

**US Strategic Propensity
towards India: Nuclear
Bonding and Security
Apprehensions for Regional
Stability and Pakistan**

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Asifa Jahangir¹
Furqan Khan²

Abstract

The Indo-US strategic bonding is shifting the security dynamics of the South Asian balance-of-power in Indian favour. From the signing of 123 US-India Nuclear Deal to the facilitation in becoming a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the US has clearly designated India as an instrumental element in the American grand strategy of devising a ‘new world order’. As a result, India has grabbed the opportunity of alleviating its status as a credible regional and global power. In this regard, the US tilt towards India is significantly paving grounds for a strategic imbalance in the South Asian region, thus creating challenges for Pakistan. Therefore, this paper argues that the growing bonhomie between the US and India is a destabilizing factor in the region which reinforces Pakistan’s fast falling into the Chinese orbit; thereby cementing the old friendship into a new strategic partnership. This dynamic certainly gives China and Pakistan an incentive to work together so as to keep the value of Pakistan’s nuclear deterrence alive. In an effort to expand the horizon on the subject, the paper is dedicated to critically examine the existing cooperation between India and the US while equally foreseeing the possible implications for the region in the face of such destabilizing cooperation. More importantly, based on qualitative data, this paper explores how Indo-US strategic partnership is directly impacting Pakistan and its strategic partnership with China; thereby explaining how the growing relationship between the US and India has undermined the traditional balance-of-power in the South Asian region?

Keywords

Indo-US strategic relationship, Pak-China, South Asia, balance-of-power, Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)

¹ *Dr Asifa Jahangir* holds a doctorate degree in South Asian Studies with expertise of International Relations from the Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. She is the Managing Editor to Journal of South Asian Studies published by ESci Journals Publishing.
E-mail: ajcsas2327@gmail.com

² *Furqan Khan* is currently a bachelor’s student at the Department of International Relations, National Defence University, Islamabad

Introduction

The visit of the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary James Mattis to New Delhi (in September 2018) achieved yet another milestone in the decade long strategic partnership between India and the US. The signing of the long-awaited agreement on the Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) enables India to acquire the encrypted security equipment of the US. The agreement was a precondition for acquiring such sensitive equipment and 'security-focused' communication interoperability between the US and the Indian armed forces the agreements on sensitive military technologies and communications, understandably underpins the deep strategic ties between India and the US (Smith, 2008). The recent cooperation towards the Next Step for Strategic Partnership (NSSP) between the US and India was signed in 2004. The NSSP offers a general framework of cooperation in areas including civil nuclear and space activities and high-end trade with particular emphasis on missile defence which will increase commerce bonding and alleviate friendship to the next level of a strategic partnership between the two countries. More importantly, the NSSP has been linked with the stability in Asia (Statement on the Next Step, 2004, pp. 61-62). The close cooperation, however, has multi-faceted consequences for the regional security architecture or what Barry Buzan has termed as the 'Asian Super Complex' (see e.g., Buzan & Waeber, 2003, p. 109).

The Indo-US strategic partnership is a game of balance-of-power being played in the South Asian region. The US, being concerned with the growing influence of China, has demanded India to engage China in the Asiatic sphere to truncate it from challenging the hegemonic standing of the US. India on its part is trying to put up with the US; benefiting from the acquisition of advanced military hardware as well as perpetuating its dominance in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Having said that, India also tries to maintain its 'strategic autonomy' which is largely undermined in Washington and hence can disappoint her in using India as part of its Grand Strategy, that is to say, containing emerging China. Professor Ming Xia is optimistic about the US design and response to the concerns related to the emerging relationship between India and the US. According to him, the developments will certainly upset China and Pakistan, however with any potential confrontations. Furthermore, the two sides would be very careful not to create hostility, but to play the game of balance-of-power and realignment (personal communication, July 3, 2018). Similarly, India perceives China as an immediate threat not only because of its disputatious history but because of the latter's continuous assistance in building the conventional and nuclear capabilities of Pakistan.

Apart from the Sino-US controlled diplomatic confrontation, India views China as a key problem for its regional ascendancy. One of the opinions is that India is working to develop its military capabilities so as to bridle the ambitious Chinese aspirations in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. This is also because India believes in employing Indian exceptionalism, which is no less than inspiration from the American Exceptionalism; setting in motion the Indo-US strategic orientation in Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This, in large, also shows Indian reflection of Monroe Doctrine in South Asia; claiming South Asia as an exclusive sphere of influence. All this suggests India as a contender in the Asian 'superstructure' along with China pushing for attaining the global power status which can be described as a perfect archetypal of realpolitik in contemporary world politics. It is a matter of fact that Sino-Indian competing aspirations are exploding to the global level, where the role of the US and its relationship with India are containing China.

The US' South Asian foreign policy, particularly for India and Pakistan, has always been oscillating right from the time of independence. Taking sides between the

two does not necessarily suit the US in the long-run, though Washington often exploits the divide between New Delhi and Islamabad for her short-term benefit (Kux, 2001, pp. 34-36). Indian policymakers are aware of India as an inevitable instrument and potential power for the American Grand Strategy in Asia-Pacific. India also considers her ever-increasing military power inevitable for the Americans to trust them for being a potential partner in controlling the South and East Asian politics, including China. However, the US chose a divided approach in maintaining relationships with Pakistan and India in view of the broad strategic interest in the region. Jahangir quotes a Pakistani professor, Syed Riffat Hussain while expressing his views about Chinese response to the growing Indo-US cooperation that 'the Chinese are very apprehensive that India would be a future rising military power. Therefore, China would like to keep Pakistan as a counterweight on its side to balance Indian power (2005, p. 116-117). The US, however, remained steady in riding both horses at the same time, i.e., its policy kept on oscillating between Pakistan and India where favouritism will scuttle the ship of the US aspirations in the region.

