

EMERGING STRATEGIC TRYST BETWEEN INDIA AND THE U.S.: RAMIFICATIONS FOR INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Dr. Sunita Agrawal

Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Lalit Narayan Mithila University
Darbhanga, Bihar.

Abstract:

The growing strategic partnership between India and the U.S. presents India with the need to balance its pursuit of strategic autonomy with deeper alliance-building, particularly in response to China's growing assertiveness. Ramifications for India's foreign policy include enhanced defense capabilities and critical technology access via U.S. support, a stronger role in the Indo-Pacific through initiatives like the Quad, and economic opportunities through trade and partnerships. However, it also requires navigating potential geopolitical vulnerabilities, maintaining ties with Russia, and skillfully managing relationships with other major powers and neighbors amidst a shifting global order.

Strategic Implications for India's Foreign Policy India aims to maintain its strategic autonomy while forging closer ties with the U.S., a delicate balance that involves skillfully managing relationships with other powers like Russia and the broader global order.

INTRODUCTION

India United States relations, have entered an epoch of tectonic transformation. The signing of the United States India co-operation bill. by the American president, has engendered a path breaking event in the history of the world's two largest democracies. This giant leap forward, signals a paradigm shift in their relations. Any how this gesture by America, seems to be overlaid in surreptitious neo-imperialist agenda. Viewing from India's perspective, this strategic shift in its foreign policy, signifies a departure from the fundamental principle of India's foreign policy that is non-alignment.

Henry Kissinger had contemplated the "Inevitable decline of American power, in the 21st century. According to him, for creating a new balance of power, it would require the U.S. to share its influence, with Europe, China, Japan, Russia and probably India."¹ The terrorist strikes on the United States in September 2001, has been a kind of a prologue, to what Kissinger had contemplated. As a result of this, "biggest effects were felt in the policies and politics of the United States, the New Bush administration, instantly turned from strident unilateralism, to urgent multilateralism."² The shift from unilateralism to multilateralism, has been evident in America's endeavour to organise a global coalition and its efforts to search for new allies to fight the battle against terrorism.

The need for fresh allies in order to fight its battle against terrorism, effected drastic changes in United States security and foreign policy. Its offer of civilian nuclear co-operation and its exulting claims that India is its strategic partner forms a continuum to what we have discussed above. "The India-U S, nuclear deal is historic. It has many commendable features, Washington sees in it an opportunity to build a long term strategic partnership."³ and has "profound implications on two areas of vital importance for India: the energy deficit and the overarching issue of national security."⁴ But how far, this deal would lead to an equal partnership between the two? It is a vital question to be deliberated considering the mystique enveloping the motives of the pro Bush neo-conservative lobby, in the United States. Who intend to utilize the partnership, as a lever against rising China. And also advance its own neo-imperialist interests, in South Asia in particular and the world in general.

Initially, the domestic opinion in the United States, including the Congress, had borne an uncompromising posture. Refusing to support the deal, now "why has opposition melted in the U.S. legislative branch? The deal with India is seen in Washington, as providing enormous strategic leverage to the U.S. in Asia and the White house has shrewdly kept the focus on the big picture".⁵ Pakistan the rivalry had been a crucial factor in determining its strategic relations with the U S . Articulating Pakistani's perspective, Ayub Khan has indicated. "The crux of the problem from the very beginning was the Indian attitude of hostility towards us. We had to look for allies to secure our position".⁶ Hence throughout the period of cold war, United States was able to utilise Pakistan as a regional ally, to aid its cold war grand strategies. The end of cold war. however brought a strategic shift in U.S. foreign policy, as now the foreign policy requirements also began to change.

The end of cold war signaled the termination of the war of ideologies. Fukuyama proclaimed that this was the "end of history, the triumph of liberalism and capitalism at the world level over communism and all other totalitarian forces."⁷ "But at the turn of the new millennium, many Western commentators have become much less sanguine,"⁸

It is in this perspective that the recent engagement between India and the United States, must be viewed and examined. A significant thing to be noted here is that the U.S. has shifted its focus towards India, as a marked contrast to its policy at the time of cold war. Pakistan had acted as a regional ally of the United States during the cold war years and the U.S. in return supported it in its subcontinental conflicts. Hence, throughout the period this notion. Fresh threats to Western liberal democracies such as the rising threat of Islamic extremism has been contemplated. A prelude to which was given by Samuel Huntington, in his famous thesis "Clash of Civilisations"⁹

Hence, the growth of Islamic extremism directed towards the U.S. has emerged as a new challenge to its security. So, despite the end of cold war, there still remained justification for the continuation of America's involvement in the politics of South Asia. But now it was essential for it to look for avenues for acquiring new allies in the region. Although, Pakistan still remains the time tested ally of America, the latter is in an urgent requirement of an alternative option, in the region. Due to the swift defacement of Pakistan's image at the global level, as there is a growing international realization. regarding its obnoxious role in sponsoring terrorism.

