

US-India Strategic Bargaining and Power Balancing in South Asia

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Abstract

The relationship between United States and India has transformed from estrangement to wider engagement since 2004. With the convergence of interests and shared values both the US and India came close towards each other and evolved strategic partnership through civil nuclear cooperation. This paper analyze the cost and benefit of strategic partnership with India for US, the impact of India's emergence as regional power on South Asian balance of power and its impact on Pak-US relationship. It also focuses on security structure of the region and challenges for the US to maintain strategic partnership with two rival states (India and Pakistan). The paper also gives some recommendations for balancing power in the region in order to ensure durable peace not only between India and Pakistan but also in south Asia.

Keywords: US-India strategic partnership, civil-nuclear cooperation, balance of power, impacts on Pak-US relationship

Introduction

US-India remained estranged from each other till the 1990 because of divergent goals and interests. From the very beginning, India is perusing a policy of strategic autonomy and neutrality in world politics while the US policies revolves around containment of communism during Cold War and in post-Cold War era, the US is struggling for maintaining her uni-polar status and now fighting against terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. Relations between the two countries have seen many ups down; both countries remain estranged from each other because of their conflicting policies and interests. India remained strategically irrelevant for the US because of its inclination towards non-alignment and its views remained similar to the Soviet's policies in the world politics. Relationship between the two countries remained a victim of incompatible obsessions, as they were close to each other's principal enemies- US to Pakistan and India to Soviet Union(Talbott, 2004). United States was working for nuclear non-proliferation and wanted India and Pakistan to sign Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty but India considered NPT as the three Ds of the US nuclear policies that is Dominance, Discrimination, and Double standard(Talbott, 2004). However, with the end of Cold War and disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US priorities in the region changed. US-India relationship is transforming from estrangement to wider engagement, which is an important geopolitical development of the post-Cold War era

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(Bouton, October, 2010a). The openness of Indian economy, democracy and relations with other powers of Asia bring the US closer to India. With convergence of interests, both countries have evolved strong bilateral relationship and since 2004, they have established strategic partnership. US has declared India as an indispensable and natural partner and concluded with India a ten years defense agreements for civil nuclear cooperation. United States is also looking for greater strategic space of India in Afghanistan.

This paper aims to analyze the US-India strategic partnership and Pakistan's possible counter-measures for balancing. It will help in recognizing Pakistan's importance for the US objectives in the region more than India by addressing the following questions regarding the US-India strategic partnership, its implication for Pakistan and South Asia balance of power and its impacts on Pakistan US relationship. (1) Will strategic partnership with India further the US core interests in the region better than Pakistan. (2) What will be the impacts of Indian emergence as a regional power on South Asia balance of power? (3) Can the US afford to ignore Pakistan's legitimate interests in Afghanistan? (4) What challenges the US would face while maintaining strategic partnership with both India and Pakistan?

US Strategic Interests in the Region and India

The end of cold war and collapse of Soviet Union has brought significant changes in the world political and strategic scene. Changing from bipolar to a unipolar world, United States emerged the sole hegemon of the world. United States introduced a new World Order in order to maintain her global superiority and dictate the world on its own terms. The purpose behind new World Order was to establish new regional alliances in different parts of the globe and these regional alliances or regional powers would play important role in supporting, safeguarding and advancing the US core interests in the world(Ejaz, n.d-a). The US-India strategic partnership and civil nuclear deal indicate that the US considers India much important to serves this role, better than other states in South Asian region. India is also important for United States because of its burgeoning economy, trade- driven foreign policy, expanding footprint in the region and the world and strong bilateral relations with great powers(Schaffer, 2008a).

Containment of China: The growing advancement of China in economic and military fields has the potential to pose threats to the US supremacy in world politics, may lead to multipolar world, and is one of the most important factors in US-India strategic partnership. However, the US interests face serious challenges in south Asian region. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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(SCO) may endanger the US interests in economic and strategic fields(Ejaz, n.d.). The emergence of India as a regional and global power will serve the US national interests in the region, as India will balance power and influence in the region against China. One of the motives behind the civil nuclear deal is to help India to become strong enough to contain China(Tasleem, 2008). China's interests in the region include gaining access to markets and raw materials, preventing instabilities as well as preventing anti-China activities in the region. The presence of the US in the Asian region, its power, influence, and the level of cooperation with India in civil nuclear field is a sign of the US' designs to put China in a secondary position in the region and to limit its potential strategic choices and its regional and international ambitions. The US India strategic partnership has the potential to influence the course of events in Asia(Rajamony, 2002). This deal will enable India to get hold of the most modern military equipment in conventional and nuclear fields and space technology, resulting major setback for China.

