**US-India strategic partnership**

[Imran Malik](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/imran-malik)

July 10, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

The joint statement puts the US-India relationship in its prospective geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic perspectives. It encompasses the economic and defense dimensions, emerging technologies, space, telecommunication sectors and supply chain mechanisms too. The strategic partners pledged to strengthen military-to-military relations including mutual logistic support, transfer of technologies, streamline implementation of foundational agreements already signed and cooperate in the new defense domains of AI and space. In the economics realm India stands to receive multi-billion-dollar investments from Google, Micron, LAM Research, Applied Materials Inc etc. Their cooperation will further include areas of AI, quantum computing, next generation telecommunications (5G,6G), biotechnology, outer space, the assembly of semiconductors and the iCET - innovative Critical and Emerging Technologies. Supply chains for critical minerals, semi-conductors will be created while Westinghouse will construct 6 nuclear reactors in India. India was further appeased by unfairly lambasting Pakistan, its nemesis, accusing it of cross border terrorism and threatening it with the wrath and power of the FATF. The US conveniently overlooked India’s own state sponsorship of international terrorism through Iran and Afghanistan into Pakistan, in IIOJ&KR and against its own minorities. Surely, the CIA and the world know better! This rank duplicity, mis-dis information and these holier-than-thou one-sided, inspired pontifications are incredulous and have been summarily denounced and rejected by Pakistan.
The US-India strategic partnership is driven and defined by negativity; a shared, unnerving fear of China’s portentous rise. The US would have rather seen a multi-polar Asia with China and India as the competing poles. It could have then created blocs within Asia, played one against the other and let these Asian behemoths expend their formidable energies fruitlessly. China could thus have been restricted to Asia-IPR and distracted from its extra-regional and global ambitions. The US seems to have missed the boat. China’s sphere of influence has already reached global dimensions.
Despite all the fanfare and pompousness, this US-India strategic partnership is marred by some very serious undoables and unknowns that create doubts on its viability and sustainability. Foremost India safeguards its famed strategic autonomy vociferously which deters it from submitting unilaterally and unconditionally to all forms of US diktat. Therefore, India prefers to be a strategic partner of the US rather than an ally. This reflects too the doubts, the hesitation and significantly India’s self-prescribed limits to this relationship.
The greatest unknown though is the quid pro quo! What are the US’ expectations from India to justify its humungous magnanimity towards it and how does India intend to meet them? What has India agreed to? On what dotted line has PM Modi signed? That is cardinal to the latent prospects of this strategic relationship and the future of the Asia-IPR. Not surprisingly, the joint statement stays silent on this crucial aspect.
The most critical test and striking undoable in this partnership is decoupling India from the Sino-Russia Combine (BRIC, SCO, bilateral trade etc). It is unrealistic. This critical turning point is though predictable and would essentially test India’s pretensions to multi-alignment to the core. Were Russia to squeeze or slow down its military (re)supplies to India, the battle worthiness of its military would immediately implode and sink. This would critically shift the regional strategic balance in China’s favor and adversely  impact US’ operational strategies for the region. This could be used as a leverage by the Sino-Russia Combine or even as an excuse by a more than clever India!
The relationship will be further tested, if and when, US and China resort to open hostilities and war. Will the Indians commit themselves unreservedly and join battle with China on the US’ behalf? Will they bleed and die for Uncle Sam, when they themselves have a no-use-of-firearms-astride-the-LAC agreement with China? Will they, won’t they? Will the US seek an unconditional commitment by India  through a formal strategic alliance? Will the Indians agree or support the war effort against China through military posturing only; by fixing Chinese forces along the LAC? India is caught up in the middle of this high stakes, blistering Sino-US competition and confrontation in the Asia-IPR. Its options are limited and mutually clashing. A hesitant, meek, dithering, undecided, non-committal India in the Himalayas/South Asia -IPR will suit China but could totally upend and potentially scuttle the US’ grand strategic design. An aggressive, proactive and belligerent India, on the other hand, would meet US strategic and operational imperatives and contribute handsomely to its war effort. That could potentially hasten a destructive, extra-regional or even a world war. India thus has a decisive role to play in the success or otherwise of US’ grand strategic design and in precipitating or avoiding war! Ironically, India has opted for the more belligerent and abrasive option of joining ranks with China’s adversaries. A state of no-war-no-peace or outright war will henceforth persist. It has arguably lost the geopolitically and morally superior option of peace and/or playing the peacemaker here!
Multi-alignment has its limits. It cannot be exercised endlessly without offending one or the other mutually hostile major power(s). It will be imperative for India to glean as much as it can from the US before it comes to that critical inflection point when it must decide to either submit totally to the US and become formally aligned with it, defy and ditch it and become “non-aligned” again or get ditched itself. This moment of truth has to inevitably arrive. The US traditionally has a rather cold, harsh and remorseless attitude at such times and gravitates rapidly to the infamous “with us or against us” ultimatum. The flow of benefits to India will thus remain critically managed and directly proportional to the degree of its alignment to and achievement of US strategic objectives. Unless India submits unconditionally, the US largesse towards it too will remain controlled, leveraged and essentially limited. So, the contest is on. Who can benefit more from this relationship within the time that is available, before it becomes untenable for one, the other or both? The bottom line is that this partnership cannot persevere without promptly, primarily and unreservedly securing US’ vital national interests, first! Period.