The Indo-US Strategic Partnership and Civil Nuclear Deal

Background of the US Realignment with Rising India

As part of the US strategic understanding of the emerging trends in the 21st century, the recent wave of tariff barriers on Billions US dollars' worth Chinese products and its hard-pressing actions in the South China Sea counts for the tactical manoeuvring of US policy of containing China. This settles the stage for India becoming an area of interest as a strategic partner with a shared understanding of the vital strategic objectives in the region. This also ensures India's long-standing desire to becoming a regional hegemon with a due role in world politics. This, however, comes at the cost of the regional imbalance of the critical 'balance of power' which is already very fragile and is narrowed down to 'balance of threat' than a once balance of power in the region. Noting the fact that India has always enjoyed a conventional superiority *vis-a-vis* Pakistan, as the country acquired large-scale weapons and worked on military modernization programs. This shows the diverging nature of Indian objectives in the region and beyond in terms of extending its relations with the US against China in Asia. Owing to her approach towards the immediate and, more importantly, the extended neighbourhood, reflects at large the long-held Indian desire to become a regional and global power. India is effectively involved in manipulating the domestic politics of weaker regional states such as Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, and even Afghanistan. Moreover, being the largest democracy and geographically the largest country in the region, to have a check and balance in the region is largely viewed by the Indian policymakers as a legitimate right, thereby showing regional posture. Here, the US assist this change in power dynamics in South Asia in the purview of the 'American Exceptionalism' by establishing a special relationship with India and to assist her in acquiring the desired status in the region and the world *vis-à-vis* China (Chacka, 2013, pp. 332-333).

This also shows that Indian politicians and policy-makers have amalgamated the Nehruvian 'peace diplomacy' or bilateral partnerships approach of Indian foreign policy with the contemporary geopolitical understanding to alleviate her status as a Global power (Gupta, 2005, p. 14). The US envisages an 'untapped' potential in building a strategic partnership with her 'natural partner' in both strategic and economic spheres, partly because of the largest democracy and second-largest population (soon to be the first) in the world (Wilson, 2018). India owns the fourth position in Purchasing

Power Parity (PPP) with an annual growth rate of more than 7%. India is second to Saudi Arabia in the world ranking in terms of importing arms, which makes her a strategic bulwark as well as an economic market for the US (Jabeen, 2012, pp. 75-77). The US recognized India's huge military, economic and diplomatic weight during the Clinton administration and hence incentivized India to bandwagon with the US, especially after 2001. The nuclear deal is part of this incentivization. The significance of India as an important market is described by Tellis as (2011, pp. 40-41):

India's rise represents a net benefit for American interests; the growing challenges emerging in Asia will only bring the two countries closer than ever before. Keeping the focus on nurturing the relationship with India — which is the grand prize for maintaining a balance of power that favours the United States in Asia — will thus require committed attention on the part of American policymakers even when they might be otherwise distracted by the necessities of engaging other powers, including India's competitors such as Pakistan and China.

Therefore, the US has developed strong ties with India as an 'indispensable partner' and as a counterweight to undo China's fast-growing influence on the Asian and South Asia spectrum (Mohapatra, 2012, p. 4). Moreover, the US also expects Indian cooperation in dealing with challenges posed by terrorism, nation-building in Afghanistan, efforts of non-proliferation of nuclear and other WMDs with an emphasis on energy security (Ameer, 2019). This is important for India as they are dependent on the US presence for the security of billion dollars investment in Afghanistan. However, regional dynamics and orientation of the US are changing with the anticipated agreement in Doha peace talks and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.

The Convergence of Interests — Indian and US Perspectives

The Indo-US strategic partnership is dictated by a plethora of strategic, economic and political convergences. Colin L. Powell, the former US Secretary of State and former US Ambassador to India, Robert Black, have identified the immediate and longstanding common challenges faced by the US and India. These challenges have emerged as 'common values and interests' in this natural partnership. Such a set of complementary interests has steered the two countries to establish democratic societies endorsing tolerance, political freedom, representative government and a commitment to fight against terror (US Embassy in India, 2004). Strategically speaking, the natural partnership based on the similar democracy-led ideational orientation between the two estranged democracies has evolved as a power partnership focussed on China as a mutual threat.

While representing the Obama administration, the former Assistant Secretary of State Asia, Nisha Desai Biswal, termed the Indo-US strategic convergence at the 'highest point' and equally emphasized on a need to continue bilateral engagement with a similar world view to understand the shared objective (Indo-US 'Strategic Convergence', 2017). Biswal's words reflected well in Trump's strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia when, after squeezing Pakistan for the 'do more', he termed India as the key economic and security partner of the US. While appreciating

India's 'important contributions to the stability' in the region, the US President also urged India to 'do more' in nation-building in Afghanistan (Myer, 2017).

Though terming India's democracy coupled with the huge military and economic potential has advantages for the US, Nicholas Burns, who was the US Under-secretary of state for political affairs, has meticulously expressed that the rise of a 'democratic and increasingly powerful India' is a significant development for the broad range of interests of United States (Burns, 2007). Such a venture for achieving shared objectives is hardly generating any disarray, even in face of the democratically inconsistent practices such as the citizen act under the Modi government that is critical to the basic human rights of minorities in India.