The Transition towards Multipolar World: The greatest threat to the US' super power status is the transition to a more multipolar global order. The global power shift to Asia will affect the US unipolar status and its global domination, a multipolar world will replace the existing unipolar international strategic structure, and the Asian powers will contest the predominance of US(Kapila, April 17, 2012a). The growing influence of new powers (China, Turkey, Brazil, India, and Iran) contributes to lessening of the US ability to achieve its goals in the world unilaterally. According to Henry Kissinger, the US will continuously assist India to develop conventional and nuclear weapons and that capability could be used to prevent the emergence of another powerful state between Aden and Singapore(The Indian Express, November 16, 2004). The US need close cooperation with the regional powers in order to achieve her interests and maintain her unipolar status. Strategic partnership and civilian nuclear deal with India will help the US in maintaining her unipolar status and the existing international order.

Economic Gravity of Asia: The rising economic and financial strength of Asia have largely contributed to the shift of power to Asia. The power challenges and power shifts in the global power structure are because of Asia's economic strength, which contribute to Asian political influence over the existing international order(Kapila, April 17, 2012b). The long-term challenge to the US global supremacy centered on Asia because of the economic gravity and geostrategic influence of the Asian region spurred by China's rise will completely change the global balance of power and will affect the US interests(Bouton, October, 2010b). The core US goal in the 21st Century is to establish and consolidate its status in order to maintain its hegemony in the world. The growing economic development gives India confidence to increase

its hard power naval ships, aircraft and weapons systems, which will in turn place it in better position to safeguard the US economic interests in the region(Berlin, 2006).

Stability of South Asia: India's role is critical in strengthening and stabilizing the South Asia, preserving the US interests and addressing challenges to the US interests in the region. India might prove a more potent security provider in the Indian Ocean region for the US. South and East Asia depend on the Indian Ocean sea lines of communication for energy and trade and their dominance by one state will lead to confrontation among great powers and will have disastrous consequences for the world economy. United States needs partnership with India in order to share security burden in the Indian Ocean(Bouton, October, 2010c). Furthermore, US-India strategic partnership is based on securing the US interests and ensuring Indian Ocean's stability. Strategic partnership with India would allow the US to enforce a broader framework of maritime security in the Indian Ocean. For this purpose, Indian Navy could play an important role in furthering and safeguarding the US security interests in the Indian Ocean and might prove a strategic asset in this regard.

Shared goals and Interests: Since the end of Cold war, the US and Indian economic, political and security interests have been converging. Peace and stability in South Asia, elimination of terrorism, economic growth and normalization of relations in the whole region are the shared values and interests of both the US and India(Bouton, October, 2010b). Both the US and India wants to prevent dominance of any single power in Asia, supporting democracy, dependence on smooth and stable functioning of energy markets and maritime security of the Indian Ocean(Schaffer, 2008c). The shared values of pluralism, democracy, and India's emergence as a regional and global power will weigh heavily in forming and in safeguarding the US' interests in the emerging multipolar world order.

India's Role in Peacekeeping and Peace Enforcement Operations: US has the power to intervene in any part of the globe but it cannot stay for long to rebuild the nation and restore civil society. The US faces serious challenges in restoring civil order and reshaping democratic institutions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, it is necessary for the US to have forces that will willingly stay for an extended period to restore law and order in the war torn countries and reshape their civil society. Moreover, the traditional partners of the US may not prove effective for carrying out peace enforcement and peacekeeping missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US needs a non-western partner to cooperate with the US in its military efforts in order to avoid the blame of being

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an imperial power. India remained active in peacekeeping missions and it could play a significant role in the US nation-building efforts in future.

India wants to participate in maintaining international status quo but to shape the international system in such a way that could provide a greater role to India in global affairs. Therefore, India supports the US and is continuously participating in peacekeeping missions. India's capacity for providing sufficient troops for carrying out peace and nation building efforts is perhaps one of the most important factors that derive the US towards India.

