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An Analysis of US-China Strategic Competition during the Trump Era and India's Role

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ABSTRACT

Relations between USA and China have been of utmost importance now more than ever. The strategic competition between two economic giants is spread all across the world. Power structure of today's world is incomplete without discussion of one without other. China where on one hand has proven itself a major power to reckon with, USA on the other hands, has been an established power since the 2nd world war and only super power after the fall of USSR. Another state that has emerged as a big power is India. Bordering with China and world's largest country in terms of population, India has been seen as a major counter towards China by USA in the region. Strategic alliance between the USA and India in the shape of QUAD is an example of it. China and India do not share much healthy relations lately and see each other as competition in the region. India is well aware of the strategic competition between China and the USA and knows exactly how to benefit from the rivalry. During Trump era, India and the USA reactivated the QUAD with alliance of Australia and Japan. China has started a multi-billion-dollar venture with Pakistan named CPEC which will help both nations to achieve their economic goals, and India is trying her best to undermine

the initiative with the help of the USA in the shape of QUAD and many strategic deals during Trump era. Here this article has explored the US-China Strategic Competition during Trump Era and role of India.

Keywords: US-China, India, QUAD, CPEC, Alliances, Australia, Trump, Narinder Modi.

Introduction

India is a powerful force in the world and especially in Asia. With largest population and 3rd largest economy in the world, it has become center of attention and being seen as a major economic and strategic ally by USA. India since the inception has never openly spoken in favor of any of the two blocs during cold war and rather remained neutral. Non-Aligned Movement in 1955 made sure of that. Even after the end of Cold war, India continued to follow the same path. Now Relations of India with USA has never been bad or intense as compared to its ties with China which saw a war in 1962. USA has seen India as a potential partner to counter China and its ambitious economic liberal expansion around the world which has really dented USA and its hegemony over the world. US attraction and unconditional love towards India has been evident and open.

The current prime minister of India Narinder Modi who was once banned from traveling to USA due to Gujrat incident, today enjoys cordial relations with US government be it Biden today or Trump in the past. All these strategic efforts by USA are to counter China in the region. A rising and strong India is really of utmost importance for USA in Asian region as its non-NATO ally Pakistan shares cordial friendship with China. Here Pakistan cannot be trusted by USA for its strategic competition with China in the region, thus, it has opted India. Now India clearly understand US motive and its regional position. Being only major competition of China in the Asian region, India also seeks to get any sort of help offered by USA. Trump had a detailed and immensely important visit of India. Then reactivation of Quad in 2017 was also a major point for the three top GDP countries in the world. This was not seen as a good gesture by China. China on the other hand is working on BRI and CPEC which has not been perceived positively by USA in a global scenario and India in a more regional perspective. Both USA and India have very realist stand for BRI and CPEC.

This strategic competition between USA and China has provided India with a chance to manipulate USA and its allies to counter China in the region and play its trouble making

part in the US-China Strategic competition. India has tried to capitalize each opportunity provided by USA. India has become largest tech service provider to USA which has led Indian economy to a big boom. China sees this partnership as a threat to its economy and national interest.

China-India Relations

India's authorities for a decade considered themselves to be natural allies with the People's Republic of China in creating a bloc consisting of newly decolonized countries upon the country's independence in 1947. Chinese and Indians considered them both to be brothers during this period, as expressed in the Hindi proverb Hindi-Chine bhai-bhai (Arpi, 2015). The relationship between the two countries started to deteriorate during the 1950s and clearly got worse after India gave the Dalai Lama refuge when he escaped Tibet under Chinese rule in 1959. The People's Liberation Army entered areas in the Himalayas under Indian administration on numerous fronts during the two countries' brief conflict in 1962. Since then, China has been seen by India as much more of an enemy rather than an ally. During the June of 2020, the Chinese army went into Indian-controlled terrain close to the valley of Galwan resulted in the first battle fatalities between the two forces since 1975 and the first double-digit casualties since 1967, which served to confirm this impression.

