programme to contain China which had acquired the status of a nuclear weapon state in 1964.

India on the other hand embarked on the policy of non-aligned movement and decided to remain neutral between the two blocs of the cold war era. The non-aligned policy paved the way for India to build strong defence cooperation with the Soviet Union while developing strategic ties with the United States during the same period. The simultaneous relations in security cooperation encouraged India's offensive behaviour during the 1971 East Pakistan crisis which eventually led to the creation of Bangladesh. Meanwhile, Pakistan initiated a backdoor diplomatic channel that enabled Henry Kissinger to visit China and laid the foundation of Sino-US bilateral relations. This historic meeting can be viewed as a coincidence with the acceptance of China through the UN General Assembly vote on 25 October 1971. China successfully reclaimed its seat with the expulsion of the Republic of China (Taiwan), led by the Chinese Nationalist Party and became a permanent member of the UN Security Council with the passage of resolution 2758 on 23 November 1971.

The US opening to China was to contain the Soviet Union by implying the balance of power while enhancing India's strategic designs in South Asia against possible Chinese influence in future. In consequence of these developments, India conducted its nuclear tests in 1974 and announced that it gained nuclear technology for civilian and peaceful purposes but the reality was entirely different and changed the dynamics of security in the region. US pursued the policy of containment and counterbalance in South Asia as India was a US ally to contain China and counterbalance the Indo-Soviet alliance while relations with China was to contain the Soviet influence in the region.

The shift in world order from bipolar to unipolar increased the strategic importance of South Asia in the geo-politics of the region. The US think tanks believe that India has the potential and that; it can benefit America economically and militarily to limit the increasing dominance of China at both regional and global level (Ahmad, 2013, p. 159). These think tanks are of the view that India can play a pivotal role in containing the Chinese influence and; maintaining the balance of power in the region. The US views India as a potential major power to emerge that can compete with Chinese interests very effectively (Rice, 2000, p. 56).

India's rising economy is yet another reason for the US interests as it deems more than sufficient trade and investment opportunities in India. The common political system of democracy, mutual market interests, societal and cultural patterns, the threat of terrorism, non-state actors, weapons of mass destruction, regional and global aims are some of the factors behind US inclination in favour of strategic defence ties with India (Gupta, 2014). India's defence capabilities and naval presence in the Indian Ocean increases its importance as a major ally of the United States to strengthen and promote bilateral economic and strategic interests in the region (Ahmad, 2013, p. 123).

India US Defence Relations

India's strategic location in the region and beyond towards the Arabian Peninsula in the west and South East Asia in the east; increases its edge to become a major defence partner of the US after Japan, to counter the Chinese threat, as both countries have historical border disputes and traditional rivalry with China (Burns, 2012).

China played a critical role in the cold war politics in pursuance of its ambitions to emerge as a major global power and avoided the shortcomings committed by the Soviets which eventually led to their demise. Chinese leadership realized the need for economic liberalization and introduced the policy of openness in the economy through their ideological orientation was similar to the Soviet Union. China's strategic aim of gaining access and securing its interests in the Indian Ocean through safe lanes of land and sea communication will provide its raw material and oil supplies to move through a less distant way, and can help pursue its interests in the region. China has increased its presence in the Indian Ocean through involvement in maritime security measures. The ambitious policies to enhance its military and economic influence are a

continuous threat and matter of concern for the United States (Gojree, The U.S. Interests and Policies towards South Asia: From Cold War era to Strategic Rebalancing, 2015).

The Fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of the ideological divide and the disintegration of the Soviet Union shifted the global politico-economic dimensions linked to the new security paradigms. The post-cold war scenario indicates that the newly emerging powers in the East diverge the US interests from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and from Pacific and Europe to South, Central and East Asia (Helge Luras, 2010, p. 1).

