

India and the United States in the Emerging Global Order

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Contemporary geopolitical debates on the post pandemic world order point to certain indicators on the nature of the emerging global order. Whether the new global order will be led by China, and also what will be the role of India and the USA in shaping the emerging global order has formed a major part of the discourse. It must be emphasised here that the shifting of the centre of gravity from the ‘West’ to the ‘East’ has been severely impacted by the ongoing pandemic. China’s desire of becoming unipolar power in Asia in a multi polar world will be too difficult to realise in the changing dynamics of geopolitics. China’s growing efforts to attain supremacy and primacy in the international system is being reflected in its behavioural patterns. India’s rise has become a dominant factor in checkmating China’s strategic aspirations.

After a series of tumultuous events in the US, Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States of America on 20 January 2021. How the United States is going to shape its orientations towards India is featuring in all the major debates among members of the academic and strategic community. The narrative that the USA has done fairly well in building a constructive engagement with India during Republican President Donald Trump’s Administration needs a closer examination. One can come up with a counter narrative by saying that the strong foundations for bilateral cooperation between India and the USA were built during the Presidency of President Clinton who was a Democrat. The Democrats slowly and steadily changed their perception about India. The last phase of the Clinton years was a turning point in Indo-US relations, though the Indo-US defence cooperation agreement was signed in 1995 during President Clinton’s first term. The day President Clinton stopped using his famous phrase, “cap, rollback and eliminate” in the context of India’s nuclear weapon programme, there was a sea change in

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mutual perceptions. All the existing misperceptions paved the way for the evolution of a robust bilateral strategic engagement. President Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 was, undoubtedly, a new beginning in Indo-US relations.

The United States was aware of India's predicament and deteriorating regional security environment. The rationale for India going nuclear was very well understood by the United States. Until then, India's nuclear weapon status was seen as an irritant in the bilateral relationship; but it finally became a cornerstone in the existing strategic engagement. The credit goes to Clinton's Presidency for providing a platform in the form of the Strobe Talbott-Jaswant Singh Dialogue. The benchmarks for the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) were based on the bilateral understanding, and reflected a willingness to work on mutually identified core strategic areas, such as nuclear, outer space, defence technology, and the harmonisation of export control regimes.

Over the years, a strong foundation has been built in Indo-US relations which are marked by multifaceted dimensions, such as political, economic, strategic, nuclear, and diplomatic. The Indo-US strategic engagement has come a long way, and is predicated on the changing dynamics of geopolitics where it seems China's rise features prominently in the current dynamics. The evolving global disorder because of the "Wuhan Virus" has provided an opportunity to both India and the USA for further strengthening their relationship. India will emerge on the top of the US priorities because of geopolitical compulsions.

President Biden certainly will not take any stand which would prove antithetical to the growing bonhomie in Indo-US ties. India and the United States have converged on a number of issues impacting global peace and stability. India is being perceived as a responsible and potential major power in the making. The bilateral strategic engagement between the US and India has witnessed a greater emphasis in this emerging world order. NASA-ISRO Cooperation has reached new heights in outer space matters. India and the United States have set up the Mars Working Group. Raytheon is playing an important role in India's Gagan navigation system.

The US will obviously be continuing with its supply of conventional weaponry to India. It might even become integral to India's 'Make in India' campaign. India would very much like to transition itself from a net importer of conventional weaponry to a net exporter of these weapons. The Inter Agency Task Force, which has been a part of the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), has been seriously engaging in identifying the

parameters for such defence cooperation. India has been contemplating the possibilities of co-production of F-16 and F-18A combat aircraft. Defence co-production involving the critical technology will remain a challenge; but the commitment shown on the part of the USA towards India is worth mentioning.

It would be in US interests if the Biden Administration has continuity in its foreign policy orientation towards India. Indo-US counter terrorism cooperation has provided good dividends to both sides by realising the containment of threats emanating from terrorism. The military-to-military exercises have experienced a very positive phase in the maritime domain. India's role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture is going to be vital along with that of the USA. The role of the Indian Diaspora in President Biden's Administration will become dominant in the key policies domain.

India and the USA together will have to assume responsibility, and lead world affairs. India's growing significance in almost all the domains - whether it is maritime or outer space - is being understood by the rest of the world in general, and the US in particular. The China factor also has to be dealt with, especially in view of its aggressive posturing around the world.

No doubt, China will feature on the top of the radar in US foreign policy agenda because of the changing dynamics of geopolitics. The US national security strategy, its defence strategy as well its military strategy has categorically mentioned China as America's primary threat. China's aggressive behaviour through the militarisation of space, and in the South China Sea, its "wolf warrior" diplomacy, and its military aggression on the India-China border have raised questions regarding peace and stability in the emerging global order.

