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A PERSPECTIVE ON INDO US TIES



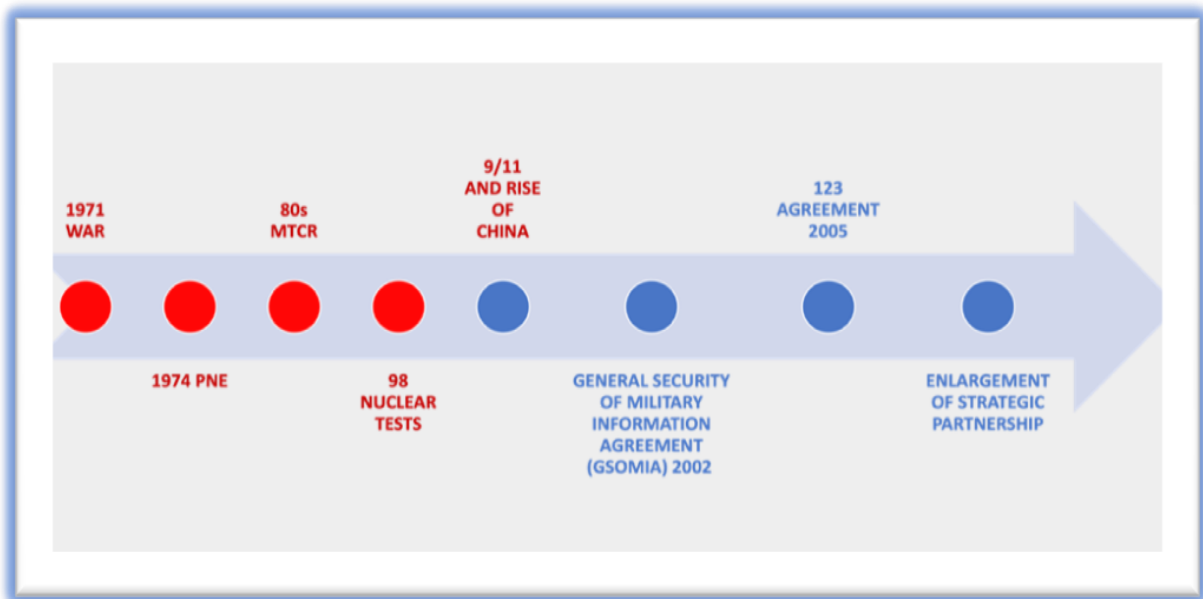
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The Indo US Strategic Partnership has come under some stress due to the differing perceptions on the Russo Ukrainian war. It even led the US President to comment that India was a 'shaky' partner. Additionally, many US officials have conveyed that they view India's 'neutral' stance on the Russo Ukrainian war as 'explicit strategic alignment' with Russia. They have also indicated there would be long-term consequences as a result of the stance. The overall tone was coercive and threatening. It resulted in a hue and cry in both India and USA. However many of those mis-perceptions were cleared in the 2+2 dialogue held on 11 Apr. Significantly the dialogue was preceded by a virtual meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joseph Biden. The joint statement coming out of the dialogue also indicated a reaffirmation of the partnership and reemphasized the need to confront global threats jointly. Despite this, On 25 Apr, a US Congress-constituted quasi-judicial body recommended that India be designated as a "Country of Particular Concern" in the context of status of religious freedom. Overall one is witnessing an established fast paced flip-flop in the Indo US relationship where things are differently perceived. It makes one wonder where is this headed?

The entire issue has to be seen in a wider perspective. John Mearsheimer puts the current difference of opinion on Ukraine succinctly. As per him, *US has a rich history of fundamental disagreement with India and is used to it. There is no serious danger of rupture in relations between the two countries because of India's neutral stand. It doesn't matter if Washington is unhappy with India because Washington needs New Delhi to contain China. This war won't end soon. Russia feels it cannot lose. America and Europe feel they cannot lose. USA has bogged down in Europe and has lost sight of China.* If one extends this argument further, despite everything else, India also needs USA to ward off China as also Pakistan (under some conditions). India's need for USA in its fight against China has increased, since supply of defence spares and parts from Russia and Ukraine are under threat of long term disruption. Hereafter it is going to be a case of mutual necessity. In this context, it is necessary to examine the background, areas of convergence and divergence in the Indo US relationship to evolve into a stable and clearheaded partnership to tackle common goals.

