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No. 46 October 2015

THE US FACTOR IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS

INDIA'S FINE BALANCING

Rup Narayan Das



**INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
STUDIES & ANALYSES**

रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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Rup Narayan Das

INTRODUCTION

In the narrative of the triangular India-China-US relations, United States occupies some degree of strategic space in India-China relations, notwithstanding the fact that Sino-Indian relations, like Sino-US relations, or for that matter, Indo-US relations have their own dynamics and imperatives. India and China are world's two most populated countries occupying vast swathe of territories. Both boast of rich civilizational heritage. Similarities may end here. On the difference, most significant is that India is a vibrant democracy, which achieved independence through predominantly non-violent means, whereas China is a communist country born out of a protracted armed struggle. The two countries were, however, born contemporaneously. India liberated from the British rule on August 15, 1947 and the People's Republic of China came into being as a Communist nation on October 1, 1949. The nuances and ethos of western liberalism had impacted the thought processes to a great deal on the minds of Indian leaders. In the narrative of democratic peace theory, India's credentials and commitments to democracy, independence of judiciary and freedom of press as contrasted with China play out in the triangular India-China-US relations. In recent years, there has been a renewed recognition and emphasis on shared values between India and USA.

The dynamics of the global and regional geo-politics have also found their resonance in the triangular relationship among the three countries. For example; it was the cold war geo-politics that greatly impacted the relationship among the three countries during the Korean crisis in 1950s. As far as the regional geo-politics is concerned, the Kashmir issue and the US support to Pakistan, at times, found their resonance in the triangular relations. The end of cold war, the seismic shift of geo-politics from the Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific, the rise of India and China, globalization and emergence of mutual economic interdependence have also impacted the triangular relations. Thus the triangular relations need to be seen through the prism of all these complex issues.

While the perceived trust deficit and security dilemma, both real and imagined, between India and China, particularly after 1962 war, have been one of the factors for Indo-US strategic and security cooperation, it is seldom remembered that India and China enjoyed a degree of camaraderie and strategic trust, though the term had not acquired the salience then, in early 1950s, which enabled India to be a channel of communication between China and USA. The war of 1962, however, obliterated the mutual trust between the two countries. The adoption of two competitive political systems and attendant economic development model; and the emergence of the two Asian giants as major powers in spite of the asymmetry between the two have provided resonance to the persistent security dilemma and trust deficit between India and China.

Realising the potential and possibilities of India to forge closer strategic and security partnership with the USA, China extends overtures to India to court New Delhi away from the US embrace. Similarly, India occupies some strategic significance in the US strategy to hedge China in its much touted 'Rebalancing' or 'Pivot to Asia' in the theatre of Asia-Pacific, although India would like to assert that there is no such element in India's foreign policy. The China threat or China's assertive behaviour not only provides a rationale for the Indo-US strategic partnership, but also gives succor to the military-industrial complex of the US, and to resurrect its economy. If Indo-US strategic relations can cause consternation to China, Sino-Indian rapport may also cause discomfort to USA. A G-2 between USA and China will also be an issue of anxiety to India.

The monograph aims to determine the extent to which the US is a factor as an intervening variable in the complex India-China relations. The intervening variable works both as determinant and consequent of the triangular relations. The study attempts to probe the research question as to how China perceives U.S. policy towards India in particular, and whether growing Indo-US ties can affect China's security interest negatively. Related to this research question is how India is trying to calibrate its relationship with both USA and China, and how far India has been successful in this endeavour in the context of strategic distrust and security dilemma. It endorses the assertion that "skillful maneuvering and manipulating of great power alignment can add to a

country's existing diplomatic capital in more practical terms.”¹ As the full import of the US factor in Sino-Indian relations can only be grasped in the context of Indo-US relations and Sino-Indian relations, it is imperative that these two aspects are put in perspective, while elucidating the US factor in India-China relations.

¹ Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, Jing-dong Yuan, *China and India: Cooperation or Conflict*, India Research Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 78.