On June 15, 2020, the most major altercation since 1967 took place. Twenty Indian soldiers and an unidentified amount of Chinese military personals perished in hand-to-hand fighting close to the Galwan Valley, a location that lies between China's Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Regions and India's Ladakh territory. This conflict came after five weeks of less intense small battles throughout the Line of Actual Control (LAC). It is still unknown why the PLA would take 23 square kilometers of terrain, which India claims it did, or why the Peoples Liberation Army would be prepared to cause fatalities after years of forbearance. One strategic justification would be the intention to prevent the building of military roads that might have strengthened India's grip over tactically significant characteristics. China's intention to convey that its overall objectives and projection of power will not be hampered by the requirements of domestic resolution to the COVID-19 situation may serve as a plausible strategic justification.

Regardless of this, the People's Republic of China doesn't easily fit the definition of an enemy for Delhi. India's economic dependence on China as its trading partner is similar to that of the majority of Asian countries. Furthermore, Policy makers of India are wary of

adopting stances that can ignite real time conflict due to China's significant military supremacy. Beijing is viewed by India as being both too dangerous and too frightening to be recognised as an ally or partner in the long run in the region. These challenges should guide policymaking of the United States: While India may have excellent cause to back the United States of America in any conflict with the People's Republic but planners for strategy must remain realistic in their expectations for how specifically New Delhi will show its assistance to the United States.

Despite Pakistan comprises a significant portion of India's operational military planning, strategists understand that Pakistan is unlikely to ever be an equal rival in terms of conventional military might. In a recent interview, a military official of the United States stated that India recognizes that Pakistan is not a threat for them anymore and they are particularly worried regarding their northern neighbour the People's Republic of China. There is a dynamic change in priority as Pakistan was always seen as an enemy before. However, Pakistan has recently gained notoriety, whereas Delhi is nonetheless attempting to comprehend the potential danger posed by Beijing and what it can do to counter this threat.

Beijing has an overwhelming strategic (though not usually practical) advantage in conventional or traditional military upper hand, and this difference will continue to grow more over the time. Delhi views itself to be China's inevitable challenger and equal in the course of time because the two countries are the two most populated on the planet and have historically ruled their respective regions for the majority of the course of history. However, the military of India is not yet on level with of Chinese and is developing its weapons systems at a considerably more gradual rate as compared to China due to many certain reasons. Where China is competing with USA in both economic and strategic aspects, India has only China to take care and Pakistan to some extent.

India-US Partnership

A shared dedication for democracy and its prevalence is presented by India. Officials of India and the United States both often quote their partnership as "the world's oldest democracy and the world's largest democracy". In fact, both former U.S. president Donald Trump and BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi have used this phrase. It is now cliché because it has been used so frequently. Additionally, several researchers challenge the value of this differentiation.

For example, Eric Heginbotham and George Gilboy criticize the veracity of what is referred to at times to as the "democratic peace theory,"(Gilboy&Heginbotham, 2001) arguing that it is doubtful if continuing a foreign policy founded on these principles is secure or practicable. In the setting of an examination of strategic cultures of both China and India, they contend that there is no empirical evidence at all for claims that democracies are essentially more peaceful than other systems or that the security interests of democracies in different regions facing different challenges will tend to converge simply because they share similar domestic political institutions and values. (Gilboy&Heginbotham, 2001).

Yet, most security strategy and international Relations scholars, such as Christian Welzel, John M. Owen, and Rudolph Rummel, do are inclined to see the basic structures of an open, democratic nation as ensuring a certain level of commonality of interests and predictable, open decision-making. The core ideas of what is now known as democratic peace theory were first proposed during the German and French Renaissance, among others, by Michael Doyle (Gleditsch, Christiansen & Hegre, 2007).

It is difficult to exaggerate how crucial it is for American officials to collaborate with a developed, solidly built system of government based on democratic norms. Government based on democracy guarantees that those who make decisions regarding security won't stray too far from the fundamental beliefs and aspirations of the people: Any security agreement reached today in countries without such strong popular backing may very easily be nullified tomorrow by a coup d'état or an abrupt change in the priorities of the ruling elite. Such abrupt swings are relatively uncommon in democracies, but any such changes significant enough to a sufficient number of voters will probably be overturned in the following election.