In the above context, India too revised its economic outlook since the early 90s and extends cooperation with the US through policies and reforms that increased the pace of liberalization of its economy. The post-cold war period witnessed the beginning of more comprehensive strategic relations between the two countries. The annual Malabar naval exercise between the US and India started in 1992 of which Japan became a permanent member in 2015 indicates the geostrategic alignment and partnership preferences in the Indo-Pacific region. The other objectives of the Malabar exercises are anti-piracy measures, rescue operations, counter-narcotics training etc. but the prime aspect is to enhance maritime security cooperation which is the most prominent feature of US-India defence relations. Naval preparedness and capabilities remain a key factor of strength and power projection in the Asia-Pacific and will continue to be a critical component of the US-India strategic alliance.

The US and India also signed the Agreed Minute on Defence Relations in 1995, which allowed them to conduct military to military exercises and, this agreement became a leading step towards the signing of the Vision Document in 2000 during the visit of the then US president Bill Clinton. The visit marked the beginning of a new era for the development of bilateral relations and the economic sanctions that were imposed on India after 1998 nuclear weapons tests were also removed. Operation Sagittarius was launched after 9/11; aimed to escort US ships through the Strait of Malacca by the Indian navy to facilitate operations in Afghanistan. Indian policymakers viewed the war on terrorism as an opportunity to propagate their narrative on Kashmir and thus aligned with the US to become a major regional player. Furthermore, India offered its bases to assist in the invasion of Afghanistan so that it could minimize the geo-strategic importance of Pakistan. Though Pakistan was a major coalition partner in

the war against terrorism; the US inclined towards India for increased security cooperation to attain maximum gains in the region.

It was agreed to further strengthen the mutual defence relations in 2005 during the visit of the US Secretary of State to New Delhi where both officials decided to start a dialogue on energy security. The US and India signed a ten-year defence framework in which they set priorities for maritime security cooperation, counterterrorism, transfer of technology and increase in defence trade. But, the landmark achievement for India was the draft of the Civil Nuclear Deal which lifted a legal restriction on its nuclear energy trade. Although the draft was inked in 2005, its framework was finalized a year later during the visit of President Bush to India and got final approval from US Congress in 2008. The deal provided India with an upper hand in the region as it became the only country outside the Nonproliferation Treaty that was allowed to participate in nuclear trade. The US support and consent to the engagement of India in nuclear trade was subsequently recognized by the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) through an exemption in their rules and played a pivotal role in India's economic growth.

Due to the convergence of interests, the US and India had agreed to cooperate as strategic partners in the field of economics i.e. physical infrastructure development, energy security and environment, civil nuclear technology, human resource development, technology exchange (especially in the field of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Nano Technology), trade and industry promotion, oil and gas sector and intellectual property protection (Forum, 2006, pp. 1-4). In the military field, their joint venture includes defence equipment sales, co-production and co-development of defence hardware. Joint exercises planned for army, navy and air force, collective response for humanitarian and disaster relief missions. It also included the joint mechanism to operate from an aircraft carrier (Verma, 2015).

Strategic Partnership between US and India

The biggest concern for India in the region has been China and its growing strategic relationship with Pakistan. Beijing has over the past decades successfully managed to enhance its influence into the South Asian region by deploying substantial financial resources and building strong bonds with states in the sub-continent and beyond. New Delhi

considers it as a capacity challenge to tackle the growing influence in its strategic backyard.

To contain the emerging Chinese threats and Russian ambitions of regaining its strength; the US viewed India as the most suitable strategic partner in the region and the first US-India strategic dialogue was held in June 2010. The US praised India as an indispensable partner in the region and publicly backed its motive to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Despite the initiation of the US-India strategic dialogue; no breakthrough occurred in the form of signing a treaty or formal agreement between the two countries until 2016. The reason was India pursued a cautious foreign policy with the US as its strategic partner and avoided being entirely dependent on one side. The simultaneous engagement in defence relations with Russia and members of the European Union indicates the Indian aim to assert its interests rationally.

Meanwhile, the US announced to bolster its military ties with India and high-level dignitaries of both sides visited each other to promote and strengthen socio-economic and defence relations keeping because of the newly emerging strategic partnership deal. In the last visit of Manmohan Singh as premier of India; issues on security, trade, immigration reforms and the civil nuclear deal were discussed and, it was the third meeting between the two head of the states within four years; demonstrates the shift in the behaviour of dealing foreign-defence relations. However, the sweeping victory of BJP in the 2014 elections turned a new page in the bilateral relations and president Obama invited Modi to the White House by reversing a visa ban that barred him from entering the US on accusations of his involvement in the 2002 Gujarat massacre. The following years have witnessed a deepening in strategic ties with the signing of three main agreements; Lemoa, Comcasa and Beca.