Similarly, India perceives US policy, especially under Trump's administration, to be reflecting step towards its ambitious goals in the region vis-a-vis Pakistan. For instance, India's Former Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj, while reacting to Trump's strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia states that 'Trump's call for Pakistan to discontinue the policy of supporting cross-border terrorism finds resonance with us' (India, US ask Pakistan to Act against Terror, 2018, n.d.). India expressed similar assent when the US withheld and conditioned the aid provided to Pakistan in the fight against terrorism what the Indians believe is being used against their interests.

The Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal: Historical Background

Until the late 1990s, the US was esteemed to propel the principles of the non-proliferation regimes and thus responded through sanctions when Pakistan conducted nuclear tests (in May 1998). However, As Ashon Carter argues that 'stance is never a policy' and the US, despite having embargoed India and Pakistan for their nuclear tests, deemed it necessary to change her behaviour towards emerging India. This can be attributed to the geopolitical change that has occurred across the Asian continent following the disintegration of the USSR in the late 1980s. The peaceful rise of China, nuclear explosions in the sub-continent and emerging India were some of the compelling factors that dragged the US to seek a strategic partnership in South Asia. India's democracy and huge economic potential attracted the US policy-makers and thus hinted for a strategic partnership between the countries. Following a series of strategic dialogue with India and the subsequent visits of (former) President Clinton, the US Joint Chief of Staff General Henry Shelton along with high-level officials from the Department of Defense (DoD) did much in easing nuclear-related sanctions on India. The meetings of the Defence Policy Group (DPG), however, triggered a restart in defence cooperation between India and the US (Zhang, 2005, pp. 29-31).

The strategic partnership was re-enforced by the commitments made between the two countries during a visit of (former) President Bill Clinton in March 2001. Emphasizing on giving freedom and practicing democratic norms as the strongest basis for the shared destiny of peace and prosperity, President Clinton and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee agreed that the shared ideals of the two major powers could transform our alliance into a natural partnership that will guide us towards achieving shared endeavours (US-India Relations, 2000). Such an overwhelming partnership was aimed to ensure long-term cooperation in shared socio-economic, political and strategic objectives. After transforming the status of China, from a 'constructive strategic partner' to a 'strategic competitor', the Bush administration

sought to contain the Chinese ambitions in Asia and maritime activism in the Indian Ocean with a tier of bilateral and multilateral alliances around its periphery. This allowed the US to take India in countering the fast-breeding Chinese designs and growing influence on the South and South-East Asian spectrum. India seized the opportunity and reciprocated with unconditional support in the form of airbases and other logistics to the US military campaign in Afghanistan. She also hinted support for the Missile Defence Plan of the Bush administration, which was acknowledged by the US. In return, the Bush administration reciprocated by ending all nuclear-related sanctions over India which then emerged as her new 'strategic partner' (Mohapatra, 2012, p. 31). India was now embedded in the US foreign policy as a required tool to augment and translate a broad range of strategic objectives in the region and beyond.

In 2002, the US National Security Strategy Report was issued which concluded that the US interests require 'a relationship with India'. The report suggested, 'India's potential to become one of the great democratic powers of the twenty-first century' as the required basis for such a strategic alignment with the emerging South Asian power. Moreover, the US affirmed her commitment that she had strong intention to 'invest time and resources [into] building strong bilateral relations with India,' and 'work hard to transform our relationship accordingly' (George Bush, President of USA: The National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States of America of 2002, 2002, p. 10). As part of the Defence Policy Group (DPG), the duration between 2002 and 2003 was marked with a number of high-level meetings with considerable cooperation ranging from the scientific and technical research to the joint military exercises. Moreover, the cooperation was aimed to alleviate the socio-economic development and to augment the law-enforcement capacity with a productive Track-II diplomacy (Zhang, 2005, pp. 30-31).

In 2004, the above-mentioned alignment was transformed into a robust strategic partnership following the initiative of the 'Next Steps in Strategic Partnership' (NSSP). This three-pronged strategic framework (Missile Defence was added as the fourth one) allowed India and the US to scale up their partnership in transfer of nuclear technology, technical assistance in civilian space programs, and trade in high-end military technology which should later include sophisticated missile defence systems (Tasleem, 2008, p. 25).

Civil Nuclear Deal

With the NSSP sets course as a strategic framework of cooperation between India and the US, the two countries aspired to dramatize the nuclear cooperation and signed a comprehensive US-India Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in June 2005 (Kerr, 2012: 2). The 10-year Defence Framework Agreement allowed India to escape the three-decades-long sanctions put in response to the 1974 nuclear tests (Interview — The Scholar as Secretary, September/October 2015). It expanded and entrenched this strategic alliance aimed at enlarging the Indian role in the Indian Ocean Region that results in a renewed balance of power politics in Asia with numerous players and competing interests. It unfolded a new era of an entrenched strategic partnership that re-enforced India's maritime activism in the farthest littorals of the Indian Ocean while also re-defined in parallel the traditional balance of power in South Asia with implications for Pakistan. This agreement as a watershed strategic framework

materialized and was given legitimacy through the approval of the Congress on October 1, 2008 (Hosur, 2010, p. 437). Under the Civil Nuclear Deal, the following special arrangements were made for India;