The Indo-US strategic partnership has a core sociological platform. Brilliant and hardworking first generation Indians made USA their home and contributed to its greatness while still retaining some connect with India. Their second generation - Americans of Indian descent like late Kalpana Chawla, Bobby Jindal, Kamala Harris and Nikki Hailey have gone on to become astronauts, senators, state governors, ambassadors now even a Vice President (across the political divide). If one reflects, one does not find second generation Americans of Chinese or Pakistani or Japanese or Australian descent in the same bracket. This phenomenon is expanding with a thriving Indian community increasing in prominence in USA. There is great depth to the Indo-US relationship. In an era where autocracies are blooming, India and USA remain two great democracies despite all their inadequacies. The oldest democracy and the largest democracies have a joint responsibility in ensuring peace prevails on this globe despite their differences.



Historically, India and USA were on opposite sides during the 1971 Indo Pakistan War. The mutual animosity hardened when India carried out a peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974. Consequently India was placed under the MTCR and other sanctions throughout the 80s and 90s. The collapse of the Soviet Union forced mutual rethink on the relationship. However, the Pokran nuclear tests of 1998 were a setback. The turning point was the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers. India and USA realised that they had no choice but to be partners in tackling global terror and contending the rise of China. That led to the General Security of Military Information Agreement in 2002 and thence to the 123 Nuclear Agreement in 2005, which has now flowered into a Indo US strategic Partnership.

In this context it is necessary to understand that the Indo US Strategic Partnership has [developed over two decades](#) since the turn of the century. The early interlocutors were Mr Jaswant Singh Minister, then External Affairs Minister and Mr Strobe Talbot, then Deputy Secretary of State. The trajectory of this relationship has risen with each new administration in USA despite the impediments and differences of opinion. The India-U.S. bilateral cooperation is currently broad-based. Its vista is multisectoral - trade and investment, defence and security, education, science and technology, cyber security, high-tech, civil nuclear energy, space technology and applications, clean energy, environment, agriculture and health. The India-U.S. Dialogue Architecture is structured. It consists of a high level 2+2 dialogue and more than 50 other bilateral dialogue mechanisms. People-to-people interaction is vibrant. This partnership cuts across the political spectrum in both countries. India and US are 'Major Defence Partners' with cooperation in counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, information exchange, operational cooperation, technology, training and equipment. I have written about this earlier in an article @ <https://www.gunnersshot.com/2020/11/indo-us-strategic-relationship-reality.html>



India and US have many convergences on which to build upon. As the world enters an era of deglobalized uncertainty and economic turmoil, India and USA, after recovering from the ravages of COVID are engines of global growth. They have deep people to people connect. The Indo US defence and military ties have grown strong and provide a platform for expansion into other areas. India and USA have shared interests in the Indo-pacific region with a common perception on China. It is only the military heft of USA and

India which has the potential to take on an assertive China. They have common interests and compatible capacities to progress the fight against COVID, combat climate change and respond to disasters. The cooperation in energy, space and nuclear domains is expanding. Ties in education are deep. The scope for trade and commerce is huge. Most importantly, there is bipartisan political convergence that the Indo US relation should be taken to the next level.