LEMOA.

The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (Lemoa) was signed in August 2016 after a decade of negotiations between the two countries. The agreement provides support for both countries to use each other's military bases to ensure supplies, spare parts and refueling purposes. Lemoa is one of the basic agreements between the US and India to enhance strategic cooperation through logistics support. The agreement is of vital importance for the US strategists to contain China, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. The increasing military presence of China in the

South China Sea and the issue of Taiwan is a matter of grave concern for the US, and India too considers it as a threat against its national interests. Thus, the Logistics Support Agreement will facilitate both countries to counter their common enemy as the agreement allows extending cooperation which would enable the US military to use Indian bases for refueling, arms supply and other technical assistance. India on the other side can use US military facilities across the globe for logistics support; will be beneficial for acquiring the status of global shareholder primarily in maritime peace and security.

COMCASA

The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (Comcasa) was signed on the side-lines of the 2+2 dialogue between India and the US on September 6th 2018, enabling India to use the US encrypted communications equipment and systems. This agreement was also under negotiation for a decade but, signed during the first term of the Modi regime; expresses a visible shift in the strategic affairs of the country. The agreement provides interoperability with the transfer of communication and security equipment to India which will be helpful for naval ships, aircraft and also military commanders of both states to communicate effectively through safe and secure networks during wartime and peace too. It is a ten-year agreement between the US and India; signed in accordance with the developing security situation for both countries after the emergence of China as a major global player. China and India have border disputes over an area of around two thousand square kilometers in the Himalayas, and both have previously fought wars in the region where tensions prevail till date through ongoing skirmishes now and then by the deployment of troops and military. The territorial dispute can be view in a broader context which is more linked to real-time politics. China and the US are major rivals to each other and India being supported by the US is considered a primary threat to the integrity of China. India on the other side had supported the secessionists of Tibet and gave them refuge in its territory and therefore, considers China as a main threat in the region and aligned itself with the US to pursue the Indian aims of dominance and subsequently contain Chinese influence.

BECA

The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) is the last basic military agreement signed in October 2020, during the third round of 2+2 dialogue. It is an intelligence-sharing agreement that would maximize the accuracy of Indian drones and missiles through the sharing of sensitive geospatial data. India is experiencing consistent threat from China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and is not capable to compete without strong foreign support. China has an established superiority in terms of arms-technological advancement as compared to India and, the US is wary of rapid Chinese growth with subsequent military presence; influencing the global order. The converging of strategic interests of both India and the US is a key factor behind the agreement. It will enhance air force and naval cooperation against their common threat with real-time intelligence sharing. The US is convinced that a capable and strong Indian military is essential in supporting stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific region and the deepening of mutual defence relations is a reflection of that policy objective.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

The quadrilateral initiative was taken after the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami cooperation by a group of four countries the US, Japan, India and Australia in 2004. It was later advocated by the then Japanese premier Shinzo Abe to strengthen the group for security-related issues like terrorism and piracy in the Asia-Pacific region. The Quad held its meetings for security dialogue and their navies conducted a naval exercise in 2007. China strongly objected to the formation of Quad and argued that it was specifically designed to encircle it which compelled the group members to suspend their activities in 2008 but, they remained active in bilateral and trilateral cooperation on security issues.

Chinese concerns were not based on mere assumptions but facts, as the US was already seeking all means to contain China in the region and beyond. Moreover, China has traditional rivalry and maritime border disputes with Japan in the East China Sea. The US and Japan are close defence allies since the end of WWII and Japan was the major military base for the US forces during the Korean War. Thus, the idea of Quad for security cooperation favoured by Japan poses a direct threat to the strategic interests of China. Further, the Chinese policymakers are of the view that the Indo-US alliance is a major shift from the non-aligned strategy of India. It indicates a policy transformation because previously India

pursued a very cautious foreign policy and refrained from indulging in favour of any bloc during the cold war era and maintained a balance in its relations. But, the contemporary policy objectives of India illustrate a clear inclination towards the United States implying the potential of an increase of rifts between the regional stakeholders.

