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Perceptionally, in 2020, analysing by contemporary trends of Russia positioned in a virtual military alliance with China, it loses its worth to Indian foreign policy as a 'Strategic Asset'. Russia ceases to be even an existential counterweight for India against China's contemporary military adventurism.

Russia's value as a 'Strategic Asset' for Indian foreign policy in 2020 stands clearly 'frayed'. Russia-India relations today are marked by more strategic divergences than strategic convergences of yesteryears

Strategic denouement between Russia and India in 2020 would be perceivable to any discernible policy analyst in the wake of the above.

In the case of India, the strategic denouement with Russia becomes painful when India and Indians-at-large see the spectacle of Russia in a strategic and military embrace of China and wooing Pakistan ----two nations engaged in bitter military confrontation with India for decades now.

Conversely, Russia could argue that India moving into an intense security relationship with the United States is equally painful for Russia. But then Russia cannot draw the same equivalence because Russia and the United States are more in a Great Power Game and not in intense military confrontation and military clashes fighting over disputed borders.

Historically, neither the Former Soviet Union nor the successor state of Russia ever provided 'Strategic Ballast' to India against an aggressive China obsessed with disturbing the centuries old India's Himalayan borders with Tibet---now China Occupied Tibet since 1950.

Indians who long romanticised over Russian relationship with India over the past decades are disappointed that Russia today has perceptibly de-valued that Strategic Partnership in favour of China.

Major points that point towards Russia ceasing to be a 'Strategic Asset' for Indian foreign policy are briefly covered below.

Russia Disrespecting India's Strategic Insensitivities over China and Pakistan

While India's foreign policies till so far have respected Russia's strategic sensitivities on a wide variety of geopolitical issues and assiduously tried to 'balance' its growing proximate relations with the United States to those with Russia and even China, the same cannot be said of recent Russian foreign policy

Russia has perceptively been disrespectful of India's strategic sensitivities over China and Pakistan. Even the semblance of neutrality is fading.

China's military adventurism against India in Eastern Ladakh since May 2020 has been widely criticised by all Major Powers. Russia is conspicuous by its feigned neutrality by stating that China and India can sort out the issues amongst themselves.

If the above be so then what is the need for continuance of the Russia-India Strategic Partnership? Using the same argument that Russian diplomats have used justifying the SCO membership of Pakistan for closer relations with Pakistan, then at least under the SCO auspices Russia could have advised restraint on China in Eastern Ladakh against India so as not to endanger the existence of SCO by India withdrawing from it?

Russia over the decades had respected the primacy of India in the Indian Subcontinent as the naturally predominant regional power and modulated its policy towards Pakistan accordingly. Deviating from the above principle, Russia's recent wooing of Pakistan not only disrespects India's strategic sensitivities but also is a petulant response.

The Russian wooing of Pakistan visible from 2014 onwards now incorporates supply of Russian military hardware from helicopters to SAMs and annual joint military exercises of Special Forces. The Deputy Russian Ambassador in New Delhi has asserted that Russia is committed to develop its relations with Pakistan including from the military point of view within the framework of SCO.

Russian lack of sensitivity of India's strategic sensitivities have also been visible by Russia till recently side-lining India on Afghanistan leading

me to comment in a number of my past Papers as the emergence of China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral.

Russia's Discordant Assertions on Indian Foreign Policy Directions in Recent Weeks

In a marked deviation from earlier years it is regrettable to note Russian discordant public assertions of Indian foreign policy directions. These assertions have been aired at the level of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov down to Russian Ambassador to India Nikolai Kudashev and his Deputy in New Delhi.

Russian Foreign Minister was acidic when his assertions implied that the United States was 'using India' against China by involving India proactively in Indo Pacific geopolitics and mechanisms like QUAD which he termed as disruptive. The Foreign Minister forgets that India was an 'Emerging Power' and could not be used by any nation.

The Russian Ambassador to India asserted that Russia's China and Pakistan policies were independent of Russia's India policy. This argument reminds me of the arguments used by the United States with India in earlier decades that its Pakistan policy was independent of its India relationship.

Russia's wooing of Pakistan was sought to be justified by his Deputy on the fig-leaf pretext that it was natural for Russia to carry out military exercises with Pakistan on terrorism (!!) as Russia was obligated by the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to engage Pakistan .

The marked Russian proclivity emerging for some time now to become overly 'defensive' over China and Pakistan should be a warning to Indian foreign policy planners as to which way the Siberian winds are blowing!

Contrastingly, India not at any high level has indulged in advancing such discordant notes or criticism of Russia's moving into a virtual military alliance with China.

Russia's high level discordant assertions reflects Russian denouement with India's foreign policy directions forgetting that Indian foreign policy has tried to balance its relations with all Major Powers, including China.

Russia & China are in a Virtual Military Alliance in 2020 Impacting India's Security

Russian President is reported to have recently stated that it is quite possible that Russia and China enter into a 'Military Alliance' or words to that effect.

