India-US Relations in the Context of India's Conflict with China

After the Cold War ended, India-US relations improved and gradually transformed into a global strategic partnership. The constant victory of Hindu Nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in the parliamentary election and President Donald Trump's visit in February 2020 strengthened the relations to a further level because Hindu Nationalists and Republicans find themselves ideologically on the same page. Apart from this, the recent conflict between India and China has brought India closer to the US and its allies in dealing with China.

India's Foreign policy Evolution

Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy tenets were based on non-alignment and *Panchsheel,* which include anti-colonialism and disarmament. On the other hand, these ideas were also premised upon two central Gandhian paradigms of tolerance and means justifying ends.[1]

The idea of non-alignment not only provided the foundation for India's foreign policy - though it seems utopian to some extent - it also helped India gain economic and military assistance from both East and West to deal with poverty and defense.[2] Nehru opted for non-alignment in the face of the bipolar order of the Cold War, arguing that India would have to 'plough a lonely furrow'.[3]

Indian foreign policy in the Nehruvian era seemed full of moral values to outsiders, defining its national interest as a convergence of 'world co-operation and world peace'.[4] Internally, it was defined as the stand that gives India an honorable place in world politics.[5]

Indian Foreign Policy; between Realism and Idealism

India tried its best to incorporate non-alignment principles in its foreign policy. This explains why the country attempted to banish the Cold War tensions in a number of contexts whether regionally or globally. To achieve these goals, India became an early advocate of the nuclear test ban treaty. And in 1952, it introduced a resolution draft with the help of Ireland to bring about a global ban on nuclear tests. The effort was unsuccessful.

Still, these efforts reflect India's deep interest in playing a role on the global stage. India also wanted to play a significant role in the United Nations peacekeeping operations, and at the same time sought peaceful resolution in regional disputes.

In pursuit of these ends, India got indulged in the international control commission in Vietnam along with Canada and Poland. India has also been a key member of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission in Korea and it also made a significant contribution to provide defense personnel to the United Nations Peacekeeping in the Belgian Congo.[6]

India-US relation in the Cold War Era

During the 1962 Sino-Indian war, the US publicly supported India's interpretation of its border with China in the eastern Himalayas and even assisted India with military equipment. [7] Although India-US relations had significant potential and both countries had occasionally worked collaboratively, it was clear from the beginning that India would not serve as an active US ally in the battle against global communism, because historically the left movement has been strong in India.

Therefore, India was hesitant to be part of either the US or the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Instead, India charted its own "non-aligned" course, to keep largely itself independent of either superpower.[8]

US perspective of Indian foreign policy reflected that its main problem with Indian foreign policymakers was that they were not in the position to translate the non-alignment approach into genuine neutrality. Instead, India kept itself away from the US and was more inclined to be part of the Soviet Union's ambit, especially after the early 1970s.

At the strategic level, the Soviet Union provided India with crucial protection against its regional opponents. In 1971 New Delhi and Moscow signed a treaty of peace, friendship, and cooperation. According to these treaties, the two countries would help each other in the event of the perceived military threat. [9] Since then, India started to depend on the Soviet Union for protection against the People's Republic of China, with which, India fought a bloody border war in 1962, and until now, it still has ongoing territorial disputes.

During the early 1970s, China also began to improve its relations with the US. It further increased the idea that Beijing would be a regular threat to India. The Soviets responded actively to India's interpretation of US-China relations by providing India with sophisticated arms under highly favorable terms and it also took supportive positions at the UN Security Council, particularly over the disputed territory of Kashmir.[10]

India - US Relations in Post-Cold War Era

The Soviet Union was dismantled in 1991, marking the end of the Cold War. This created severe consequences for India's foreign and security policies; despite India's claim of non-alignment strategy, it had maintained a close tie with the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union led India's policymakers to reexamine their strategic thinking. They realized that they were not in a position to rely on Russia's military and diplomatic support.

