

## **Geo-political realities of South Asia in perspective of US-India strategic Partnership**

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### **ABSTRACT**

US-India strategic partnership in the volatile region of South Asia is a complex phenomenon. Prior to World War – II, there had no significance of South Asia in the eyes of US, but now the importance strategic of the region has changed drastically. The region is now well equipped with nuclear weapons and missiles as well as by regional proxies as non-state actors with intensified terrorism on high profile. Pakistan, Afghanistan and India are at the centre stage of all these activities. This article explores how the US changed its strategic priorities in the South Asian region with changing sequences and its partners with the change of time gradually and got concrete shape between 2000 - 2016. This partnership saga that was sparked late in Clinton administration (1993-2001) and carried out fully during the Bush administration (2001-2008), as well as has been retained by the Obama administration (2009-2016) as significant part of Pivot to Asia (2011) and got the attention in recent renewal of the Mutual Defense Framework (2015) between Barack Obama and Narendra Modi.

**Key Words:** Clash of Interest, Balance of Power, Strategic Partnership, South Asia, Cold War, Global Order.

### **Introduction**

In the backdrop of continuously intricate world that is specified by war, apprehension, clash of interests and seeking more power, it is perilous to understand the phenomenon of US-India strategic partnerships in the volatile region of South Asia, which having two competitive nations (India and Pakistan) stand still on war mode. The region which is well equipped with nuclear weapons and missiles as well as regional proxies of non-state actors with terrorist activities, particularly in Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.

The study focuses on to explore the sequences and series of events behind US-India strategic partnership from post-Cold War era to 2016. The study also examines that how did US change its strategic priorities in the region as before

World War II, when it had no priority as for as strategic political interests were concerned and had limited business interests with an American tobacco company which was involved in trade with South Asia. This study also argues that how and what were the reasons that US left its traditional isolationism in the region and started to act after 1945 in the region during Cold War era.

During this era, the US relations with India were started with low esteemed, though the US president Franklin Roosevelt was assumed as an ardent supporter of US friendship with India, but reality was different. This paper will also explore the fact through that if it was India's choice not to join US camp or it was the United States preference to have strategic partnership with India during Cold War. After Cold War, we will also explore that what were the vital reasons that became the resultant factors to improve India's partnerships with the United States is also one of our important areas of study to focus, and to examine the facts. This study will also address the trail of events between US-India strategic partnership in post-Cold War era sparked late during the Bush administration, and was persisted by the Obama administration in the perspective of Pivot to Asia (2011) and recently tookup again with mature defence framework.

One of the research areas of study is to evaluate the future of this partnership in the perspective of three potential causes. This research article touches the contours of security structure of the region and challenges for US to maintain strategic partnership in the presence of two rival states (India and Pakistan).

## **South Asia Viewed in Geo- Political perspective**

### **South Asian Map**



Source: <http://www.freeworldmaps.net/asia/southasia/political.html>

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## **South Asia: The Land of Marvels**

The great German Philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel had seen India through 19<sup>th</sup> century perspective by saying “India as an object desire”. He further elaborated that all nations from most ancient downwards had directed their wishes to the treasurers of land of marvels, and wisdom”.

(Bose and Jalal, 2001) The plundering of all these treasures by West, from beginning has been a matter of world-historical importance, “The East India Company was the lord of the land”, as Hegel further added. For it is a necessary fate of Asiatic Empires which become subject to European. As Mahatma Gandhi, the great leader and founder of modern India, in 20<sup>th</sup> century struggled for “Hind Swaraj” against the British imperialism, expressed his sorrow as “English have not taken India, We have given it to them. They are not in India, because of their strength, but because we keep them.” Regarding British behavior, he said, “Who made it Bahadur?. It is true to say that we gave India to the English than that India was lost. The battle to win India back was led not only on the political front but also on the plane of ideas.

