

Abstract

Historically, relations between India and the US have observed different phases of ups and downs. Over the past decades, “estranged democracies” of the past have now acquired the status of “engaged democracies”, especially with stronger security relations between them after the demise of the Soviet Union. US interest (containment of Communism) and Indian policy (Non-alignment), previously seen to be in opposite camps during the Cold War, later underwent a radical transformation. As the Cold War came to an end, strong US-India relations started to develop in its scope and breadth wherein they have reached the heights of a “strategic partnership” in the contemporary era. After the end of Cold War, since the administration of President Bill Clinton, US-India relations started improving significantly and the trend continued over the later administrations of Bush Jr., Barack Obama and now the incumbent president Donald Trump. As the US categorizes India as a “major non-NATO ally”, closer relations have marked a long-term strategic convergence especially noted between India’s ambitions as a major world power and vital US security interests in the region. Although there are many areas of mutual cooperation in US-India relations yet the most significant aspect, which is discussed in this research, is US-India security partnership that is purportedly meant to achieve “strategic stability in Asia”.

Considering the equation of balance of power in Southern Asia, it is important to note that in a larger context, the regional order is determined by collective impact of various variables. These variables include trends like the rise of India, the rise of China, “China-Pakistan nexus”, US-China confrontations, growing US-India relations, worsened Pakistan-US relations etc. Overall, one major impact of collective action of these variables is the ongoing wave of strategic competition at various levels. In this way, evolving trends of geo-politics have significantly contributed and created an environment of competition and relative influence of four competing power players in the region. These players include globally influential countries not less than the US, China, India as well as Pakistan. In this piece of research, the rationale behind restricting the number of variables to only four countries (US, China, India and Pakistan) is important. Relations and the nature of relationship among these countries would not only provide the bigger context (between US and China in the Indo-Pacific region) but would also enable the readers to understand a reciprocal

picture of the strategic competition reflected in South Asia. For the context of this research, the primary focus is kept on security partnership between the US and India in which convergence between security interests of both countries is reflected. It is considered one of the foremost factors that can affect the existing strategic stability and alter regional order in South Asia. Moreover, it is emphasized that US-India partnership would have numerous implications for the security environment in South Asia. Amidst competition and evolving regional alliance structures between major players, one implication of US-India partnership with far-reaching impact is that the smaller states would be challenged by a new security complex in the region where India emerges as a leading regional player. In this regard, the foremost victim of stronger US-India relations remains Pakistan. It is noted that the US tilt towards India would enhance increasing influence of India and alter balance of power in the region where, in turn, a new regional order is taking shape.

For Pakistan, the basis of her security concerns is, among other reasons, primarily rooted in historical rivalry and imbalance of power between Pakistan and India, both nuclear-armed countries. Considering a history of large scale wars and limited wars between the two South Asian neighbors, it is considered that Pakistan is concerned about possible Indian security threats in the evolving new “strategic balance” in the region. Pakistan is concerned with the challenge that the US would now prefer India against Pakistan on various fronts: political, economic, security and defense, international diplomacy and others. In this way, India would be in a position to be able to endanger strategic regional parity. Furthermore, US-India nuclear cooperation would initiate an arms race thereby creating possibilities of escalation and confrontation(s) between Pakistan and India. Similarly US-India strategic partnership would also consolidate India’s role as leading power in the region and beyond. In this context, with India’s rise as a regional hegemon supported by the US, Pakistan looks for new ways to create credible minimum deterrence and meet her security needs. In order to achieve this objective, Pakistan’s shift away from the US security orbit and proximity towards China and Russia is important.

Hence considering the larger context of changing trends of geo-politics in the region, this research primarily focuses on US-India security partnership, its security implications on strategic environment in South Asia, and Pakistan’s concerns.