In the light of this. the present course of constructive engagement between India and the United States, must be examined. The monumental agreement of July 18th 2006, is neither an abrupt development, nor was the phenomenon obscure. It has been the result of a gradual process, effected by epoch making global changes which engendered significant paradigm shifts in the course of Indo-US relations.

In the history of their relations, it can be viewed that twice there has been significant paradigm shifts. The end of cold war, as a fallout of the demise of Soviet Union, is the first one. "The end of cold war and the demise of the bipolar world, provided the circumstances for India and the United states to change from political adversaries to strategic partners."¹⁰ With this their relations were liberated from the shackles of Cold War, ushering in with a re-orientation in American foreign policy towards South Asia. Leading to a considerable dilution in the pro Pakistan tilt in its policies. It also strengthened America's ties with India. This policy re-orientation was apparent during the Kargil crisis, when the United States condemned Pakistan for violating international delegations and disturbing the line of control.

However, the most significant paradigm shift, occurred on July 18th 2005. When the India-United States co-operation agreement was signed by India's Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh and the American President, Mr. George Bush. It also involved a deal, for Civilian nuclear co-operation. This event not only metamorphosised the matrix of their bilateral relations, but also transformed the political geometry of South Asia, to a considerable extent Due to America's preference of India, ahead of Pakistan. With this American acceptance to India's nuclear program became apparent and "India became US's strategic partner."¹¹ "US's nuclear co-operation with India forms the bedrock of a wider set of strategic interactions, aimed at

harnessing Indian strategic capabilities. Indeed the strategic factors. have over determined the U.S. approach to the Indian nuclear question."¹²

This deal is seen as the first bilateral agreement after the Indo- Soviet treaty of peace friendship and co-operation, arrived by India with any country that involves candid security motives. This may go a long way, in determining the national security doctrines of India and Pakistan. The editorial of Seminar noted: "Are we witnessing a tectonic change in India's foreign policy? For decades. India, seen as a prominent spokesperson of the third world and non-alignment, if not a camp follower of the Soviet Union, and the U.S. widely regarded as the leader of the capitalist world was described as two estranged democracies. No longer does this seem to be the case. The recent agreements signed by President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. opening up among others the prospects of civilian nuclear co-operation—a major irritant in their relationship—as seen by many as moving into a decisive new chapter."¹³

Anyhow, there is a great deal of skepticism both in India and the United States, regarding the prospects for this agreement. C. Rajamohan, a prominent Indian strategic analyst contends that Bush has risked much of political capital back home and pressed for the deal. with a solemn conviction that India's steady rise in Asia coupled with rapid economic growth would facilitate the United States to fashion the balance of power in Asia, in particular and the world in general to its own advantage. However, Rajamohan is incredulous, when it comes to conclude that a "Concrete and broad alliance would materialize, between India and America because the partnership would be unequal. Due to United States' sheer superiority as against India, in terms of political-military power."¹⁴

Substantial domestic opinion within the United States, also seems to be pessimistic. This has been epitomized by the views of various American analysts. For instance, Strobe Talbott. comments "the civilian nuclear deal would be a setback for nuclear non-proliferation."¹⁵ In the same way. Francine R. Frankel, in his testimony before the American Congress house international relations committee contested the notion that the agreement would materialize. "primarily due to India's enduring reluctance in the past to align with the U.S. because of its intransigent stance on the policy of non-alignment."¹⁶

However, considerable optimism also has been expressed Ashley Tellis, in his remarks, before the United States Congress house committee on international relations. Illustrates that India and America. share common interests on several issues Such as "countering terrorism. promoting democracy, arresting the further spread of nuclear weapons and preventing Asia from being dominated by any single power."¹⁷ Upon these issues, the convergence between the two countries is remarkable. Henceforth, a stable partnership will be beneficial, for both. Similarly, Steven Blank, notes that if the United States wish to take effective advantage of the transformation of Asia, into a strategic entity. Where in India plays a dominant role, it must re-orient its relations with India. While admitting the past failures. on the part of both the countries to build a partnership. He indicates that "it would be tragic to miss the current opportunity."¹⁸