## **India Vs. Barata Versha**

Bi Pin Chandra par, the Indian nationalist, in his book called, “The sole of India” attempting to defy and refuse the Western definition of India that they called her India or the land of the Indus, by emphasizing only her strong physical features, but locally it has another name, and which is “BarataVarsha”. This name was derived by the ancient King Baharata. On the other hand, the Persian and Arabs coined the term of subcontinent” by the name the river Sindh or Indus and called as “Al-Hind”, the inhabitants and Hindus. The origin of word “India” and “Indian” were simply derived from Greek and Roman and finally adopted the English versions of the Old Persian phraseology terminology.” (Bose and Jalal, 2001)

## **The term South Asia Vs. India**

The words South Asia and India in origin are geographical expression and only five decade old. Today, there are following different sovereign states including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, India and Pakistan are Myanmar in this group can also be added which as Burma was a province of British India (until 1935). The term India however, as we have seen is much older, while the term South Asia lacks its historical depth and makes political neutrality. “The terms South Asia and India both in the first instant reflect a geographical boundaries with foot hills of the Himalayan range in the North and to the Indian Ocean in the South, and goes from Indus Valley in the West to the Brahmaputra plains in the East”.(Wolpert,2009)

This great and huge geographical landscape has become the home to a diversified population more than a billion people who are accounted for over a fifth or to be more than 23% of world populations (Allchine and Allchine, 1982).

### **Pakistan's Geographical Location as a Key Hub of Energy Corridor**

As Pakistan's geographical location is concerned, it is located at the crossroad of Southern Asia which join three magnificent landscapes like Russia, China and India. Its coastal areas touch to the landlocked remote areas of Central Asia to the Indian Ocean, and it is spread over to Persian Gulf, the hub of oil, which makes it a key point of energy corridor to Asia and the rest of the world and moreover, its large armed forces coupled with its nuclear capabilities and resource potential, all combine to enhance the country's geo-political importance.

### **Geostrategic importance of Pakistan**

As Pakistan is geographically attached with China, the Muslim world, as well as with India, it directly affects relations within the U.S Sino-Pakistan informal alliance like the pillar of Pakistan's regional policy. Pakistan's relationship with key Islamic countries looks like Saudi Arabia and Iran, in particular, as well as its strategic relations with India are in censorious reference within particular context to represent a major strategic challenges for Pakistan which vacillates between prospects of "détente" and can be suddenly involved in armed crisis. In this regard, the nuclear-armed nations are trying to remain away from direct clash. But, "limited warfare policies, and lack of clarity of nuclear thresholds, develop a considerable uncertainty as far as strategic stability in the region is concerned". (Nehru, 1947)

At the same, as South Asia is attached with the Middle East (West Asia) and with South East Asia, it becomes most strategically important venue when it bordering with Indian Ocean. In this perspective, "the direct and indirect presence of US as the sole superpower has some vital questions interests in this dynamic region". (Khan, 2012)

### **US Interests & Policies towards South Asia**

In the context of past events, the US had no significant interests in South Asia as a strategic power prior to World War II. The only interest of the US in South Asia was limited and business oriented. For example, there was an American tobacco company which had been trading with South Asia as well as there were some educational, cultural and religious attachments maintained between US and South Asian region. As the US left its own traditional policy of isolationism in post-World War-II and joined the global leadership mainly to check the expansion of Soviet Union. At that juncture, the US interests in South Asia were governed by the region's geostrategic location in the presence of major powers like China and

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Soviet Union. It is obvious that “South Asia is a region over loaded with the huge sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean and connects with the two politically uncomfortable and economically critical regions of Asia and that are: the Gulf and South East Asia”. (Gojree, 2015)

So that, the US interests in the South Asian region were not only economical, but as well, motivated to govern with strategic competition with the Soviet Union and its drive of maintaining viz-a-viz the rest of the world. During the era of the Cold War, the area had strategic significance except checking over Soviet Union for the communism expansion but the recent shift in global power relationship has made South Asia an important region not to ignore.