More significantly perhaps, the Leahy Law, which was passed in 1998, forbids the United States administration from collaborating on security-related issues with foreign military whose units have systematically violated the rights of people (Beittel, Blanchard & Rosen, 2014). Democracies are not immune to such violations, but there's a link between them and the upholding of fundamental human rights. Furthermore, redressing violations when they happen (a feature offered by the Leahy legislation) is simpler in a democracy with institutionalized civilian oversight of the military than it would be in a non-democracy.

It's possible that similar political institutions don't necessarily lead to shared interests. As stated by Sameer Lalwani and Heather Byrne, "The convergence of geopolitical goals between the two biggest democracies in the world has proven slower and more limited than

many anticipated 20 years back and continues to think." They draw attention to the fact that, rather than bridging gaps, democracy's connections can just serve to disguise very real distinctions that are "masked by shibboleths that are frequently spoken, such as "natural allies," and "defining alliances of the 21st century" (Lalwani & Byrne, 2019).

US-India partnership for Chinese Counter

The argument put up by the United States for gathering a diverse group of allies and partners in its conflict with China is not based on power politics. Rather, the United States of America often bases its case on defending an orderly global structure and supporting an approach for resolving international conflicts through a set of rules-based international processes as opposed to using armed force. The USA does not seek to put together an alliance against Beijing in the context of a new Cold War when it seeks allies for projects like the South China Sea Freedom of Navigation Operations, which is based on a defence of shared interests in free, legitimate transportation.

This article specifically aligns with how India perceives its strategic objectives and position in the global order of the twenty-first century. In fact, any attempt to involve India in a conflict with Beijing that was not grounded in the defence of a global system of rules-based order would face fierce resistance under the guise of "strategic autonomy" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). Taking this as cover, India is trying so hard to create troubles for China in the world and especially in the region. India must work to sustain a democratic global structure at many different levels, according to Nonalignment 2.0, because the nation's intertwined developmental and national security objectives are built on an international rules-based framework (Tripathi, 2020).

The Alliance of Quad

Another attempt of India and USA to create stress for China was the establishment of Quad. It is a strategic alliance that has not been perceived positively by China. China has raised its concerns regarding Quad. India, who receives its almost 17% imports from China, is arguably the biggest partner of China in terms of Chinese exports, is working on a project like Quad which is clear evidence that it on one hand is trading with China, on the other hand doesn't take China for a long-term strategic partner.

The Quad—a four-way alliance involving the India, Australia, Japan, and the United States—is one of the most talked-about but least built components of strategic architecture in

the Indo-Pacific area. On paper, this could represent a positive development for both parties involved. All four countries have similar strategic objectives, and probably most significantly, they are all enough apart to prevent the territorial overlap that frequently turns allies into adversaries. India enjoys positive bilateral relations with each of the three Quad countries. India and Japan have a special strategic and global cooperation that was established in 2014. The 2+2 talks between the two countries involve formal discussions between their respective ministers of foreign affairs and defence department (Govindaraj&Kumar, 2021).

Three of the four are treaty allies: Australia, Japan, and are not treaty allies of the United States, but each is one of them. Therefore, three of the four participants of the Quad already employ a variety of military equipment that is compatible with one another and follow a common set of operational procedures. The idea is that India can be persuaded to cooperate more closely than might otherwise be the case by putting together a "mini-lat" with four very competent partners. The Quad might be portrayed as a power club of Asia rather than a broad coalition that India might interpret as "a superpower and a bunch of followers" (Rej, 2018). That hasn't been the case, at least not thus far.

Although there have been plenty of talk, not much has happened. A military official from the United States who is based outside of India said, So many man-hours, and still no action. Another American military representative from a different branch who is stationed in Asia emphasized that political decision-makers, not military ones, will spearhead any move to enhance the Quad. He claimed that the uniformed commanders of all four forces are ready to fight, but that any accelerated speed on India's part would be determined at the level of policy, possibly at least at the 2+2 level (Govindaraj&Kumar, 2021).