- This provided the prospects for the recognition of India as a de facto nuclear weapon state by describing her 'responsible state with advanced nuclear technology, India should acquire the same benefits and advantages as other such states' (MoGoldrick, 2005, n.d.).
- India agreed to allow the inspection of her civil nuclear installations by the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEA). By March 2006, India pledged to put fourteen out of its total twenty-two nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the IAEA. She promised to sign an Additional Protocol (AP); thereby allowing a more intrusive inspection by the IAEA.
- During a visit to India, (former) President Bush acceded to an Indian plan which would seek to separate 'its civilian and military' nuclear facilities for inspection by the international watchdog, while India will show restraint in further nuclear tests and will help the US in implementing the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT).
- After taking necessary measures in the domestic laws of the US with Congress approval and that from Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the agreement allows India to import sophisticated civil nuclear technology from the US. By the Hyde Act, Congress exempted India from doing nuclear commerce with the US, irrespective of the fact that India is non-signatory to the NPT and thus a non-declared nuclear weapon State. However, such nuclear commerce will comply with the legal obligations set by the IAEA such as the 'dual-use' of nuclear technology and fuel.
- The *123 Agreement* of July 2007 provided an operational basis for the commencement of nuclear trade between India and the US. This followed a series of negotiations between India and the IAEA that approved safeguards for the civilian nuclear facilities on a condition that India will utilize nuclear facilities and fuel for peaceful energy purposes and ensure non-proliferation on her part.
- Finally, after intense lobbying by the US, the agreement secured legitimacy from the NSG and granted an exceptional waiver to India with 'reasonable conditions' of abiding by the export rule of nuclear material. After NSG exempting India from nuclear test ban followed by the Congress approval in September 2008, the agreement went into full force after the US President George W. Bush signed the final draft on October 10, 2008 (Akhtar, 2008/09, pp. 5-12). As part of the 'rebalance to Asia' strategy, President Obama tried to take the existing cooperation with India to new heights. The cooperation was enhanced in economic development, global politics, military hardware, leading to market integration, liberal democratic norms,

capital investment and a new era of innovation in science and technology. Such a comprehensive engagement in the form of the strategic partnership was aimed to contain the Chinese ambitions in the South and South-East Asia.

Repercussions for Pakistan, South Asia Region, and the World

The resulting thrust and repercussions of the Indo-US strategic partnership with special focus on the civil nuclear deal can be analyzed with respect to Pakistan's position, as it is the main victim with reference to the South Asian politics and power rivalries. In addition, it is also important to recognize the potential impacts of the afore-mentioned arguments on the Sino-Pakistan relations which are detailed in the subsequent subsections.

i) Repercussions for Pakistan

A coherent analysis of the Indo-US nuclear deal indicates that Pakistan remains at the receiving end of and most affected country of the close Indo-US nuclear and military cooperation in the South Asian region ('Implications of Indo-US Nuclear Deal Discussed', 2008). Pakistan, having witnessed a continuous pattern of political instability, weak economic and financial conditions, has already been locked in a geostrategic competition with India. She has ensured over the past seven decades that India should not be allowed to become a regional hegemon, which in turn has forced the country to allocate a generous amount of its GDP to defense spending. Concurrently, the country is investing its resources in a long-term Global War on Terror (GWoT), a war that was imposed by the US which also remains the sole architect of India's hegemonic orientation in the region. Nevertheless, deal-raised Pakistan's fears took a high-up anticipating India's nuclear superiority after upgrading her nuclear facilities with modern technologies and sophisticated missile systems from the US. Consequently, the balance of power is gradually becoming irrelevant because of the discriminate nuclear cooperation between India and the US, which invariably accords the already advantageous in conventional terms Indian military superiority over Pakistan and by extension demonstrated US discrimination against Pakistan. This will put an end to the scope and practice of the deterrence stability in South Asian. This is because US support for India is matchless to the Chinese 'inferior' military and financial facilitation for Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan expressed her reservations over the following discriminatory and counter-productive developments of the nuclear deal.

ii) Indian Separation Plan and Approval by Nuclear Supply Group

As part of a series of developments between India and the US, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Bush announced the Indian Separation Plan on 20th March 2016. It was one of the controversial plans that ensured India's right to declare either a nuclear facility is civilian or military. This was significant because only the civilian nuclear facilities were to be offered for inspection by the IAEA. It means that not only it allowed India to place military facilities out of inspection but also to expand her nuclear program for strategic use as much as she deems it necessary for inspection. Soon after the announcement, India established multiple enrichment facilities with eight indigenous power reactors, Fast and Prototype Fast Breeder Test Reactors (FTBR), the three Heavy Water Plants and various strategic facilities of security significance such as a Prototype Naval reactor. Hence, the approval of the Indian Separation Plan from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) legitimized Indian freedom of choice to categorize her civilian and military nuclear facilities (Squassoni, 2007).

Dr. Shaista Tabassum, Chairperson at the Department of International Relations in the University of Karachi has described three following nuclear benefits to India ('Implications of Indo-US Nuclear Deal discussed', 2008);

- First, irrespective of India's approval to allow IAEA inspection of its nuclear facilities, the agreement allows India to designate which nuclear facility is civil and which is not.
- Second, the existing stockpiles of nuclear fuel and military facilities that were developed prior to the deal will be exempted from inspection.
- Third, the deal discusses only civil nuclear installations while leaves the ambitious and unlimited nuclear weapons programs with insufficient concern.

iii) NSG Waiver to India for Dual Use of Nuclear Material and Technology

The nuclear deal required a waiver from the Congress and the NSG. Congress granted legitimacy to the deal for the NSG, the US forwarded a draft in consultation with New Delhi to the NSG in August 2008. The draft sought a special exemption for India from the NSG's requirements of full-scope safeguards, without considering its non-signatory nature of the NPT. After an intense debate in the 45-member body, the draft was approved which dealt with India as a special case; thereby allowing her to use the nuclear for civilians as well as military purposes. The NSG statement, however, claimed that India acceded to a 'unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing' (Kerr, 2012). Such a waiver rendered suicidal repercussions for the regional security and balance of power in South Asia. Therefore, such a nuclear deal and the unprecedented waivers, with no condition to guarantee the non-diversion of nuclear fuel, were sufficient to encourage India for fissile material production and its use in making nuclear weapons (Mian et al., 2006, p. 119). Pakistan, fearing the collapse of her minimum credible deterrence (MCD) strategy, geared up her nuclear weapon program with respect to the 'evolving high-tech warfare structures including nuclear weapon development capacity, a delivery system in Indian defence arrangements' (Basrur, 2008, p. 6).