**The Changed Situation of the Region in past 9/11**

The post 9/11 situation as well as US-India strategic partnership has changed the relationship between Pakistan, US and South Asia. As well as, present involvement of the US in Afghanistan and Pakistan, India and Pakistan’s nuclear rivalry, concern with the proliferation of nuclear weapon, war against terrorism and the growing influence of China in the region, have significantly increased the strategic importance of South Asia to the US policy making circle

In this perspective, today, the US policy interests are not hanged in one set of issues, rather it engages a set of some issues like counter terrorism, as well as the US presence in Afghanistan, where its military shows sizeable influence. On the other hand, Pakistan, with a large number of issues have US concerns, such as, counter terrorism, Afghanistan and non-proliferation communities ‘converse. Moreover, “pivot to Asia (rebalancing toward Asia), where the greatest concern comes from China are some major concerns to the US”. (Lawrence, 1993)

The US asserted its position in South Asia regarding to maintain an equation between its two close friends, the India and the Pakistan that was started during the early days of the George W. Bush administration. Washington had differentiated between two countries with the conclusion that the India is a rising power capable of contributing a regional stability and countering growing Chinese influence has more to offer over the long term. “It was a calculus that led to the 2004 strategic partnership agreement and the US in 2005 provided assistance to India in civil nuclear sector”. (Stanely, 1993) The result is the “convergence of interest between Washington and New Delhi on most of the regional and global issues”. (Gojree, 2015)

**Rebalancing Asia through Pivot to Asia Doctrine**

Since 2012, the Obama administration initiated policy rebalance to Asia was initially called “Pivot to Asia,” with the aim and objectives to provide strategic attention and some defense resources to the Asian threatened. The pivot was based on three core assumptions; the first, Asia would be most important centre as far as

both opportunity and risks are concerned second, Europe would be stable and secure. Third assumption is now questionable, while first remains and is seen by the Obama administration as sufficient grounds to sustain its pivot policy. (Hanauer and Chalk, 2017)

In a report released by “National Intelligence Council’s Global Trend” 2030, “Asia would surpass both North America and Europe combined in term of global power based on the contribution of GDP, population, defense spending and investment in technology.” The Pivot to Asia doctrine has raised strategic tension among major powers including China and Japan as well as in most Asian countries with rising nationalism. It also created minimal reconciliation along the lines of what occurred in Europe and multiple flash points in the East and South China seas on the Korean Peninsula and also in Taiwan. (Binnendijk, 2016)

### **Two partners of US Pivotal doctrine**

There are two pivotal partners of US in this connection, India and Japan, and India will have important impact on the United States poster in Asia. As far as India is concerned, it has the potential to be an important player with US in the region. The GDP of India has grown to about \$2 trillion and now possesses the third largest military in the world. As well as, Modi is eager to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is the ball game of China and Russia. Although, India still has border dispute with China and is growing it’s concerned about Chinese deep involvement and penetration around the Indian Ocean. (Binnendijk, 2016)

### **Conclusion**

The status of US - India strategic partnership and mutual trust has been growing tremendously since 2000s, which seems to change the regional security balance and helping India to emerge as a hegemonic power in the South Asian region. Contrary to appear as a major broker of peace and stability in the region, the United States of America looks more interested in reconstructing the geo politics of South Asia for its own and repairing relations with India, which remained its dream from last seven decades. “The US sees partnership with India as a support and cooperation with a strategically located democratic country of rapidly growing economy with great expansion of middle class to help US market, as well as to confront the challenges from Iran and Pakistan. Moreover this is unpredictable China who may pose challenges in future. After 9/11, approximately 16 years have passed, the US- China, and Pakistan’s strategic triangle on terrorism gradually losing flash from bones, while other priorities including energy security, Afghanistan’s political future and the emerging US- China rivalry suggest that traditional geopolitical objectives and interests once again competing to each other or perhaps even dislodge terrorism as the top security concern in South Asia. The present strategic partnership between US and India directly and indirectly effect Pakistan through many ways ranging from regional power disparity to physical

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security to more spending on defence, to domestic political upheaval and creates a uncertainty and fear in the region and in Pakistan specifically. Pakistan has limited but other options to combat the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges, and to change the landscape of not only regional politics, but also internal security paradigm.

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