THE KOREAN WAR

The Korean War broke out six months after the Communist assumed power in China in 1949. The triangular relationship among India, China and the USA was played out for the first time in the Korean Peninsula, when North Korean forces invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. India's actions at the UN were complex. While the crisis in the Korean Peninsula found its echoes in the Indian Parliament, India's proactive role was played out in Beijing, the Korean Peninsula and at the UN General Assembly at New York.²

At a time when the nuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula hardly finds echo in the Indian Parliament in recent times, it is worth a while to recall that *Lok Sabha*, the popular chamber of India's bicameral Parliament, was convened on July 31, 1950 to discuss the Korean crisis. Addressing the members of Parliament, President Rajendra Prasad said that Prime Minister Nehru had appealed to the Russian Premier, Joseph Stalin and the Secretary of the United States of America, Dean Acheson to exert their authority and power to localize the armed struggle in Korea. He further said that India wanted to break the deadlock in the Security Council of the United Nations over the admission of the People's Republic of China, so that the international tension might be eased and the way opened to a solution of the Korean problem by discussion in the Security Council³. With his principle belief in a peaceful settlement of disputes, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, at his own initiative, earlier on July 13, 1950 wrote to Dean Acheson and Joseph Stalin, suggesting a broader approach arguing for admission

² Shiv Dayal, *Settlement of International Disputes Under United Nations* (S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1959).

³ LS Deb.cc9-10, July 31, 1950.

of the People's Republic of China into UNSC, which in turn would have facilitated the return of the Soviet representative to the Security Council.⁴

Although Stalin was favourably inclined towards India's stance, Dean Acheson was not quite convinced. Acheson explained in some detail in private correspondence with Nehru as to why the United States disagreed with the Indian approach. The exchange of correspondence indicated American interest in using the Indian Ambassador in Beijing K.M. Panikkar, as a channel to the Chinese Communists. Although Washington regarded Panikkar with suspicion, he was the only non-Communist envoy with good access to the Chinese leadership.⁵

The refusal of the Security Council, under US pressure, to admit People's Republic of China to UN, led to the Soviet Union walking out of the Council. This further precipitated the Korean crisis. In the wake of North Korea's sudden and brazen invasion, all the Commonwealth members including India endorsed a US-sponsored resolution condemning North Korea and calling for the withdrawal of its forces from north of 38th Parallel. At the same time, India made it clear that it would not send troops to fight in Korea, thus distanced herself from the Western bloc. In the Security Council, India, the only Commonwealth country represented except Britain, which refused to vote on the second US-sponsored resolution, calling for the members of the UN to furnish such assistance to South Korea necessary to repel the North Korean armed attack and restore international peace and security. It was only after intense British pressure that Prime Minister Nehru agreed to 'accept' the resolution as a natural progression of the UN action. Still Prime Minister Nehru refused to sanction the British-sponsored, but American-authored third resolution that placed the US government in control of the Unified Command- a resolution that

⁴ Skand R. Tayal, *India and the Republic of Korea: Engaged Democracies*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2014, p. 28.

⁵ Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies*, National Defence University Press, 1992, Washington, pp.73-74.

transferred the Security Council's powers of military coordination to Washington.⁶

While there was a great degree of convergence of approach between India and China, though differed on nuances, there was some degree of divergence of views between India and the US with regard to the unfolding security scenario in the Korean Peninsula. For USA, it was a challenge to prevent the spread of communism and rein in China. India, a nascent democracy, confronted with its own developmental imperatives, cherished peace and stability in the region. USA perceived that Nehru saw the US policy as threatening to enlarge the war in defence of Western interests. Favouring Chinese incorporation of Formosa (Taiwan), and withdrawal of the French from Indo-China, Nehru saw both issues in terms of Asian nationalism, as part of the struggle to free the region from Western domination, rather than as a contest between pro- and anti-communist forces⁷.

In September 1950, MacArthur's forces crossed the 38th Parallel. That evening Zhou Enlai invited Indian Ambassador to China K.M. Panikkar, to his home in Zhongnanhai. Through Panikkar, Zhou issued the first of many warnings. "China cannot remain passive while our neighbour is being invaded.... We need peace, we want peace, and we do not want war for a single day. War would slow down our reconstruction. But we cannot be bullied. We are not afraid to resist invasion. This must be understood."⁸ Pannikar passed on Zhou's warning to the US interlocutors. President Truman declared that he did not take Panikkar's report "as that of an impartial observer", believing that the Indian envoy played "the game of the Chinese Communists fairly regularly".⁹

⁶ Robert Barnes, "Branding Aggressor: The Commonwealth, the United Nations and the Chinese Intervention in the Korean War, November 1950-January 1951", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.33, No.2, April 2010, p.235.

