

US-India Dynamic Strategic Partnership 2017: Geopolitical Imperatives Analysed

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Mon, 10/23/2017 - 06:24

Paper No. 6315

Dated 23-Oct-2017

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Geopolitical imperatives generated by China's aggressive bid for global dominance in 2017 has prodded the United States to make the game changing offer of transforming the US-India Strategic Partnership into a dynamic predominantly security-centric relationship catering for Indo Pacific security.

Both in terms of content and also in terms of timing, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's address at the US think tank CSIS last week were strategically meaningful. Detailed coverage of this game-changing shift in US policies can be accessed on media websites.

Meaningful are the assertions made as they mark a significant shift from existing United States policies on China and Pakistan. India should welcome this shift and not lapse into over-analysing and suspecting US motives----- a favourite pastime of the 'Doubting Thomases' in the Indian political and strategic fraternity.

In more stark terms it can be asserted that for the United States and India, the former making the shift and the latter making policy adjustments to incorporate the dynamic shift are impelled not only by the 'Option of Choice' as natural allies but also by the 'Geopolitical Imperatives Necessity' of the Indo Pacific turbulent security environment and whose turbulence is not likely to lessen but grow dramatically as China unfolds its global ambitions buoyed by its massive military strengths. The China Threat unfolding is emerging as a more comprehensive and complex which cannot be handled singly by the United States, India or Japan. 'Balance of Power' strategies become a geopolitical imperative. United States and Japan are not newcomers to the game but India is a late entrant.

US Secretary of State Tillerson highlighted that President Trump and the Trump Administration were committed to "building an ambitious

Partnership” with India that would “dramatically deepen” the US-India Strategic Partnership with special reference to Indo Pacific security. We should therefore expect major changes which from the United States side are likely to focus on provision of advanced defence technologies and advanced military hardware to add punch to India’s military might.

Preceding the foregoing were statements by US President Trump, his Defense Secretary General Mattis who recently visited India and other senior US dignitaries. The common thread implicitly visible was the new US Strategy for South Asia in which the United States viewed India as an existential counterweight to China’s military rise and also as the nett provider of regional security. Towards this end the United States was opening up for India access to top-end US defence technologies and military hardware so as to enhance India’s defence capacities.

Obvious in all of the above enhanced United States political and strategic reachout to India were the US realisation that US-Pakistan privileged relations were to be dispensed with and that the United States would no longer pursue its China Hedging Strategy. Apparent to United States was the geopolitical reality in 2017 that both China and Pakistan were in various shades of endangering United States security interests in the Indo Pacific.

What is becoming obvious is that China is emerging as a “Threat in the Making” for the United States and the China Threat to India is live and threatening. China’s stupendous expansion of its Armed Forces with an exponential expansion of Chinese Navy and force projection capabilities could soon translate into a direct China Threat for the United States. Then of course China has its nuclear proxies like North Korea and Pakistan as regional destabilisers at the two ends of the Indo Pacific Region.

The year 2017 would mark the tipping point in the US-India Strategic Partnership where the geopolitical imperatives have brought about political and strategic convergences between these two powerful democracies to a new effectively coincident point. Dramatic developments now should be expected arising from various US articulations hinting that the United States has accepted that any dramatic enhancing of their Strategic Partnership would not involve limiting India’s separate options where perceptionaly it had to cater for India-specific security interests.

The detailed contents of the assertions made in respect of enhanced strategic and military cooperation between USA and India can be accessed in the media. However, the timing of the United States assertions in this direction has to be contextually be viewed against the forceful assertions made by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 19h NPC Session in Beijing on October 18 2017. Implicit in Chinese President’s enunciation of his Great China Dream were elements that impinge on the national security interests of both the United States and India.

Obviously, comprehensive consultations would have taken place behind closed doors, before the United States unveiled this game-changing offer in the public domain. This too, against the backdrop of China’s bid for Superpower status and influence, and further on the eve of the visit of US Secretary of State to India on October 24-25 2017. Therefore, it should not be construed as a one-sided offer by the United States.

High level strategic and defence dialogues between US and India have been taking place.

Any other opposite interpretation amongst the Indian strategic community would distort the true import of this historic offer made by the United States at a critical juncture where the entire strategic fabric of Indo Pacific Asia has come under siege from China's unrestrained aggressive military brinkmanship.