Hence, Pakistan was forced to take measures to ensure strategic balance with counter-measures to India's technological advancement, parallel to her defensive strategy of preserving the MCD. Professor Rasul Bakhsh Rais at the Department of Humanities and Social Science in Lahore University of Management and Sciences justifies Pakistan's appropriate response and argues that "Pakistan must make the quality of its nuclear warhead or delivery system better rather than matching Indian nuclear strength" (Basrur, 2008, p. 6). Moreover, the waiver also signifies a transparent discriminatory approach towards Pakistan. Consequently, the waiver for the Dual Use of critical nuclear material allowed India to supersede Pakistan in both conventional and non-conventional power with dramatic consequences for the region.

iv) Boosting up Indian Military Might

Besides the aforementioned superiority and relief, India was already enjoying a credible conventional military superiority over Pakistan. A report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) ranks India as the top arms importer between 2013 and 2017; with Russia supplying 62% while the US and Israel 25% and 11% respectively (Wezeman et al., 2018, p. 8). Moreover, A. K. Antony, the then Indian Defence Minister, expressed in 2009 that '70% of India's military equipment was

imported' (Perlo-Freeman et al., 2010, p. 168). The deal also encouraged India to try to implement her hostile designs in the region with resulting in aggression. During the last decade, India has consistently conveyed 'to prepare themselves for a nightmare scenario: a two-front war with nuclear-armed Pakistan and China' (Swami, 2012). Such hostile intentions have a flared-up arms race in the region because Indian military stock is mostly Chinese-oriented subsequent to Pakistan. This was also mentioned in the SIPRI Yearbook of 2010 that Indian military advancement is aimed to gain 'superiority over China and Pakistan' as to reduce 'China's threat which has always been a perennial notion of Indian defence and foreign policy circles and in the Indian media.'

Concurrently, India is expanding her military resources through procurement from the US, Russia, and Israel including fighter jets, missile technology, cruise missiles development, Various SAMs and Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense System (ABMs). Indian strategic partnership with the US is to secure three objectives: 'the legalization of its nuclear status, a permanent seat on the SC, and international recognition of the Line of Control (LOC) as the border between India and Pakistan' (Gupta, 2005, pp. 28-29). However, Barack Obama as well as the subsequent Trump administration have categorically called for a bilateral solution of the Kashmir problem and did not side India in obvious terms ('President Trump Dismissive of Third-Part Role on Kashmir', 2018; Shaukat, 2010). However, the US did not side India but still insisted on dealing with Kashmir as a bilateral issue, contrasting Pakistan's perspective of Kashmir being an international dispute. Hence, the US adamant position on Kashmir and endorsement of India's cause for the permanent reservation in the UN Security Council renders intrusive implications on Pakistan's national interests. This is because India will have the opportunity to veto any development favoring Pakistan such as the resolutions on Kashmir while pushing for actions that will run counter to Pakistan's national security interests.

Preserving India's Strategic Autonomy – Pakistani Perspective

By signing this deal back in 2005, India attained an unprecedented position in the nuclear world. She did not only open a corridor to civil nuclear cooperation with the world but also managed to retain her principled stance on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which the country is reluctant to become a signatory. India achieved this unprecedented status without giving too much in return; securing her arms open in developing nuclear weapons. This means that India was successful in securing its 'strategic autonomy'. The deal rendered India a de facto recognition as a nuclear-weapon state, irrespective of its non-signatory nature at NPT. This was the reason when China tried to condition any such recognition to similar treatment with Pakistan (Mian et al., 2006, p. 119).

i.) Fake Indian Energy-Related Justifications

One of the major justifications provided by the Indian and US officials about the need for the nuclear deal is that it will address the growing energy needs of the Indian economy. While facing the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the deal, Secretary Rice argued that 'civil nuclear cooperation agreement with India will help meet its rising energy needs without increasing its reliance on unstable foreign sources of oil and gas, such as nearby Iran' (Muhammad, 2006, p. 12). However, currently, India is consuming 11% of energy sources such as gas, coal, oil, wind power and nuclear energy for power generation. Out of the total 11%, nuclear power contributes only 2-3%, which, according to the proponents of the above argument, will increase only up to

6.5% or 8% by 2025. It means the argument is not valid, as the deal will not bring any significant increase to the Indian power generation (ibid). Conversely, India has relied ambitiously on nuclear commerce to augment her weapons production capability as well as capacity. Recently, Pakistan's foreign ministry termed India's nuclear program as the fastest growing and claimed to have enough fuel to produce 2600 nuclear weapons ('India Capable of making 2,600 Nuclear Weapons', 2017).