China gained the status of second largest economy surpassing Japan in 2010, and the US responded through the US-India strategic dialogue along with an economic and financial partnership to provide assistance to the Indian economy. The reason was to build India as a regional power against China and due to that president, Obama publicly announced his country's support for India to acquire a permanent seat at the UN Security Council and the Secretary of State remarked India as an indispensable partner. Despite the US adversary, China focused on its policy to promote and strengthen its influence through economic cooperation both at the regional and global level. President Xi Jinping unveiled his initiative of economic connectivity and development under "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) in 2013.

In response to OBOR, India introduced its "Act East" policy in 2014 which is the continuation of its "Look East" policy initiated after the demise of the Soviet Union. The difference between the two is that the former was more focused on economic issues like investments, trade and development with the Southeast Asian region but, the later is entirely based on strategic cooperation because of the emerging geopolitical conditions. Furthermore, the "Neighborhood First" policy was unveiled by Prime Minister Modi, for creating a strategic balance in the region through establishing partnerships with other neighbouring states. It was attempted to extend Indian influence through increased economic cooperation and create a balance of power in the region. India is developing a regional strategy based on its natural geographical position, economic outlook, common cultural heritage and preeminent strategic location.

However, with the emerging Chinese influence and subsequent military presence, President Obama signed an agreement on the "US-India Joint Strategic Vision for Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region" during his second visit to India in January 2015. The agreement emphasized increasing regional connectivity, freedom of navigation and collective security. The increasing tension between the US and China in the South China Sea on the issue of Taiwan and, the creation of artificial islands

which China claims as its “nine-dash line” remain a key factor behind the US-India Joint Strategic Vision because it will enhance the maritime strategic partnership and cooperation between the two countries and their regional allies. Moreover, Japan also joined the annual Malabar exercises as a permanent member along with the US and India due to increasing threats posed by Chinese policies towards its strategic and economic interests. (Secretary, 2015).

China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a long-term transcontinental investment policy for infrastructure development through the economic integration of countries along the historic Silk Road route. BRI is a global initiative for promoting connectivity between Asia, Europe and Africa along with their adjacent maritime routes to establish multi-dimensional partnerships through connectivity networks and sustainable economic development. India started working with Japan on the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, which further highlights its willingness and aims to attain regional superiority and counter Chinese influence. (Xavier, 2017).

The US under the Trump administration; in its National Security Strategy of 2017, used the term "Indo-Pacific" to demonstrate the shift in its strategic interests for the pan-Asian region. He considered the prevailing issues of the region as a top-level regional priority to be dealt with while emphasizing the growing Chinese influence as a common threat. To fulfil its security and political agenda, the US has reshuffled its economic penalties and inducements as a tool along with its military strength to influence other states in the region. The US administration placed India at the core of its strategy for the Indo-Pacific region while boosting security ties and cooperation with Japan and Australia too. India has now become a major defence partner with the US which will allow expansion and strengthen Indian influence throughout the region (The White House, 2017, p. 47).

The quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) has recently been revived in continuation of the above discussed geopolitical scenario, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. Senior officials of the four countries met on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in November 2017, to discuss the evolving security situation in the Indo-Pacific. Its framework which began with maritime security cooperation has extended with the inclusion of cyber technology, infrastructure development, counter-terrorism, disaster management and humanitarian assistance. Further, the navies of the Quad member states along with Singapore conducted a joint naval exercise in

November 2020, and its first summit took place in March 2021 amid rising tensions between the US-China and other regional powers.