Meanwhile, Russia was ambiguous in regards to whether or not India would still be able to continue its purchase of arms under favorable Cold War terms. As a result, the subsequent Indian government started to explore alternative strategic options. They also tried to ease the tension with China by undertaking some measures to improve their relations with its hostile neighbor.

More significantly, India largely left its reflexive opposition to US strategic, economic, and diplomatic policies. This was a clear indication of a new openness to gain mutual benefits while being determined to not becoming a part of US efforts to contain China.

India realized that a closer relationship with the US would enable them to fill the vacuum that has been left by the Soviet Union's downfall. This way, India could also seek to make a balance against China's rising power. The US, for its part, was no longer keen to view India in light of its friendship with the Soviets; instead, it wanted to re-evaluate India-US relations on their own merits.[11]

As India started its economic reforms and tried to integrate its economy with the global economy, it was obvious that the US and India would have to find a modus Vivendi for a deeper engagement with each other. As Indian foreign policy priorities got changed, it helped increased US-India cooperation in a wide range of issues and areas.[12]

But it was the George W. Bush administration that made a deep impact on US-India bilateral engagement. India emerged as a prominent country in the Bush administration's global strategic calculus, as it was made clear by Condoleezza Rice in her *Foreign Affairs* article before the 2000 presidential election. Rice had argued that "there is a strong tendency conceptually (in the United States) to connect India with Pakistan and to think only of Kashmir or the nuclear competition between the two states." She further argued that India has the potential to become a great power and that US foreign policy would do well to take that into account.[13]

With the passage of time, US-India cooperation on strategic issues has grown. Indian and US forces conduct joint exercises. This opinion would not be regarded as an exaggeration; that the US would like to have a strong US-India alliance to counter any kind of instability that is running from the Middle East to entire Asia, as this relationship would benefit the US to form much greater balance within Asia,   [14]

especially between India and China.

The US *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) strongly emphasized India's importance for the US in the emerging global security architecture. [15] While a concern with China's rising military power is evident throughout the defense review, it is worth noting how QDR described India's rising global profile. India is in fact an emerging great power and a key strategic partner to the US because both states share some common values such as representative democracy that provide the foundations for increasing strategic cooperation.

These above-mentioned political values are very much against the centralization of power, which is manifesting in Russia; and the lack of transparency of security affairs in China. It is also important to note that India has been mentioned along with the US' traditional allies such as the NATO countries, Japan, and Australia.

India-US bilateral relations have heightened due to the strategic partnerships that took place between the two countries. However, it should be taken into consideration that such defense cooperation would cost India's strategic autonomy should it decides to maintain it, especially in the context of India's relation with China.

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[1] Jawaharlal Nehru on International Co-operation (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1996) p, 69.

[2] Sree Ram S. Chaulia, International Politics 39: 215-234, june2002.

[3] J. Nehru, India's foreign policy and relations 1947-1972, vol.1(New Delhi: Oxford university Press, 1982), p,10

[4] ibid

[5] ibid

[6] See for detail account, D.R. Sardesai, Indian Foreign policy in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Berkelye, CA: University of California Press, 1968)

[7] Neville Maxwell, India's china war (Dehra Dun: Natraj Publishers, 1970), p, 146.

[8] Stephen P. Cohen, India: Emerging Power (Washington, D.C, Brooking Institution Press, 2001), p, 271

[9] For further discussion see, Robert Horn, Soviet-Indian Relations: Issues and Influence (New York: Praeger, 1982)

[10] Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, Asian Survey, Vol. 47, No. 4 (July, August 2007), pp, 642-56.

[11] See for detail, John Garver, Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

[12] Harsh V. Pant, India Negotiates its Rise in the International System, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2008) p, 20.

[13] For detailed account visit, http://www.state.gov/secratry

[14] Alex Perry, "Why Bush Is Courting India?" Time, February 28, 2006.

[15] http://www.defenselink.mil