Afghanistan stands at a critical juncture, and India should be included in any form of US-led negotiations on resolving the Afghan issues. The dice was rolled when the Trump Administration signed the peace deal with the Taliban in Qatar early in 2020, paving the way for the treacherous intra-Afghan talks. There will be continuity in terms of eventually reducing American troop presence in Afghanistan, and focusing more on a leaner force presence which will be devoted to counter-terrorism operations coupled with reconciliation activities. These were Joe Biden's preferences while serving as Vice President.

The future of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, and the contours of US-Pakistan ties will be an important development to watch. Pakistan has continued to play a dubious role in the war on terror, inviting criticism from many in the

US policymaking community. Afghanistan will remain a challenge for the Biden Administration, especially when the Taliban is not showing any signs of adhering to the obligations made in all the peace dialogues. Indo-US efforts in building peace in Afghanistan might give a new direction to the regional order.

Another foreign policy challenge in the emerging global order will be Iran's nuclear ambitions. Iran has always featured in the list of American adversaries since the Islamic revolution in 1979. The animosity increased substantially because of the divergences over the Iran's controversial nuclear programme. The Obama administration was able to come up with a multilateral negotiation with Iran that resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, the Trump Administration abrogated the JCPOA, and the killing of Iranian commander, Qasem Soleimani, has brought US-Iran tensions to its height. As such, despite his best intentions, to what extent President Biden and his team will be able to recalibrate the relationship with Iran is crucial. How India will manage the existing contradictions between the United States and Iran remains a part of the challenge for the emerging global order.

A number of other challenges will persist for the current Biden Administration. One of them is managing its complex relationship with Russia. India will have to manage its equations with Russia in a manner that does not impact its strategic partnership with the US in the emerging global order. Moreover, the broader question of moving ahead and managing ties with American allies also remains a matter of importance. As President Biden said in his inaugural speech, "We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again." Furthermore, with the former Secretary of State, John Kerry, entrusted with leading America's Climate Change diplomacy - after eschewing President Trump's questionable approach to the issue - it will be worthwhile watching America's steps in this regard. The India-US bilateral engagement will be vital for the success of the Climate Change negotiations. This will also remain critical in the emerging global order.

Besides bilateral issues in the India-US relationship, how the Biden Administration approaches these foreign policy questions will be of consequence to India's dealings with the USA. India has a complex relationship with China; its role in Afghanistan is crucial; it has deep ties with Iran as well as Russia; it plays a pivotal role in the Indo-Pacific in partnership with the United States; and is an inevitable factor in the global drive against Climate Change. The broader arc of stability in the India-US relationship, the election of Kamala Devi Harris as Vice President, and the appointment of a number of Indian Americans in the Biden Administration has given much optimism, and

raised expectations as far as the India-US relationship is concerned. However, India will need to be pragmatic and forward looking in terms of how it can leverage its multifaceted relationship with the United States for securing its national, regional, and global interests.

The United States on remaining the leader in advances in science and technology will obviously ensure the means of continuing to negotiate from a position of strength with the rest of the world. Its increasing presence in outer space will provide a distinct edge as compared to the rest of the world. Undoubtedly the US will face impediments in maximising its interests in a multipolar world. The challenges which US allies confronted during President's Trump Administration will have to be addressed by President Biden. The trust deficit between the United States and its allies will need to be bridged. Hopefully, President Biden will be able to help US allies in regaining confidence. The USA will need India on its side in the complex geopolitics of the emerging global order.

Will President Biden be successful in keeping the USA a pre-eminent power? Will the US under Biden Administration be accepted as a world leader? These questions are being much debated among the academic community in the USA. President Biden has had good experience in understanding the complexities of the world system in his role as the Vice President for eight years. The reversal of President Obama's policies by President Trump on a number of pertinent issues impacted global peace, stability, and Climate Change, and weakened the US role in global affairs.

Since the signing of Indo-US defence cooperation agreement in 1995, both countries have augmented efforts in creating a conducive atmosphere for a win-win situation. India has worked with four Presidents since 1995 (Bill Clinton, George Bush Jr., Barack Obama, and Donald Trump) who were both Democrats and Republicans. During this period, the USA found India to be both a responsible and a reliable partner in the evolving dynamics of geopolitics. India has figured prominently on the US radar across Presidencies on almost all key decisions taken in defence cooperation.