Implications for Pakistan

The joint strategic partnership between India and the US has direct implications for the region and Pakistan. An existing model of the US-India joint strategic partnership will have grave consequences for the South Asian region. This will directly add a strategic imbalance upon nuclear and conventional arms race. The US has deep economic interests in the Indian defence market which can give a boost to its economy. The increase in hostility and instability in the region will provide an edge to the US defence exports (Reporter, 2015). India continued the advancement of its nuclear capabilities and avoided all such treaties which could be binding for it. The Indian design of establishing its influence over the entire region and beyond endangers the peace of the world. China and Pakistan are the prime targets of its offensive policy objectives and thus, promoting an arms race in the region (Furgosen, 2006, p. 11). The strategic partnerships of India with the US, Afghanistan and other global and regional players are mainly directed to increase its influence against Pakistan's stability and territorial integrity (Gulshan, 2014).

The strategic partnership will provide India with an opportunity to use its influence on the US to resolve outstanding issues with Pakistan and other neighbouring states according to its terms and conditions. This will implicate serious challenges for Pakistan to secure its interests in the region (Shahid, 2011, pp. 19-20). The US assistance to enhance India's military capability at the cost of Pakistan will certainly disturb the balance of power in the region and could provoke a response from other regional powers primarily Russia. Pakistan has limited options to deter Indian ambitions and therefore, seeks to further strengthen its defence ties with China and continuous up-gradation in its nuclear and conventional stockpiles. India took the opportunity from the event of 9/11 and established close relations with the new Afghan regime to threaten Pakistan's interest. India increased its influence through financial aid and assistance program in the infrastructure sector, food security and military cooperation in Afghanistan. The hegemonic designs of India pose serious threats to the socio-economic and strategic stability in the region which will adversely affect Pakistan (Haan, 2015, pp. 2-6).

Furthermore, Pakistan has grave concerns over the increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan; and contrary to the Indian objectives of promoting instability through terrorism and other unlawful activities demonstrates maximum restraint for the collective peace and security of the region. The last two decades witnessed a sharp rise in violence but, Pakistan successfully fights against terrorism. The economic assistance to Kabul was an effort to strengthen the political and diplomatic influence of India and forward its national security objectives primarily to undermine Pakistan's interests. Afghanistan has vast energy resources and an ideal strategic location for trade and economic opportunities in the region. It's obvious that India can only assert its influence by minimizing Islamabad's presence in Kabul by inciting violence and cross-border terrorism (Larry Hanaeur, 2012, p. 1).

India also seeks permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council thus, to have the veto power and would be able to assert its role as a global power. In pursuance of its role as a sole regional power, it infiltrated terrorism and incite secessionist elements in Baluchistan to destabilize Pakistan and sabotage the OBOR initiative of China to undermine its security and economic interests (Muhammad Imran Rashid, 2018).

India has aspirations for global influence and regional hegemony. In the regional context, has always exercised its influence over other South Asian states except for Pakistan. The desire of an "Akhand Bharat" comprising the entire region of South Asia is the ultimate goal in this regard. Moreover, the strategic partnership with the US would help India to safeguard its interests and achieve its objectives in the region and beyond; consequently would create unrest and instability in the region because it would be unacceptable for Pakistan at any cost (The Express Tribune, Islamabad October 5, 2014, by Hasan Askari Rizvi: the United States, India and Pakistan)(Hagerty, 1991).

Conclusion

South Asia, since the era of the Cold War to the Strategic Rebalancing, has remained as the basis of increased US interests and emerged as a priority in its foreign policy strategy. The geostrategic interest is the key factor of the US policy for South Asia despite various shifts in the policy matters related to engagements and disengagements. The Afghan war against the Soviet invasion was the continuity of the US

containment policy in South Asia. This policy has been an integral part of its global strategy where the US wants to see the whole of Asia and Europe free from any domination by any power that is hostile and to continue having its competitive edge over other major powers of the world. Previously, the US considered Soviet Union being such a power that was in direct competition with the US and now in the 21st century, China is being viewed as a major threat to US interests. Moreover, as long as the shadow of the Chinese threat looms over, the US will continue to support and strengthen India as its key partner for the region and use it to pursue its strategic interests. Whereas, the US presence in Afghanistan did not transform it into a stable and peaceful country by eliminating terrorism and it is assumed that the current withdrawal of the US forces will further deteriorate the security situation of the region.

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