⁷ Kux N.3, p.73.

⁸ Han Suyin, *Eldest Son, Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China, 1898-1976*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1994, p.225.

⁹ Harry S. Truman, *Memories, Years of Trial and Hope*, Garden City; Doubleday & Company, Inc; 1956, pp.361-62.

In December 1950, just after the Chinese routed UN forces in North Korea, a State Department policy review of South Asia made it clear that Washington's main concern about India was that the country not to be "lost" the way China was. "With China under Communist domination", "Soviet powers now encroach along the perimeter of the Indian sub-continent. India has become the pivotal state in non-Communist Asia by virtue of its relative power, stability and influence".¹⁰

The estrangement in Indo-US relationship in terms of the US military assistance to Pakistan, the US interference on Kashmir issue much to the chagrin of India and its nudging to join in military pacts with the US such as SEATO and the Baghdad Pact to contain China, which had military implications for India, also played out in the triangular relation. The Korean crisis witnessed arguably the best period of Sino-Indian relations, which reached its pinnacle in the signing of the Panchsheel in 1954. This period was also one of the most difficult phases of Indo-US relations. The estrangement of Indo-US relations was partly due to Sino-Indian cooperation in both the Korean crisis and the crisis in Indo-China and India's intransigent attitude towards the USA in its containment strategy. This period also witnessed efforts of the US to prevent India from moving closer to China. The US, however, didn't succeed in its endeavour, which impelled it to court India's adversary, Pakistan.

During the next two years after the cease-fire in the Korean Peninsula, India participated actively in the arrangements to supervise the repatriation of prisoners of war. India was not directly represented at the Political Conference because of the opposition of the Western countries, particularly the United States and the Great Britain; later, however India took a leading role in the momentous negotiation in which decisive personal role was played by Krishna Menon. India's pivotal role as the Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission was acknowledged internationally. India's role in Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission, however, was not liked very much

¹⁰ Kux N.3, p.87, quoting *Foreign Relations of The United States (FRUS)*, Vol. V, p. 1478.

by the USA. While Washington was annoyed with India for not appreciating the danger of communism, Nehru was not happy about strident anti-communism of President Eisenhower and Dulles.

India's role in the Korean crisis and also, in the Indo-China imbroglio, in spite of minor hiccups here and there endeared India to China and created a sort of bonhomie and camaraderie between the two emerging Asian powers that reached its climax in the signing of the lofty Panchsheel Agreement in 1954 and continued till the Bandung Conference a year later in 1955. Thereafter, fissures developed casting shadows on the relationship between the two countries. As far as the triangular relation was concerned, India and USA continued to differ on Communist China. Nehru argued for Beijing's acceptance into the UN system. He thought it only a matter of time until Formosa (Taiwan) fell. During the period in which Eisenhower was the President of USA, he believed that the Chinese needed to follow basic norms of international conduct before they joined the United Nations. Regarding India's non-alignment, Nehru emphasized that this approach helped keep defence expenditures down since the policy minimized the chances of conflict on the Himalayan borders, the only logical security threat to India. In an argument that impressed President Eisenhower, Nehru asserted that, given India's extant economic weakness, having India as an ally would "serve to weaken rather than strengthen" the western bloc.¹¹

¹¹ Kux, N.3, p.142.

1962 WAR: THE TURNING POINT

Sino-India relations started deteriorating in the middle of 1959. Hostilities broke out between Tibetan and Chinese forces and Dalai Lama left Lhasa on March 17, 1959 with the intention of seeking asylum in India. The news of the uprising led to a spontaneous outburst of sympathy with the Tibetan people in India. There were demands for an interventionist policy by those political parties that had, through out the fifties never been reconciled to China's occupation of Tibet. While there was internal outrage in India with regard to development in Tibet, most Western countries, the United States, in particular, saw in this development an excellent opportunity to wean India away from her policy of neutrality and enter into anti-China, anti-Soviet and anti-Communist positions.¹²

The Chinese attack on India coincided with yet another major international development of the Cuban missile crisis. It is debatable if the Chinese attack on India was premeditated or the Cuban missile crisis was just a coincidence. Hindsight tends to suggest that it was by conscious deliberation and design.