Even during the concluding days of the Trump Administration, the US Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo, and the US Secretary of Defence, Mark T. Esper, visited India for the "2+2" Dialogue between the Defence and Foreign Ministries of the two countries. One of the most notable developments of this visit was the signing of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) on geospatial intelligence sharing - it was the last of the foundational agreements. This is in addition to the earlier signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), and the Communications, Compatibility

and Security Agreement (COMCASA), both of which have given a new direction to growing interoperability between the militaries of India and the USA.

Almost 15 years of the implementation of the New Framework for the US-India Defense Relationship Agreement of 2005 has produced a number of tangibles, making the United States one of India's most robust defence partners. Whether it is in the realm of defence sales and purchase, or the growing sophistication of military-to-military exercises, or the potential for the co-production of defence equipment, the cooperation has been outcome oriented. There is no denying the fact that cooperation in the defence sector has become the highlight of the India-US strategic partnership. Evolving threat perceptions from an aggressive China in the Indo-Pacific region have accentuated the imperative for greater synergy in the defence partnership, which stands on a strong footing as the Biden Administration sets out to take the baton of the India-US relationship.

There has been a discernible broad arc of positive continuity as far as India-US defence cooperation is concerned. India has been named a major defence partner of the USA, and convergences on both the global and regional security environments have given rise to growing cooperation in capability enhancement and capacity building. The renaming of the US Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command reflects the growing recognition of India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region. This has brought a sharper focus on maritime cooperation between India and the US, which is visible in both greater defence sales and purchases as well as augmented maritime information sharing to increase India's maritime domain awareness. The Indian Navy and the naval arm of the US Central Command (NAVCENT) have together shown a greater sense of joint purpose and action for maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean.

As military-to-military engagement across all the services and the sophistication of their exercises increase through the implementation of the foundational agreements, it might be incumbent upon both the countries to create greater synergy in traditional as well as non-traditional areas of operations. How different military commands of the US operating around the globe can engage further with the Indian military across different domains will remain a matter of priority in times to come. The inclusion of the Australian Navy in the latest Malabar exercise has added a new dimension to the trilateral arrangement between India, the US and Japan, and given new heft to the Quadrilateral Security Initiative (QUAD).

India and the USA have come a long way as far defence trade is concerned. In a very short period, India has emerged as one of the major destinations of high-end US defence equipment despite India not being a traditional ally of the USA. The defence equipment purchased from the USA is meant to enhance India's capabilities on land, sea, and air-based assets. For instance, the US origin equipment, including long range maritime patrol aircraft, are being seen as instrumental in enhancing India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities in the Indian Ocean. In recent times, the focus has been to shift from a buyer and seller relationship to that of greater technology sharing, joint innovation, co-production, and co-development.

In this context, the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) has been a mainstay of the level of cooperation achieved and envisioned. Four joint working groups, under the aegis of the DTTI, have been focusing on cooperation on land, naval, air, and aircraft carrier technologies. Other significant initiatives include the meeting between the Indian Defence Innovation Organization (DIO-iDEX), the US Defense Innovation United (DIU), and the Industrial Security Annex (ISA) mechanisms.

Much has been achieved in a short span of time in India-US defence cooperation; but much also requires to be done to create all round synergy between the two militaries as well the respective defence industrial bases in the two countries. The dynamics of the global and regional security environment would require India and the USA to constantly revisit standard operating procedures, and innovate new areas of defence cooperation in order to create a robust joint deterrent capability across the Indo-Pacific region.

President Biden will most likely maintain continuity in his foreign policy orientation and intensify defence cooperation. India has also reached a stage where it can negotiate with the United States from a position of strength. The United States will play a dominant role in helping India realise its dream of Make in India through joint ventures and co-production. India's "buy and make" proposition with defence offsets obligations will obviously be the priority in the emerging scenario. How President Biden will drive the course of action in building synergy with India will form a major part of the discourse.

India and the United States will be more prone to confronting strategic risks if they do not converge, and become proactive in assuming the leadership role in the emerging global order. The USA has finally understood India's importance in the global arena. The elevation of India's status, both at the regional and global levels, is a testimony to the fact that both India and the US will work together in ushering in a rule based global order. The emerging

global order is not going to be led by a specific country but by a set of countries where India and the US will play a dominant role in the international system. China's rise will obviously have an impact on the complexities of the permutations and combinations of the emerging global order. The intensification of the Indo-US strategic partnership will remain pivotal to the new emerging global order. The sharing of technological knowhow will be emphasised to build a robust strategic partnership in a number of domains, including outer space, counter-terrorism cooperation, and enhancing India's potential in gathering intelligence information with the help of technology.