American acclamation of the deal is premised upon the contention that as India and the United States, are two large liberal democracies. With multi-cultural societies, faced with common challenges, such as terrorism. A concrete partnership between the two is inevitable and beneficial for both. But "by now the fact that United States' offer of civilian nuclear co-operation, carries with it hidden political costs, is well accepted within and outside India's foreign *policy* establishment."¹⁹ American commendation of the deal is plotted upon a three-point neo-imperialist agenda. Firstly, the United States administration is exploring the probability of India being a potent ally to sustain its conflict against Islamic extremism. As the role of Pakistan in the global war on terror is becoming spurious, due to the gradual exposure of it's indulgence in fomenting cross-border terrorism.

Secondly, in the name of creating balance of power in Asia. America is attempting to establish India as a formidable bulwark against rising China, for its own advantage. This indeed may not surve the wider Indian expectations from the deal. For India, it is crucial to meet its energy requirements and acquire a better access to the American markets. But if Washington attempts to engage India in its post cold war hegemony

strategy, then the actual progress of India in vital areas of national importance, may be hampered to a considerable extent.

Lastly, the most perilous dimension of the July 18th agreement is United States's efforts to advance its non-proliferation agenda. Already a section of the Indian political class and strategists are concerned that the nuclear deal may jeopardize India's credibility of a minimum nuclear weapons deterrence. "Right from day one, the Indian side has insisted that the July 18, 2005 agreement is about energy co-operation and not arms control. For the Americans too, the deal is primarily about fashioning India's energy choices. But there is also a non-proliferation impulse, as reflected in the reference to India's unilateral moratorium on nuclear weapons testing in the joint statement that day. Accepting this without extracting a reciprocal reference to the United State's own moratorium was a serious error of tactics and principle. Today it is this commitment that is proving much difficult *to* work around as India resists U.S. efforts to concert its voluntary no testing pledge into something more legally binding."²⁰

In addition to this, India's urge to strike a deal of civilian nuclear co-operation, with the United States has been exacting. In the sense that it has occupied the priorities of the entire foreign *policy* establishment and its full might has been diverted towards pushing the agreement to a fruition point. "More disturbingly there is evidence *of* how the Government has begun to adjust our foreign policy to the strategic partnership."²¹ In doing this, it appears that the ability of India's foreign policy to deal with other vital areas of international politics has been debilitated.

This has been evident by New Delhi's dubious foreign policy posture, towards Pakistan. It seems that preoccupation with the Bush administration has rendered the issues concerning Pakistan into a state of oblivion India's inability to convince Pakistan to prioritise cross-border terrorism, ahead of Jammu & Kashmir, even after having substantial evidence of the involvement of Pakistan based terrorist outfits in the terrorist strikes of July 2006 carried out in Mumbai provides credence to this phenomenon.

Above all, the deal has questioned the autonomy of our foreign policy, rendering its core principle the Non-alignment to appear as a sham. "The Manmohan Singh Government let down the country badly by caving in on the Iran nuclear issue. Aside from the shameful negative vote against Iran in the IAEA in September 2005. New Delhi has been boxing under its weight in the world stage in an effort to please the Bush administration. New Delhi would like to treat the nuclear agreement as a stand-alone agreement, but Washington has a host of collateral expectations, in the strategic and economic field India must come out of the foreign policy trap and reassert the independence of its external policy. Else the nuclear deal would turn out to be an albatross round its neck."²²

Hence, with "justifiable apprehensions that the nuclear agreement is used to serve the wider purpose of the United States, to harness India as an ally for its wider strategic interests in South Asia."²³ India should be cautious in dealing with the United States, in its future negotiations, as the time for the implementation of the deal may arrive at any moment. The crucial thing for India is that too much of optimism must not be expressed, as still the actual intentions of the U.S. appear to be enigmatic. The concern here must be to preserve the core doctrine of India's foreign policy that is non-alignment, which is the harbinger of our autonomy. Else, the country's national interest may be held for ransom by a super power that is eager to dominate the affairs of contemporary world politics.

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