According to Rama Chandra Guha, "The border war provoked a reluctant tilt towards the United States, who had come forth with arms while Soviet Russia stayed neutral¹³." J.K. Gailbraith, the US ambassador to India, the Harvard University economics professor was quite appreciative of Nehru's ideology of a calibrated economy. He was enthusiastic to extend American support to India's crisis at the India-China border.

¹² A.K. Damodaran, "Foreign Policy in Action", in *A Century History of the Indian National Congress (1885-1985)*, vol.Four, Vikash Publishing House Private Limited, New Delhi, 1990, p.476.

When the Sino-Indian war was at its peak, Gailbraith met Prime Minister Nehru on October 23, 1962 and strongly urged him to see how sensitive the issue (Cuban missile crisis) was for the USA and to support the US efforts in the U.N. to have U.N. inspectors go to the Cuban missile sites.¹⁴

R.D. Pradhan, the Private Secretary to the late former Defence Minister Y.V.Chavan, recalls in his book *Debate to the Revival* that “the request unambiguously asked that the United States should also send planes flown by American personnel to assist the Indian Air Force in any battles with the Chinese in Indian air space and also two B-47 bomber squadrons to enable India to strike at Chinese bases and air fields”. Making a plea for Nehru’s request, Galbraith wrote to President Kennedy, “... all his life Nehru had sought to avoid being dependent upon the United States and the United Kingdom, most of his personal reluctance to ask (or thank) for aid has been based on this pride... Now nothing is important to him, more personally than politically, than to maintain the semblance of this independence. His age no longer allows of readjustment. To a point we can, I feel, be generous on this”¹⁵.

On October 26, 1962, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made an appeal to major world leaders for support and assistance against Chinese attack. The letter said:

...The issue involved is not one of small territorial gains, one way or other, but standards of international behaviour between neighbouring countries and whether the world will allow the principles of ‘Might is Right’ to prevail in international relations.

Finally he asserted:

In this hour of crisis, when we are engaged in resisting this aggression, we are confident that we shall have your sympathy

¹³ Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, Picador, New Delhi, 2007, p. 339.

¹⁴ J.K. Gailbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1969, p. 430.

¹⁵ Ibid.

and the support of all countries, not only because of their friendly relations with us, but also because our struggle is in the interests of the world peace and is directed to the elimination of deceit, dissimulation and force in international relations.¹⁶

Nehru wrote a letter to President John F. Kennedy, soliciting American support and assistance. Gailbraith also met the beleaguered Defence Minister Krishna Menon, who later demitted his office to Y. V. Chavan.

President Kennedy's response was immediate. Assuring Nehru of his support and sympathy, he suggested, "This is a practical matter and, if you wish, my Ambassador in New Delhi can discuss with you and the officials of your government; what we can do to translate our support into terms which are practically more useful to you as soon as possible."

3.1. Nehru's letters to Kennedy

On November 19, 1962, in the wake of the debacle when the Chinese troops were almost poised to reach the foot hills, Nehru wrote two letters in quick succession on the same day to President John F. Kennedy, requesting the immediate dispatch of a minimum of twelve squadrons of supersonic all-weather fighter aircrafts and setting up of radar communications to defend Indian cities against anticipated attack by the Chinese air force.

Now that the said two letters have been declassified and are available in some sections of the public domain, the controversy with regard to the contents of the letters particularly regarding the American 'aircraft carrier' can be set to rest. The credit for publishing these two letters in the Indian media goes to the veteran editor, Inder Malhotra.¹⁷ In his first letter of November 19, 1962, Nehru acknowledged his gratitude

¹⁶ R.D Pradhan, *Debate to Revival: Y B Chavan as Defence Minister, 1962-1965*, Orient Longman, 1999, pp., 35-36.