Hence, the main prospect for the deal was to focus more on accelerating India's nuclear weapons program with little priority of power generation. Irrespective of the fact, that the US has kept 'the right of return if the cooperating state detonates a nuclear explosive device or terminates or abrogates an IAEA safeguards agreement,' (Jaspal, 2008, n.d.). However, the IAEA safeguards will still not be able to stop India from using the advanced civil nuclear technology for critical use in weapons production. This was because the deal allowed technology provided for civil purposes to be transferred for military uses because as noticed that 'a significant proportion of India's nuclear complex to remain outside IAEA safeguards and continues to have a strategic function' (Mian et al., 2006, p. 125). Thus, 'nuclear testing by India might enable it to wield nuclear weapons and much larger explosive power than those currently it has and it might let India change its nuclear strategy against China or Pakistan' (Ferguson et al., 2006, p. 11).

ii) Repercussion for South Asian Region and the World Destabilised Strategic Balance of South Asian leads to Arm Competition

One of the anticipated consequences of the Indo-US civil nuclear deal was that 'if it implemented without checking India's potential to increase its fissile stocks and eliminating any possibility by India of improving its nuclear weapons could lead to arms competition in the region involving Pakistan, India, and China, thus destabilizing the entire region and making India a global, as well as a regional military power, seems primary aim of the US' (Muhammad, 2006, p. 119). This is evident by advancements made by both Pakistan and China in their respective nuclear missile programs, in response to India's nuclear modernizations. Since 2008, Pakistan has conducted more than a dozen successful nuclear missile tests including Ra'ad, Babur, improved version of Ghauri and Abdali (Pakistan Missile Chronology, 2011) and Shaheen III as well as a MIRV capable Ababeel in January 2017 (Pakistan Conducts First Flight Test of Ababeel, 2017).

iii) Source of Expanding Indian Role in Afghanistan

The growing nuclear cooperation between the two countries took its assent on eve of the US invasion of Afghanistan and the ensuing Global War on Terror (GWoT) in 2001. The drive for nuclear cooperation between India and the US started on the onset of the Global War on Terror and the US invasion of Afghanistan. America was not only seeking a huge market for nuclear technology but also sought an ally that could help her in dealing with the situation in Afghanistan, especially in the nation-building and post-war reconstruction. This is why, the deal brought the two strategic partners together, and it also allowed the US to give India a major role in the strategically important Afghanistan. India has gained a considerable presence in Afghanistan and is investing billions of dollars in expanding her influence through reconstruction and building the Afghan economy. Being in the immediate neighborhood and the associated strategic interests in Afghanistan, Pakistan has always objected to such an

unnecessary role of India in the country. (Pakistan fears Indian influence in Afghanistan, 2017). President Trump's 'request' to India for a major role in Afghanistan while announcing his strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia underscores this ambitious design (Masood, August 22, 2017). Therefore, there are chances that the vacuum left with the exit of the US troops from Afghanistan will be filled by India that is growing concerned for its investment and security imperatives.

US Hybrid Role in the Canvas of South Asian Politics

The US has been playing a hybrid role in South Asia since 1947 that has ample implications for an unending arms build-up by both Pakistan and India. The United States relations with Pakistan are mostly transient and largely affected by the US' close cooperation with India and her pro-Indian stance. In the nuclear realm, the US voiced concerns and opposed Pakistan's nuclear program since it gained momentum in the 1980s. Despite having deep nuclear engagement with India, the US has deplored Chinese assistance in developing Pakistan's nuclear program. Conversely, the US has endorsed nuclear assistance to India and even lobbied for a waiver to her non-NPT status. Such discriminatory cooperation is aimed to give India an edge in developing her nuclear security apparatus against China (Tasleem, 2008). However, Pakistan continuously and appropriately responds to any nuclear development in South Asia as she believes Pakistan's nuclear posture is aimed to act as a credible deterrent in the South Asian balance of power. Such a scenario has forced Pakistan and China to believe that the increasing supply of advanced conventional and non-conventional arms to India will indiscriminately widen the already unequal military capabilities between Pakistan and India in addition to the economic and strategic misbalance. Another analyst says that 'the single superpower with very important stakes in South Asia, the US should pursue the procedures that should contain rather than support an arms competition in the region. The Indo-US deal is a clear sign that the US no longer will deal with India and Pakistan as an equal competitor in South Asia and that it has at last recognized India as the leading power in the region' (Fani, 2009: 150). As a result of this deal and augmented US's cooperation, India has already been developing her sea power with an eye on attaining credible Second Strike Capability (SSC) which will wilfully endanger prospects for peaceful and strategically secure Indian Ocean region. India is thriving to augment her sea-based platforms equipped with nuclear missiles. She is seeking cooperation from Russia, the US, and other NSG member states to meet her 'security requirements' in the Indian Ocean with respect to China. Back in April 2012, India commissioned its first Nuclear Submarine, of Russian Origin, 'INS Chakra-II' to her naval fleet in the Indian Ocean (Kashani, 2012).

More recently on 6th November 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that India has inducted INS Arihant nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine and completed the "first deterrence patrol" in the Indian Ocean (Pandit, November 6, 2018). This is a dangerous development that can accelerate the nuclearization of the Indian Ocean. Pakistan has voiced concerns over the deterrence patrol of the INS Arihant and cautioned against a 'renewed' arms race in the region (Bokhari, November 12, 2009).

