**What is the quid pro quo? -PART-I**

On **Aug 27, 2022** [Imran Malik](https://nation.com.pk/authorpost/columnist/imran-malik/)

The US’ drive to retain its hegemony at the global level continues to gain momentum. It has embroiled Russia quite inextricably in Ukraine and has profoundly tested China’s political and military will over Taiwan. Concurrently, it is trying to isolate both its adversaries by weaning their major allies away from them. It would rather see India disregard its age-old ties with Russia and prefer the US-led West over it. Similarly, it would like to see Pakistan move out of China’s strategic partnership and trust the US-led West, yet again!  
To these strategic ends, it must of necessity, have a very meaningful presence in the South Asian Region (SAR) and the ball thereto appears to have been set arolling!  
First India; it has been very wholesomely engaged by the US. It has played heavily upon Indian sensitivities and sensibilities; its misplaced hubris, self-righteousness, megalomania, obsessive compulsion to be considered great and its insatiable desire for a seat on the “round table of elite global players”! They have factually become Indian vulnerabilities that have been adroitly exploited by the US. The US-led West has boosted its ego further by offering it modern weapon systems, transfer of defence technologies, joint research and productions, joint military exercises etc. However, India has yet to graduate from the status of a strategic partner to an ally—by choice, perhaps.  
Can the US achieve its twin aims anytime soon—wean India away from Russia and turn it viciously against China? Most unlikely. Anywhere between 60 to 70 percent of India’s military hardware is of Soviet/Russian origin. It will take an unprecedented paradigm shift and eons for the Indian military to shift comprehensively to western military hardware, if at all. The evolution of compatible doctrines, strategies, operational strategies, tactics and intensive field training of formations would be a colossal, time-consuming effort in itself, thereafter. If the Indians do not drastically transform their military capacity very soon, they will consign themselves perennially to an adverse strategic balance with the Chinese. The basic differential will remain essentially unchanged even if the Indians induct a few select weapon systems or force multipliers from the West. So, it is immaterial whether the Indians ditch the Russians or not, it will not make any real difference in the strategic balance between them and China. (A two to three-front war scenario for India will be covered later). The longer that India takes to bridge this differential the more time the Chinese will get to evolve further as an economic, political and military power that challenges US’ global pre-eminence, even more. It is a no-win situation for the Indians as well as the US-led West. Thus, keeping the overall time constraints in mind, India will always be a weakness, a vulnerability in the US’ strategic design against China. (Did the Chinese already carry out pre-emptive operations in June 2020 and acquire meaningful strategic advantages?)  
Will the US-led West be willing to induct well-equipped, well-trained forces into the South Asian theatre of war to overcome this Indian weakness, to tilt the strategic balance in its favour? (Most unlikely). That would imply that the US and European militaries, populations, and industrial and infrastructure centres will become legitimate targets in the war too. Will this keep the war limited to the Himalayas/SAR theatre of war or spread it inevitably from the Pacific to Continental USA and GMER and Europe—a potential World War scenario? However, will India accept this and the costs thereof willingly? The battles will essentially be fought on Indian soil and Indian soldiers and civilians will die while Indian infrastructure, industrial and population centres will get destroyed too. (Remember Ukraine!). Where does this leave India’s famed strategic autonomy, if it has to become subservient to US diktat? Do US and Indian vital national interests converge so compellingly that they are both willing to go to war with China? Together? The implications of such a conflagration would be horrendous and global in nature. India however, must also consider where its economy, its military and its future will stand at that end of such a conflict. Should India actually play ball? In any case, the Indians must ask the one most basic albeit vital question first—what is the quid pro quo and is it really worth it?  
The Indians are not likely to fall for these US stratagems. They have a history of multi-alignments and are likely to pursue the same policies even now. They are most likely to keep engaging the US, Russia and China simultaneously, as has been their wont for ages. They are likely to gain all that they can from the US-led West without prejudice to their decades’ old relationship with Russia (military hardware, missiles, nuclear power plants, cheap oil, wheat etc) and their mutually beneficial trade ties (US $ 100billion) with China. They continue to deal with Iran as well, CAATSA notwithstanding. Clearly, the US has yet to acquire a controlling influence over India; not a very sobering thought when it is preparing to confront China.  
India, however, will continue to milk the US at international fora like the UN, G7, G20, etc too. It will remain ostensible partners in the QUAD, I2U2 etc, without losing its presence and clout in the SCO, BRICS etc. India will continue to wreak all manners of genocides, atrocities, rapes, murders, cordon and search operations, demographic and political engineering and ravage all standards and conventions of human rights in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir Region (IIOJ&KR). It will also persist in demonising and decimating Indian Muslims and other minorities and yet the US-led West will remain tongue-tied and paralysed into inaction for their need to appease India and exploit it against China.  
India will run with the hare and hunt with the hound for as long and as far as it is possible. However, it will never commit itself to a battle it knows it cannot win—and fighting China, alone or with distant allies, is clearly not a prospect that inspires any visions of victory.  
To be continued