¹⁷ Inder Malhotra, "J.N. To JFK, 'Eyes only'", *The Indian Express*, November 15, 2010; also "Letters from the darkest hour", *The Indian Express*, November 17, 2010. The Internet editions, however, do not show Nehru's letters. Pl. see the hard copy of November 17 edition to view Nehru's two letters. Pl. see Annexure 1 and 2.

to President Kennedy and the Government of US, for speedily providing small arms and ammunitions to India. He then apprised President Kennedy that the Chinese were, by and large, in possession of the greater portion of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and were poised to over-run Chushul in Ladakh. He further said that there was nothing to stop them after Chushul till they reached Leh. He also informed him that he was separately writing to Prime Minister Macmillan to keep him informed of these developments.

In the second letter that Nehru wrote to President Kennedy, “within a few hours of the first”, he said, “The situation in NEFA Command has deteriorated still further. Bomdila has fallen and the retreating forces from Sela have been trapped between the Sela Ridge and Bomdila. A serious threat has developed to our Digboi oil fields in Assam. With the advance of Chinese massive strength, the entire Brahmaputra Valley is seriously threatened and unless something is done immediately to stem the tide, the whole of Assam, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland would also pass into Chinese hands.” He further said, “The Chinese have poised massive forces in Chumbi Valley between Sikkim and Bhutan and another invasion from that direction appears imminent. . . In Ladakh, as I have said in my earlier communication, Chushul is under heavy attack. We have also noticed increasing air activity by the Chinese air force. . .” After pointing out that hitherto, he had “restricted our request to essential equipment” and thanking the US for assistance “so readily given”, he went on, “We did not ask for more comprehensive assistance, particularly air assistance, because of wider implications. . . in the global context and we did not want to embarrass our friends.” Having said this, he hastened to emphasize, “The situation that has developed is, however, desperate. We have to have more comprehensive assistance if the Chinese are to be prevented from taking over the whole of Eastern India. Any delay in this assistance reaching us will result in nothing short of a catastrophe for our country.”

Nehru was rather categorical about India’s wish list at that critical juncture, when there was grave security threat to India’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. Not surprisingly, therefore, Nehru’s request for comprehensive aid goes into minute details, and is prefaced by the statement, “We have repeatedly felt the need to use our air arm in support of our land forces but have been unable to do so because in

the present state... we have no defence against retaliatory action by the Chinese.” In this context, his specific demands were for “minimum of 12 squadrons of supersonic all weather fighters and a modern radar cover (which) we don’t have.” Nehru added that the US air force personnel “will have to man these fighters and radar installations while our personnel are being trained.” More significantly, he spelt out that US fighter transport aircraft “manned by the US personnel will be used for the present to protect our cities and installations from Chinese attacks and maintain our communications... and if possible... to assist the Indian Air Force in air battles with the Chinese air force over Indian areas where air action by the IAF against Chinese communication lines, supplies and troop concentrations may lead to counter air action by the Chinese. Any air action to be taken against the Chinese beyond the limits of our country, e.g. in Tibet, will be taken by the IAF planes manned by Indian personnel.”¹⁸

It was indeed a very agonizing and excruciating experience for Prime Minister Nehru who all his life had tried his best to maintain India’s self-esteem and independence against all odds. India’s Ambassador in USA, B.K. Nehru was also pained and anguished at the trauma of Prime Minister Nehru. Capturing the despondency, he very poignantly wrote in his biography, “... the morale of our leadership had collapsed and the unconquerable spirit of that valiant, fearless, unbending leader who had led India to Independence and also maintained that independence under great pressure from both the Western powers and the communist bloc was broken,” He further wrote, “the tone of the telegrams I got conveying the message to the President for help was not the tone that I had been used to in all my dealings with Jawaharlal Nehru from childhood on. Nor were the words used his words. His only contribution to these messages seemed to have been his signature; he seemed to have been in a state of mind where he did not quite know what he was signing.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ B.K.Nehru, *Nice Guys Finish Second*, Penguin India, New Delhi, 1997, p.404.