US India Strategic Partnership

US-India strategic partnership has adversely affected Pak-US partnership and disturbed balance of power in South Asia. India and the US have established strategic partnership through their civilian nuclear deal. United States in a US-India joint statement in July 2005, declared India a responsible nuclear weapon state with advance nuclear technology and agreed on full civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India(Kronstadt, September 1, 2011c). The civil nuclear deal will improve the existing defense equipment of India that will ultimately lead to its superiority in conventional and nuclear weapons. A strong bilateral partnership with India is in the US interests as India is an emerging regional and global power increasingly assumes roles in the world commensurate with its position as a stakeholder in the international system. Both are natural partners and share common values and interests for a stable and secure world.

India's motives behind civil nuclear deal with the US includes meeting the growing energy and fuel requirement, acquisition and advancement of civil nuclear technology, to become a dominant player in the region and across the globe and establish close relations with the world super power to get her support in acquiring permanent seat in UNSC(Tasleem, 2008). According to Indian officials, the civil nuclear technology would advance its trade across the globe. Indian and the US officials believe that strategic partnership would advance security and stability in Asia through an open, balance, and effective cooperation in the region(Ejaz, n.d-b).

India strategic objectives in the region and the world include a strong commitment to strategic autonomy (a policy not to align its foreign policy with any other state), emergence as a regional and global player and recovering a major place in world politics(Schaffer, 2008b). US objectives behind the deal are to help India to fulfill her energy needs, to strengthen non-proliferation regimes and to support India to become a major world power. South Asian region involves full spectrum of US interests. Particularly Pakistan and India

involves many US interests including security, economy, and humanity. However, there are several threats to US interest in the region. With the burgeoning economy, India will emerge as a regional economic power in the near future and this profound economic growth will provide substantial investment opportunities to the US(Glardon, April 1, 2005).

According to Pakistani officials, US-India Strategic partnership would destabilize the strategic balance in South Asia and will enable India to project power in Asia. However, there are certain challenges to US-India strategic partnership as the notion of strategic autonomy and US-India differences over Iran. India wants independence of action or in other words strategic autonomy while United States wants to align foreign policies of other states with its own interests. However, there are signs that India has shifted its foreign policy to some extent from strategic autonomy to aligning itself with the US as it has supported the US policies in the region especially the US military action against Afghanistan and the US sanction against Iran. The strategic partnership and civil nuclear agreement with the US has compelled India to subordinate its foreign policy to the US global interests and turned it into a satellite and junior partner of the United States(Mansingh, October, 2006).

US Assistance to India

In contemporary international relations, the US has successfully maintained its unique position as a super power. Due to its technological and military superiority in the world, it possesses the power to dictate diplomatic and political outcomes around the globe. Many scholars of international relations view India's strategic partnership with the US as a product of both countries' complementary interests in the contemporary world. India is struggling to attain significant position in the world power structure and the US is assisting India in gaining its rightful position in the world because India's rise as a regional and global power will serve as a watchdog for the US interests in South Asia as well as in the world.

Permanent Indian Seat in UNSC: The U.N. Security Council remains a significant source of legitimacy for a worldwide action and is indispensable for securing the US national interests and maintaining the international order. Advancing and safeguarding the US interests in present global threats requires successful multilateral actions. The old institutions of the world are struggling to adapt to the changing circumstances around the globe. The US president Barack Obama is committed to renovate the old institutions and supports the integration of rising powers as mainstay of rule-based global order. President Obama's endorsement to Indian in November 2010, for a permanent UNSC seat is the first significant step in this direction(Kara C.

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McDonald, December, 2010b). The US President as well as the congress support India's permanent role in the SC because the US is committed to elevate India to its rightful position in the globe(Kronstadt, September 1, 2011b). The U.N. Security Council possesses significant power to decide upon the question of war or peace, India's permanent role in the council would increase political and legal authority of the US for initiating multilateral action in the world that would advance US objectives(Kara C. McDonald, December, 2010a). Permanent seat in the UNSC provide India with formal acceptance of its status as responsible nuclear power state and greater legitimacy of initiatives. Having a permanent seat in UNSC will emerge India as a major player in the international system and will act proactively in maintaining global peace and security. However, India's permanent position in the UNSC will fuel regional confrontations, conflicts and will have disastrous affects for Pakistan. Being the traditional rival India will endanger the very existence of Pakistan. Moreover, this will have serious consequences for Pak-US relations as Pakistan will also sought for same status in the UNSC for which the US might not agree.