ISSUE	USA	INDIA
UKRAINE	MY WAR	NOT MY WAR
OUTLOOK AND VIEW	GLOBAL BALANCE OF POWER	REGIONAL STABILITY AND INFLUENCE
SECURITY	SECURE	UNSECURE RADICAL TERROR AND NUCLEAR
CHINA	PEER COMPETITION	MAJOR THREAT
RUSSIA	ADVERSARY	STRATEGIC PARTNER WEAPONS/AFGHANISTAN/ CHINA
ENERGY	SURPLUS	DEFICIENT
NATO	OWNERSHIP	NOT PART OF IT
PAKISTAN	NON NATO ALLY	ADVERSARY
MYANMAR	HUMANITARIAN ISSUES	CRITICAL TO INDO PACIFIC
AFGHANISTAN	PAST TENSE	PROVIDES STRAT DEPTH TO PAKISTAN
SOUTH CHINA SEA	CRITICAL TO CONTAIN CHINA	NOT MY BABY

It is also important to understand that there are many divergences between India and USA. these have been tabulated below and are being amplified. USA has a global outlook and views many issues from a balance of power perspective. However, India has a regional outlook and has more concerns about regional stability and influence. USA feels that the Ukrainian conflict is its war whereas India feels, that is an European affair and it should remain neutral. USA is a secure nation with unassailable seas on either side. India on the other hand is in an unsecure neighbourhood where it has to contend with radical ideology and terror on a daily basis. USA considers China as a peer competitor, whereas India considers it as an adversary from which a major threat emerges. For USA , Russia is an adversary. For India, Russia is a traditional strategic partner which can be leveraged to offset China and create space in Afghanistan. USA is energy surplus and India is energy deficient. USA owns NATO and India has no role in it. Last but not the least, Pakistan remains, a non-NATO ally of USA whereas it is our prime adversary.

At first glance it does look as if the convergences are dwarfed by the divergences. However there should be no doubt about the common Chinese threat, footprint and intent in the Indo Pacific. China will cause a lot of turbulence in the Indo Pacific as it seeks to attain superpower status. As it stood, China had a wide footprint in the region which included, the, South China Sea, Afghanistan, Iran, Middle East, Pakistan, BRI countries, Island nations the IOR, and the LAC along India. Its recent foray into the Solomon Islands is a power shift. As per a [Rand Report](#) of 2018, *'distance and geography work against the United States and largely counterbalance its military strengths, especially in scenarios around China's immediate periphery. China's ability to project power to more distant locations remains weak, and the United States continues to hold more decisive advantage at a distance from China's coast'*. While the first part, that US strength cannot overcome China's military capability near the latter's periphery, remains true, the second part of this assessment has changed. In the past five years, China's comprehensive national power has expanded. The Solomon Island foray has deeper meaning when seen in this context. USA or India have to wake up from their petty bickering. USA or India alone cannot handle this powershift. If China does acquire and establish a naval base in the IOR either at Gwadar or Kyaukphyu, all we can do is welcome 'superpower' China in our strategic vicinity to present us with an overbearing maritime threat. For USA it will be equivalent to letting the genie out of the bottle.

Yet this is not a timeless inevitable phenomenon. A rapidly ageing China with a shrinking population is facing economic cooling down enhanced by an extended pandemic risk. However it continues to militarise heavily and display assertive behaviour. In about a decade Chinese behaviour will change due to its decaying demographics. Hence containing China in the coming decade is critical. In this context USA and India will have to understand the larger picture, each other's interests and further realise that the Indo US partnership is not a zero sum game. To a large extent, USA must realise that India's multilateralism is an advantage to it. If India has to change course drastically at this stage, it will be detrimental not only to US interests but will also weaken India beyond acceptability to Indian interests. In the overall picture, India and USA must build on each other's strengths, improve cooperation in military and other critical technologies, and expand the relationship in a positive direction. It is to be expected that there will be ups and downs in the relationship but both should not sight of the long term objective.

In conclusion it can be said that while there are doubts in India and USA about the relationship, there is no doubt about it in China. Headlines in the South China Morning Post on three different days since the 2+2 meet are in the graphic below and tell their story. China has clearly underestimated India's grievances with their protracted border stand-off. An analysis in one of the reports mentioned "*India wants to stay neutral on Russia, but it is not neutral on the US strategy to contain China. Despite contrasting stances over Ukraine, Washington supports New Delhi as a defence industry leader and net provider of security in the Indo-Pacific*". Well, very clearly, China is worried about the Indo-US relationship. It is still more worried about the QUAD. If that be so, is it not time to feed these fears?



CERTIFICATE

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