Russia and China in 2020 are perceptibly in a virtual military alliance today when the dots are joined of Russia's increasing military

exchanges with China, Joint Naval Exercises on possible war scenarios, and the recent reports acknowledged by China of Joint China-Russia Air Force patrol sorties over the East China Sea and more forceful Chinese assertion of these Joint Bomber Sorties over Sea of Japan

China went to extent of an intimidatory statement that Japan should not forget that it exists in vicinity of Russia and China.

While scope of a virtual Russia-China military alliance may be presently limited to the Western Pacific directed against the United States and Japan but its overall impact on Indian security cannot be discounted.

Briefly, the stark lessons that emerge for India from the above emerging Russia-China virtual military alliance are (1) Russia ceases as a strategic asset for India even in existential counterweight terms (2) China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral which emerged on Afghanistan as pointed in my SAAG Papers couple years back may now emerge as wider in scope with China's pressures on Russia (3) China may be encouraged to greater military confrontation with India assured that Russia would not even remotely now try to restrain China (4) China-Pakistan Axis may now get impetus to enhance its military provocations against India (5) Russian Navy may align with Chinese Navy for greater presence in Indian Ocean to counter QUAD and Western Navies presence

The above perceptive analysis of recent trends in the fraying of Russia-India Strategic Partnership would be incomplete without recounting that historically too there have been instances of India's disappointment with Russia other than the transactional relationship of military hardware supplies geopolitically expedient to both sides.

Some instances are examined below in succeeding paragraphs

Russia Not Standing by India against China in 2020 Eastern Ladakh Military Adventurism has a Precedent in Sino-Indian War 1962

In the critical weeks that China imposed the 1962 War against India resulting in adverse losses of Indian Territory, the Former Soviet Union adopted "Neutral" policy stances. While the United States and the West stood by India. Russia was conspicuously hesitant in not castigating China.

It was the United States and the West that rushed-in military supplies to assist Indian Army whose limited war-preparedness due to PM Nehru's neglect resulted in a debacle. Notably, the United States Air Force C-130s were sent to airlift Indian Army troops to the war-fronts.

In 2020, in the ongoing six-month major Indian military standoff confrontation against China's military adventurism in Eastern Ladakh the successor state of Russia has displayed the same propensity of "Neutrality". Perceptually, once again, Russia stood on the wrong side on both occasions hesitant to castigate China as the aggressor. Russia was in a 'State of Denial' on both occasions. It's assumed 'Neutrality' perceptually connoted an implicit pro-China stance.

Russia's Much Vaunted Strategic Support for India—A Myth

In the last 70 years of independent India, objective analysis would indicate that Russia can be said to have stood with India only twice. The first Russian support of India on Kashmir issue in the United Nations in the 1950s was the notable one.

The second instance of Russia's support during the 1971 India-Pakistan War 1971 in the wake of the signing of the Indo-Russian Friendship Treaty was limited to India's liberation of Bangladesh. When India was transferring Indian Army to the Western Front from the Eastern Front for offensive against West Pakistan Russia then in support of United States support of Pakistan restrained India

Notably, in both the above instances there were no strategic dilemmas for Russia as China was not involved as the opposite party against India.

Russian Massive Military Supplies to India-The Varying Rationales over the Years

Undoubtedly, the Former Soviet Union and Russia later have provided 60-70 % of Indian Armed Forces military inventories during these past decades. But these have been commercial sales and not as military aid or on 'friendship prices'.

During the Cold War years Russia supplied massive amount of military hardware to India but this was impelled by Cold War geopolitical compulsions. Again these were at commercial rates and when it came to spares parts these were leveraged at exorbitant prices

In the decade following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, during President Yeltsin initial years when Russia was trumpeting that Russia was a 'Natural Ally of the West' it incensed India by refusing to supply cryogenic engines to India under US pressure.

In the last 15 years it was India that was subsidising Russia's dwindling armaments industry by continued orders military hardware as India was transiting to diversifying its military inventories.

The foremost question arising from the above is as to why then India's policy establishment persisted in flaunting the Russia-India relationship as the cornerstone of its foreign policy?

Russia-India Strategic Partnership Romanticising was a Cold War Indian Compulsion by PM Nehru and PM Indira Gandhi

Highlighted in my preceding SAAG Paper was a factual assertion that India was always a 'Natural Ally of the West' both by its democratic freedom struggle and its democratic instincts. Further, there were neither shared ideological affinities with Russia or China nor a shared history with them of class wars.

Russia-India Strategic Partnership and Nehru's narcissistic obsession of China till 1962 were romanticised and the Russian romanticising by PM Indira Gandhi at best can be attributed to India's then Cold War compulsions.

Personalised inclinations of Nehru and Indira Gandhi also played a part.

With the end of the Cold War and in the decade following, India just carried on the Russian relationship for reasons of dependence of Indian military supplies on Russia and for the rather geopolitically tenuous reasons of demands for a 'balanced foreign policy

Concluding Observations

In terms of future perspectives, it would be fair to assert that the onus of resuscitating the Russia-India Strategic Partnership would now lie more on Russia than India. And for that to materialise Russia would have to think of drastically resetting its China and Pakistan policies respecting India's strategic sensitivities.

Since the emerging geopolitical scenarios would preclude Russia resorting to the above, India would have to factor-in in its foreign policy that Russia is no longer a strategic asset and be content with an Indian transactional Russia-policy.

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