US assistance to Various Sectors of Development in India: United States assists India in the development of efficient energy markets. Both the countries are working on projects like carbon reduction and energy efficiency and have agreed to work jointly for the development of smart grids and clean coal technologies. As a part of their strategic partnership, President Obama and Indian Prime Minister have launched an initiative of Clean Energy, energy security and Climate Change(Singh, 2009). The US government strongly supports India's economic reform policies and encourages expanded bilateral engagement in trade and economics. US also provides market access to Indian goods and services.

US to India Space Cooperation: India sought to get a range of space, dual use and nuclear technologies from the US, as these are important for the future technological and economic growth of the country. However, the US remained reluctant to deliver such technologies to India, as the US officials are greatly concerned about the possible transfer of these sensitive technologies to other parties(Krishnaswami, September 20, 2004). In recent years, commerce department of the US has removed hurdles to trade with the civil space agencies of India. United States encourage India's active participation in different fora such as committee on Group on Earth Observation and Earth Observation Satellites and are willing to take initiative for cooperation in the field of human space flight. Bilateral space cooperation will help India in predicting accurate climate and weather(Rajeswari Pillai, July 18, 2011.).

Indian Commitment to US

India is fully committed to the US goals in the region. In return, India wants to achieve three objectives from its relations with the US; permanent seat in the UNSC, legalization of nuclear status, recognition of Line of control as an international border between Pakistan and India

India's Role in Afghanistan's Reconstruction and Rehabilitation: India envisages a peaceful and stable Afghanistan that can serve as a transportation energy and trade hub in the region. India is actively assisting the Afghan rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. India attaches great values to its relations with Afghanistan and is a key regional contributor to the Afghan humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. It supports all major sectors of development in Afghanistan and extends help and assistance in road projects in order to reduce the country's dependence on Pakistan(Kronstadt, September 1, 2011a). The longstanding Indian interests and the underline purpose behind its huge investment in the country are to bypass Pakistan's influence and to increase its soft power in South Asia.

India is fully committed to the Afghan unity and independence. India supports 'the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' peace efforts and is against Pakistan's involvement in the process of peace in Afghanistan as it is worry about the US' dependence on Pakistan's military for gaining military victory in the Afghan war. India perceives that Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan endgame would bring catastrophic implications for its security(Varadarajan, June 6, 2011.). Pakistan is also worried about India's growing role in Afghanistan. India has established consulates in Afghanistan near the Pakistan border which is used for providing material support to the separatist elements in Baluchistan. India is also involved in energizing the insurgencies in Pakistan's tribal regions.

India's Policy over Iran Nuclear Issue: India-Iran relations remained positive throughout history. Both countries maintained high-level engagement after the 1979 Islamist revolution in Iran. In order to strengthen cooperation in energy, economic, education and science as well as to work together on afghan counterterrorism and reconstruction both have launched bilateral strategic partnership in 2003("Delhi Declaration. January 2003.," February, 2014.). However, India has also strengthened its ties with the US, and slowly shifted its policy over Iran nuclear issue when it voted with the US in 2005-2006 International Atomic Energy sessions. In recent years, tension grew between the two countries as India has fully supported the international sanctions regime against Iran. In response to India's policy shift Iran has also made changes in its Kashmir policy. Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

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repeatedly mentioned the Kashmir problem in late 2010 that many see as an "Anti-Indian tilt"(Sharma, December 6, 2010). United States is against the Iran-Pakistan-India gas Pipeline project because the project will benefit Iran economically and will promote cooperation among the neighboring countries. Therefore, the US want to hamper progress on the project in order to weaken Iran's economy and isolate it in the region. Despite Iran's continuous efforts for the completion of the project, India has abandoned its participation due to the US' concerns over IPI project(Hopes, June 17, 2011).