In Non-Alignment 2.0, Australia is only addressed twice, and neither mention is used to further a point. Both group Australia with many other nations. But the reliability of the bond is underestimated by this. In 2009, Australia and India agreed to a Strategic Partnership; in 2014, that agreement was amended to include a Framework for Security Cooperation. Collectively, they conduct military drills for the land, the sea, and the air (Pitch Black, Red Flag), as well as multilateral drills for the ground (Force 18), the air. The Quad (and Australia as a member) may not always inspire enthusiasm in Indian interlocutors, but at least in Australia's eyes, this is a collaboration that is growing (Khilnani, 2014).

Nevertheless, this occasion was changed from a multilateral to a bilateral India-USA exercise for several years after Beijing opposed to the participation of Australia (along

with Japan and Singapore) in the 2007 Malabar naval activity. Japan has since been introduced again, but as of this point in time, Australia remains outside of the group only on paper (Pandit, 2020).

CPEC: China and Pakistan

Beijing continues to serve as Islamabad's most reliable global ally and constant friend since the late 1960s. Both the military and the economic aspects of the picture have gotten stronger in the past few years. The Indian security strategists are concerned about both sides of this scenario. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the BRI's most ambitious economic initiatives (Small, 2015).

Both infrastructure and economic development zones would be covered by the projects that are being planned. The port of Gwadar, in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan, which was developed and is operated by the Chinese, serves as its anchor. After the completion of road improvements, China will be able to export commodities from its western heartland directly down to the Arabian Sea for later transportation to Europe, Africa, and the Americas, eliminating thousands of kilometers off the current shipping routes that pass through the Strait of Malacca. Chinese President Xi Jinping has publicly declared that the country may invest \$62 billion in the CPEC, however many commentators think that this estimate is greatly exaggerated.

Regarding the BRI broadly and CPEC in specific, India has distinct reservations. Formally, the broad worries regarding the BRI are expressed as regards of global standards, effective governance, the rule of law, accessibility, openness and equality. According to the Indian experts contacted, these worries are just the surface of a much more serious worry: that BRI funding is significantly promoting tactical objectives of China, not just its economic ones. The specific objection to CPEC is based on the reality that an important section of it—the Karakoram Highway expansion—passes through land that both Pakistan and India have been disputing since 1947: in relation to the alleged China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The world is mindful of India's viewpoint, according to a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs of India in 2017. A scheme that disregards a country's fundamental worries regarding territorial integrity and sovereignty cannot be accepted. (Sachdeva, 2018).

Thus, it is not unexpected that policy makers in India saw both Pakistan and China as posing an interconnected set of problems. Together with each other, they are considered as creating a de facto coalition against the nation of India, with each one seen as a potential foe

in their own capacity. A China that is increasing its regional and international status will offer Pakistan a more effective shield. As a result, we might need to see Pakistan as a smaller subset of China's more significant strategic issues. The conventional, nuclear, and sub-conventional spheres of this danger are all considered to be relevant. India should be somewhat concerned about the Pakistani and Chinese nuclear arsenals' ongoing expansion and modernization.

Conclusion

Strategic competition between the USA and China has been one of the major developments in contemporary international relations as both nations have tried to overshadow each other via different policies. Where China have spread its influence across the world in economic sphere, the USA has been a super power. Both nations have been looking for strategic partners to gain more influence. Where China has introduced BRI, CPEC is its flagship venture featuring Pakistan, the USA has reactivated the QUAD with India during Trump era. India has been a beneficiary of this strategic competition as it stuck many deals with the USA regarding Nuclear, Defence, Maritime security cooperation. This US-India strategic alliance has been perceived by China as major threat to its objectives in the South China Sea and BRI. China is aware of the US involvement in the region and taking appropriate measures. Although Pakistan has been a long-time ally of the USA in the region, the USA is also well aware of the long-term friendship between China and Pakistan. Since Pakistan is already having a long-term partnership with China in the CPEC, India being a major state and direct competition of China in the region is choice of the USA to counter Chinese threat.

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