In 2017, the strategic congruence on China's threatening rise in relation to Indo Pacific Asia in the strategic calculus of both the United States and India has acquired enhanced and threatening contours. China's feigned inability to restrain North Korea's nuclear blackmail of the United States speaks of ill-disguised motives. India stood besieged by China militarily for nearly three months over the Doklam Military Standoff. While China opted for a tactical truce so as not to endanger the BRICS Summit in China in September 2017, the Doklam Standoff promises to surface again in near future with renewed aggression including other sectors of the India-China Occupied Tibet Borders.

China's list of political and military transgressions against the United States and India is lengthening by the day and threatening the national security interests of the United States and India. China's conflict escalation in the South China Sea, East China Sea and a vigorous push into the Indian Ocean are notable examples. This endangers the maritime security of both the United States and India.

On transnational Islamic Jihadi terrorism threats China can be seen repeatedly shielding Pakistani global terrorist Hafeez Saeed from United Nations indictment. One would even bravely venture to suggest that Chinese intelligence with its proximate relationships with the Pakistan Army/ISI and the Taliban would have been unaware of the various transnational attacks by Pakistan Army affiliated terrorist affiliates.

Worrisome for the global community is China's propensities not to hesitate in pursuance of its Grand Strategy to earlier underwrite nuclear and WMD proliferation to irresponsible and unstable nations like Pakistan and North Korea. In 2017, China is repeating this propensity to underwrite and condone at international forums Islamic Jihadi terrorism of Pakistan Army/ISI terrorist affiliates. For years now China is opposing UN designation of the notorious Pak terrorism leader Hafiz Saeed as a global terrorist.

The sum picture of China in 2017 figuring in the strategic calculus of the United States is one of a "Threat in the Making" and for India the "China Threat" existent since 1962 has acquired more menacing contours..

In terms of perspectives for the remainder of the 21st Century on China, the picture appears even more threatening when viewed with China's military ambitions unveiled by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 19th National People's Congress on October 18 2017.

The United States and India chiefly along with Japan, Australia and Western Europe cannot remain as passive spectators of the looming global China Threat and that these countries synchronise and integrate their political and military responses so that the Hitlerian impulses of China do not hurtle the global community into a possible more horrifying Third World War.

Building the US-India Strategic Partnership has enjoyed bipartisan political support both in the United States and India. But in India the opposition is likely to come from India's strategic community long wedded to a delusionary "Strategic Non-alignment" which in very essence is strategically illogical and runs against the geopolitical imperatives that India now has to opt for 'Balance of Power' strategic formulations.

The political opposition seemingly would arise from the Opposition Congress Party, not on any sound meaningful grounds but sheer cussed opposition to PM Modi's success on the global stage diplomacy.

Both these impediments should not be a matter of serious concern for the Modi Government as despite Opposition efforts to demonise demonetisation and GST, the Modi Government enjoys high ratings domestically, and internationally too.

What the Indian Government should really be concerned are the serious misgivings of China and Pakistan on losing their leverages on US policy formulations in South Asia and the wider Indo Pacific Asia. Both China and Pakistan singly and in conjunction can be expected to heighten tensions on Indian borders along with provocative military brinkmanship.

Why an enhanced dynamic Strategic Partnership becomes a geopolitical imperative in 2017 is that the complexities of the threat posed by China both in the regional and global context cannot be handled singly by the United States and definitely not by India. Particularly applicable is this in relation to India's paramount interest to keep the Indian Ocean as purely "Indian".

In such a dynamic shift in focus, both the United States and India will have to deal with patience the high level of expectations that would accrue from both the countries. But as long as the end-aim is kept in focus of a stable Indo Pacific security environment, both the United States and India can be expectedly rise to the level of managing the expectations of each other

The United States needs to be cautioned here going by the US record of being diverted by 9/11 developments and putting the evolving US-India Strategic Partnership unveiled at the turn of the millennium in cold storage. The first decade of this Century witnessed the United States temporising with a confirmed duplicitous military ruler of Pakistan---General Musharraf. The Afghanistan quagmire today which the United States is facing in 2017 is the direct outcome of the United States distorted Pakistan-centric policies of that sorry decade. It also facilitated China getting a more firm stronghold in Pakistan. India paid a heavy strategic price for these US policy deviations and produced unavoidable strains in the evolving US-India Strategic Partnership.

Concluding, it needs to be stressed and over-stressed that the United States bears a special responsibility in that midway it does not

habitually reverse its gears in its South Asia and Indo Pacific security policies that it is currently manifesting. The United States has to ensure that its policy articulations are matched by visible policy implementations that convince the Indian mind that the United States intends to be a committed and long standing strategic partner of India unlikely to be buffeted by China's and Pakistan's overtures of transactional political expediencies.

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