Moreover, the US is increasing India's capacity by modernizing its arms and through technology transfer coupled with a series of military exercises with Indian military to secure sea-lanes of communications of South and Southeast Asia (Sutter, 2006, p. 48). The US and Indian navies carried out joint military drills at different positions near the Strait of Malacca, for instance in 2002 and in September 2007 in the Bay of Bengal while in October 2008 in the Arabian Sea known as the 'Malabar

Exercises'. Moreover, a joint multilateral air exercise named as 'the Red Flag' has held in the US For countering insurgency, India is training US army troops since 2008(Akhtar, 2008-09, pp. 24-25). The Malabar Naval War-Game was conducted between the Indian Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces (JMSDF) and the US Navy in June 2018 in the waters of Guam and Philippine Sea (Gady, 2018). The dominating opinion exists in the analysts that the motive behind India's acquisition of the latest weapons and technology is to compete with China and are not merely to defend her as is justified by India. India and the United States are also concerned about China's billion dollars economic and strategic plans for Gwadar Sea-port in Baluchistan to enhance regional connectivity and can be used as a maritime chokepoint for checking Indo-US naval manoeuvring in the Indian Ocean (Shaukat, 2010).

Apart from having dreadful consequences for regional stability, the nuclear deal between the US and India and close strategic partnerships also render multi-faceted consequences at the global level. Some of the major global level security concerns of Indo-US civil nuclear deal are listed as follows;

- The discriminatory nature of the deal rollbacks the decade long non-proliferation efforts under the NPT.
- This deal has politicized the humanely dangerous issue of proliferation.
- This deal allows India to utilize advance nuclear technology and access to an unlimited supply of nuclear energy without even being a signatory to the NPT which encourages the rest of the states to take the NPT status for granted and use nuclear fuel for dual purposes. Countries like Iran and North Korea got a considerable justification for their nuclear weapons production program.
- This deal also questioned the credible nature of the so-called non-proliferation regimes such as the NSG and their non-proliferation efforts as the waiver by the NSG opened a new window for the legitimate proliferation of nuclear technology among the great powers.
- This deal encouraged other states of the world to allow the IAEA to inspect only the civil nuclear installations and keep the military installations of weapons production un-safeguarded.

Way Forward: Pakistan, a Key Player for Stability of India and South Asian Region

Pakistan has become a critical 'peace player' for South Asian not only for the US regarding American-Taliban talks for the Afghanistan peace process but also for regional stability and security as a result of its proactive role for winning the diplomatic war following the recent Pulwama attack. The attack on the Indian forces in Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir on February 14, 2019, provided yet another test for Pakistan to highlight its relevance in regional peace and stability in terms of proposed nuclear war in South Asia. The uproar in Indian government and media, accusing Pakistan of perpetrating the attack without even investigation, was tackled with due caution and responsibility by Imran Khan's government and Chief-of-Army Staff, Qamar Javaid

Bajwa. Despite assurances by PM Imran Khan of acting on perpetrators, if found guilty based on solid evidence, encouraged by its military muscles and triggered by the domestic political compulsion, Modi's government resorted to aggression in the form of futile surgical strikes in Balakot (Bokhari, Frahan&Kazmin, Amy, February 26, 2019). The strikes were responded immediately the next day by Pakistan Air Force with two of the Indian jets shot down and a pilot taken in custody. The Prime Minister Imran Khan revitalized Pakistan's commitment to peace during his address to Pakistani parliament and handed the pilot over to India within 24 hours as a 'peaceful gesture' (Safi, Michael & Malik, Mehreen, March 1, 2019). These developments were important since both India and Pakistan were almost inching closer for a nuclear war with possible missile strikes in consideration (Nuclear-armed India & Pakistan, 2019). Adding to all this, the Indo-US nuclear cooperation challenges the nuclear parity in the region which starkly encourages the superior to strike the inferior with impunity. In March, following tensions between the two countries, US has signed an agreement with India for building 'six nuclear power plants' which raises questions over either the US is desirous to see a power balance in the region or not (the US to provide six Nuclear Powers Subs, 2019).

While analyzing the implications of the Indo-US close strategic partnership, the fact remains that the geostrategic position with considerable stakes in the region, Pakistan can never be ignored as irrelevant. Especially the US, largely engaged in a GWOt in Afghanistan, cannot side-line Pakistan and her role in the evolving geopolitical developments in South Asia and beyond. President Barak Obama, while responding to question during his 2010 visit to India; why Pakistan remains vital to the US so far it has not declared Pakistan as a terrorist state?, explained that 'Pakistan is an enormous country. It is a strategically important country not just for the United States but for the world. I am absolutely convinced that the country that has the biggest stake in Pakistan's success in India. If Pakistan is stable and prosperous that's good because India is on the move and it absolutely is in its interests at the time when you succeed in incredible ways on the global economic stage. You want the distraction of your security and instability in the region. So my hope is to trust will develop between India and Pakistan' (Slap on Indian, 2010).

On the contrary, Donald Trump presented his South Asian strategy in August 2017, wherein, he tried to continue the policies of the previous administration, i.e. de-linking Pakistan and India, and demand of 'do more' for Pakistan in light of Af-Pak strategy. Three compulsions forced Trump to revisit its relationship with Pakistan (Kayani et al., 2018). (1) Trump has taken to u-turn in order to distance from Pakistan as a result of rising of an unknown entity to power — Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in Pakistan subsequent to the general election of July 2018. The PTI government took a firm stand of an equal and balanced relationship with the US along with providing supporting hand to America for its respectable exit from Afghanistan. However, not ready to sacrifice Pakistan's interests anymore for others' interests. (2) Pakistan's closeness with China due to China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and (3) Pakistan's strategic proximity with Afghanistan which is a sole option for Afghan peace in the way of the US forces' withdrawal from Afghan land. Ultimately, Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State, expressed that America wants good relations with Pakistan and expressed the desire to strengthen cooperation in multiple areas. (Khalilzad appreciates Pakistan's role, 2019). Additionally, Zalmay Khalilzad, United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation so appreciated Pakistani role in the ongoing dialogue process for bringing peace and stability in the war-ravaged country of Afghanistan. As he stated 'What they [Pakistan] do on Afghanistan to facilitate peace and reconciliation, which has been a burden on the relationship, that will be removed.