Power Balancing In South Asia

A nation state needs power and strength in order to survive in the anarchic international order. If a state is incapable or fails to acquire power, it can become subservient to other powerful states and will ultimately lose its autonomy, security, and prosperity. The anarchic structure of the world compel nation states to maximize their power and as a result of power maximization a competition for power among states becomes a natural state of affair in the world politics(Writz Paul, 2004). Power balancing is the main goal of all nation states as any strategic gain by one state directly affects another state. US- India strategic partnership and civilian nuclear cooperation will disturb the strategic balance of power in South Asia. The agreement will help India to become a major power and to advance US strategic interests in the region. Strategic partnership with the US will facilitate joint weapons production, missile defense cooperation and transfer of civil and military technology to India. The US-India civilian nuclear deal indicate that US has recognize India as a leading power and will no longer treat both India and Pakistan as equal competitor in the region and has overlooked Pakistani apprehensions that the deal will upset strategic power balancing in South Asia(Fani, December, 2009). However, US India strategic partnership and cooperation in civilian nuclear technology have greatly disturbed balance of power in South Asia. The rising of India as a regional power and its increasing influence in Afghanistan will decrease the role and influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan and pose threats to Pakistan's security, left Pakistan in strategic imbalance and will affect relations between the US and Pakistan. In response to the defense and civil nuclear cooperation between US and India, Pakistan would definitely struggle for balancing and might take counter measures by strengthening its defense relations and initiate close cooperation with China and even with Russia in nuclear technology.

India and Pakistan are two rival countries and south Asia security context is determines by the nature of their relationship. US policies towards India directly affect its relations with Pakistan, its goals in Afghanistan and in the whole South Asian region. The strategic partnership with the US has

increased India's prestige unprecedentedly while Pakistan's prestige has come at stake as the US desires to make India a major power in the world while Pakistan is treated as a supporting channel. US-India strategic partnership could enhance irregularity in the balance of power between the two rival and confrontational neighbors of South Asia and would lead to arm race in the region. The US-India nuclear deal may severely affect the regional and global security, nuclear non-proliferation, environment, and economic system. It will negatively affect Pak-India peace process, create difficulties for the US to win war in Afghanistan, disturbed the security balance of the region, and will drag China and Pakistan into a new arm race with India(Noor ul Haq, May 4, 2006).India's civil nuclear deal with the US would give India upper hand in its dealing with Pakistan and its superior nuclear technology would pose threats to Pakistan's security, as the growing potentials would encourage its aggressive policy of Cold Start(Qadir, May 8, 2004). The deal would change Pakistan's policy of minimum credible deterrence and dragged it into an arm race. The civil nuclear deal would create threats to the peace and stability of South Asia.

Conclusion

The economic constraints, the rise of new power centers and transition towards multipolar world have compelled the US to involve regional powers in order to meet the challenges to its global superiority and its influence in the world. Strategic partnership with both India and Pakistan is essential for the US in order to meet these challenges. Achieving US interests and objectives, maintaining her super power status and keeping the existing international system according to values and wishes of super power, the US requires balance, peace, and stabilization of the whole region. US-India strategic partnership will be beneficial for the US, as partnership with stronger India will help the US in shaping regional order according to its own interests and values. The US wants to remain in near future the only powerful actor in the region; partnership with India will secure this interest of the US as India's emergence as a dominant regional power will stabilize Asian regional order. However, Pak-India traditional rivalry remained a dominant factor of South Asian security complex. The US civil nuclear deal with India would adversely affect Pakistan's security and disturb the balance of power between the two countries. In response to the US-India nuclear deal Pakistan has strengthened its defense ties with China, reestablished its relations with Russia and Iran and other countries, which Pakistan previously ignored due its alliance with US. Pakistan has strengthened its relations with China, Russia, Iran, and other countries that remained hostile to US. Close partnership among these countries would pose serious threats to the US interests in the region and her super power status. Moreover, the challenges of democratization, nation

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building, China's containment, and securing the US national security interests will require both financial and human resources as well as a new set of alliances in different parts of the world. The US will need close cooperation with both India and Pakistan on equal basis. It will be in the best interests of the US to ensure relations with the two countries on equal basis. Therefore, the US should play its due role in resolving all outstanding issues between Pakistan and India especially the Kashmir dispute as well as the US should facilitate regional cooperation in trade and development. Strong bilateral relations between Pakistan and India will ensure Asia's stability that will in turn promote US values of democracy and pluralism.

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