**US-India strategic congruence**

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The US-India strategic partnership must be viewed as a subset of US’ Indo-Pacific strategy. India is central to it. The US is determined to circumscribe China’s inexorable rise as a contesting global power by restricting its sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Eurasia, South-Central Asian Region (SCAR) and the Greater Middle East Region (GMER). In particular, it wants to curb its presence, territorial limits and control of the fisheries, fossil fuel and mineral deposits in the South and East China Seas. It aims to create an ostensibly Free and Open Indo Pacific region to allow free passage to international maritime trade (US $ 5 trillion per annum) and counter China’s assertiveness around the Indian and Pacific Ocean rims.

The US can only stem the rampaging Chinese economic juggernaut by engaging it in a war. It still has the most powerful military in the world. However, its economic clout has waned substantially, with an exponentially rising US $ 25-26 trillion national debt hanging like an albatross around its neck. Politically too, the American public might be wary of getting involved in yet another deadly, costly, distant and patently unnecessary war. With these handicaps, the US will have no choice but to resort to its oft-employed strategy of offshore balancing; whereby it “uses favoured regional powers to check the rise of a potentially hostile power.” Hence, the emergence of the QUAD and the marshalling of Japan, Australia and India, in particular, to take on China.

[Israel to build new settlement near Gaza](https://nation.com.pk/09-Nov-2020/israel-to-build-new-settlement-near-gaza)

The US will perhaps consider a three-pronged strategy to that end. In the East it will employ the QUAD and a coalition of some willing Pacific rim nations to counter China’s influence in the IPR, particularly in the South and East China Seas. In the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), it will use the Indian navy/military and its strategically important locations like the Nicobar and Andaman Islands, the east and west coasts of India to dominate the region comprehensively. The Malacca Straits, in particular, will be maintained under total control. In the West, in the Himalayas, India has already challenged and engaged China astride the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between them. Thus, in a three-front scenario, China’s military efforts will get divided and dissipated over divergent and distant fronts. This could possibly be the quid pro quo for the US largesse (strategic partnership, foundational agreements, sale and transfer of defence technology and critical data etc) towards India. Nothing short of India engaging China in a protracted war will meet US interests; now being portrayed as US-India interests. Such a war might meet US interests but will devastate India’s economy, decimate its military and sound the death knell for its regional ambitions. Regardless of the quality and quantity of military technology and data that the US “sells” to India, the latter will probably be alone in the slugfest with China. Whither India’s famed and oft referred to strategic autonomy, then!

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India will have to deal with its own strategic challenges as well. The Chinese deployments on the LAC complement (by default) the Pakistani deployments on the LOC. This creates a fearsome two-front scenario for the Indians coupled with a manifestly destabilised Jammu & Kashmir Region—its ostensible base of operations in Ladakh and on the LOC. Indian operational strategies must now cater for these multiple threats and allocate resources accordingly. While US interests might converge with India’s on China they do not coincide with respect to Pakistan and the other states in the SCAR-GMER complex—CARS, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal etc. Apart from China they do not have any other common foe in the region. Is it then a US-India collaboration limited against China alone or is it going to eventually end up in a classic Mexican standoff?

The US, in pursuit of its own interests against China is enhancing India’s military capabilities wholesomely, (sales of military equipment worth US $ 20 Billion already!). However, it has no control over Indian intents and its strategic compulsions, like seeking to become the uncontested regional hegemon. The LEMOA, COMCASA and BECA will decisively upend the strategic balance in the Indo-Pak subcontinent and elicit compatible counter measures from Pakistan. The arms race henceforth will cover the conventional arms, cyber, space and electro-magnetic spectrums and inevitably the nuclear-missile dimension too.

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India’s professed intentions against Pakistan, Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan are well known. Furthermore, Pakistan is bound to disregard all western (US, UK, NATO etc) interpretations of Indian intents done for its benefit. Pakistan’s stance is very clear; its reliance on its strategic-nuclear assets is inversely proportional to the differential between its and India’s conventional armed forces. The larger the differential between them, the lower will Pakistan’s nuclear thresholds stumble and the shorter will be the timeframe in which Pakistan resorts to its strategic assets. This puts a probable nuclear exchange in the Indo-Pak subcontinent on a hair trigger and the better part of the world and humanity on notice. Arming India without operative controls, ostensibly against China, will have unintended strategic connotations for the region and the world at large.

Two other factors emerge prominently. One, the US can and probably will exercise operative control over India by manipulating the flow of data, intelligence, information, imagery, maps, charts etc, the main force multipliers, to India. Furthermore, it can use its own allies like Israel, France and even the Arabs as leverages over India. Israel and France provide world class military technology and the Arabs much needed investments, employment opportunities and colossal remittances of foreign exchange etc. Two, the shifting balance of power in the South Asian region will force Pakistan and China to gravitate towards one another even more. Furthermore, the evolving strategic environment in the IPR, IOR, astride the LAC, and on the LOC will force Pakistan and China to seriously consider forging a binding, wide ranging, mutually supporting, formal defence arrangement.