Pakistan is an important country with which we want to have better relations' (Khalilzad appreciates Pakistan's role, 2019).

Moreover, it has been argued that 'Pakistan's geostrategic location makes it a frontline state in the political, economic and military-strategic contexts of regional and international relations. It also offers challenges for Pakistan to architect its foreign policy in accordance with the quadrilateral China-Pakistan-India-US linkage' (Naz, 2011, p. 1). This, however, needs to be realized at a national level as well. It is up to Pakistan's policy-makers that how they evaluate the emerging geopolitical trends and policy transformations and respond to these geo-political realities in a way so as to maximize the potential benefits of the state in this highly complex anarchy of the international system. This is evident from the relevance of Pakistan in the possible peace settlement in Afghanistan which implies the crucial strategic importance of Pakistan in the realm of changing regional dynamics.

Conclusion

The emerging geopolitical environment in South Asia and beyond has modified Pakistan's strategic outlook with a new dimension of the 'Look East' policy (Ansar, 2011). However, Pakistan is enjoying a multi-faceted warmer partnership and strategic alignment of interests with China. Both the 'Iron Brothers' have transformed their relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership over the past seven decades. Peaceful co-existence, mutual trust, alignment of interests with win-win ventures are the significant features of Pak-China friendship. Also, such an alignment is independent of any regional or extra-regional relationship and exhibits a mutual ground on regional and global issues. Pakistan and China are firm to survive 'the winds of change with maturity and self-confidence and in keeping with the soul and spirit of their relationship' (Ahmad, 2006).

The Indo-US civil nuclear deal is consistent with and a 'mirror image' of both US' and India's antagonistic China-centric approach. As part of the psychological manipulation, the western world has long been dubbing Pakistan's nuclear bomb as the 'Islamic Bomb', the western world has long been associating Pakistan's nuclear bomb as "Islamic bomb", therefore, during 21st century, both are propagating that Pakistan's nuclear program is insecure while increasing Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in region and nuclear terrorism. Nevertheless, Pakistan and China have expanded their cooperation mainly as the result of the Indo-US civil nuclear deal that is based on energy purposes finalized since 2008 but actually a defense-oriented deal. Pakistan and China maintained 1986 agreement as a baseline for their nuclear energy cooperation by signing the civil nuclear deal of 2009 and aim of providing Chasma-3 and Chasma-4 power plant by which Pakistan would overcome its severe energy problem after the refusal of civil nuclear technology transfer to Pakistan on an equal basis as it has done to India.

Indian and US media have portrayed Sino-Pakistan cooperation in the civil nuclear sphere as a 'counter' to the Indo-US deal and equate both deals ('World's Double Standards on Pakistan-China Nuclear Deal', 2010). India and the US showed concerns by cross-questioning about China-Pakistan civil nuclear deal of 2009. However, both states criticized internationally when they raised the point and demanded 'clarification' after the Sino-Pakistan civil nuclear deal of 2009. As Pakistan's stance was that India has no right to raise objections and concerns on the agreement as India has signed a civil nuclear pact with the US, Canada is now also exploring the possibility of civil nuclear cooperation with Japan (Bokhari, 2009). Contrarily, the questions have been raised by China and Pakistan about the world's

double standards to the international community especially to the US and India. Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistani former ambassador to the US and senior analyst argued that ‘all the fuss’ over providing Chinese nuclear power reactors to Pakistan may just be for ‘an orchestrated campaign’ against Sino-Pakistan strategic cooperation while all this was done under full international safeguards. She stated, ‘Indian eighth civilian nuclear deal with Canada on the sidelines of last month's G20 meeting including France, Russia for the same kind of deals since the exemption it received from NSG in the wake of the Indo-US nuclear accord that entered into force in 2008’ have exposed the world’s double standards regarding non-nuclear proliferation strategy and especially Pakistan and China altogether (Lodhi, 2010).

In the coming scenario, it is expected that continuous Indo-US strategic engagement and using cards of the largest and most powerful democracies, their partnership would continue to be an important factor to push China and Pakistan together. Pakistan would help China balance its relationship with India. Pakistan would be an important ally for China in international organizations such as the UN. This is clearly evident by the continuous vetoing of UN resolutions backed by India and its allies, especially the US, calling for designating Masood Azhar as a global terrorist’ (Pakistan’s Masood Azhar, 2019). Yang Jiemian, president of SIIS argues that the Chinese want to bring a ‘new strategic framework’ wherein it could extend its strategic partnership with Pakistan independently. Moreover, another Chinese analyst’s view is that the continuing military competition among strategic triangle players may change soft balancing into a hard one. Besides due to the US policy of containing China and its competitors to US partners around the Chinese periphery, China’s top priority is to ‘maintain periphery stability and make neighbors partners’ (Akhtar, 2008/09, p. 38). In this entire scenario, Pakistan seems the most reliable partner for China and China is very important for Pakistan as well. For Pakistan, no other country is willing to give nuclear weapons to Pakistan but Chinese have been giving. Both can continue to pursue a countervailing strategy of Indo-US nuclear collaboration in the future.

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