The USA, the UK and the Commonwealth countries promptly responded to Nehru's request for military aid. There was, however, a logistic problem. Since the Indian armed forces did not have American weapons, the emergency aid had to be only in respect of those equipments which were common to the American and the Commonwealth countries or which the American could spare in adequate quantities to cover India's requirement. India received self-loading rifles from the UK and Australia and ammunitions for its own weapons from the Commonwealth countries. USA provided some ammunition of the World War II; weapons like 4.2 mortars and 3.7 howitzers. USA also supplied 0.30 Browning machine guns, which were subsequently replaced. Considerable quantities of wireless equipment (models which were obsolescent in the US forces), spares for Dakota and Fairchild Packet aircraft, snow clearing equipment, winter clothing etc., were also received from the USA. In December 1962, at Nassau, President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan, agreed to provide military aid to India to the extent of \$ 120 million of which 60 million would be from USA and the balance from the Commonwealth countries. After setting off the above mentioned emergency supplies, twenty four more Fairchild Packet supply dropping aircraft from USA were received by India, besides similar military assistance from the UK and Canada²⁰.

In the first eight months of 1963, a squadron of C-130 (also called Hercules) aircraft was deployed by the US Air Force to drop supplies to the Indian troops in Ladakh. But at the end of the period the aircrafts were withdrawn. An Indian request for this transport aircraft was not acceded to.²¹ The fact remains that the fleet of C-130 aircrafts was found immensely useful during those critical times. During those days, the mainstay of the Indian Air Force's transport fleet was the Russian AN12 four-engine aircraft, a sturdier and faster aircraft than the C-130. But the Indian Air Force was finding it difficult to transport heavy loads and personnel to the short Leh airfield located at an altitude of

²⁰ K. Subramanyam, "U.S. Policy towards India", *China Report*, January-April 1972, p. 44.

²¹ *ibid*, p. 45.

10,500 feet. The unpressurised AN 12 was also unsuitable to fly troops to the high-altitude airbase. Over a nine-month period, the 12 C-130 detachment brought in thousands of troops to the Chinese frontier, flying regular missions to Ladakh as well as airstrips in the North-East on the Arunachal Pradesh border. In one mission, an aircraft flew out 104 Tibetan orphans whose parents had been killed during the border clash from Leh to South India.²²

In 1964, there was another agreement between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan, at Birchgrove where they agreed on a programme of military assistance to India under which the United States and the Commonwealth would contribute \$50 million each. During this period, it was found that the United States was unwilling to provide lethal military items to India fearing that it would offend Pakistan. At the same time, a large body of American personnel (around 120) was stationed in New Delhi to supervise that the equipment, provided by USA, was solely used by troops deployed on the northern borders.

The year also witnessed heightened defence contact and engagement between India and the USA. Y. V. Chavan, who replaced Krishna Menon as India's Defence Minister visited USA in April 1964. Chavan held discussions with the US Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara. McNamara described the US perception of the Chinese threat and also outlined the parameters within which the United State could help with India's defence requirements. McNamara came down harshly on the state of India's defence preparedness, especially India's inferior quality of weaponry. This was largely true as Indian soldiers were still armed with 303 Enfield rifles of the nineteenth century vintage with which they had faced Chinese troops armed with semi-automatic rifles.²³

²² Manu Puby, "1962 war hero Hercules to make a comeback", *The Indian Express*, July 5, 2010, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/2547147/posts>

²³ Pradhan, n. 16, p.185.

The motivation behind the American military assistance was clearly articulated by Gailbraith in a letter to President Kennedy. He wrote, “The Chinese are not quarrelling with the Soviets over some academic points of doctrine. They are, one must assume, serious about their revolution. The natural area of expansion is in their part of the world. The only Asian country that really stands in there are India and *paripasu* the only Western country that is assuming responsibility is the United States. It seems obvious to me [that] there should be some understanding between the two countries. We should expect to make use of India’s political and geographical position; political power and manpower or any how ask?”²⁴

3.2. The ‘Air Umbrella’ Controversy

Considering India’s reputation to its avowed commitment to the principles and policies of Non-Alignment, and Nehru’s sensitivity to it, the nature and extent of USA’s military engagement with India sparked off a lot of controversy, which dominated the debate both in Parliament and outside. Questions were raised about India seeking an “air umbrella” from the United States. Official agencies denied that any such request was made. Nehru openly rejected the concept of the “air umbrella”. There were also reports about whether India and the US had entered into a joint defence agreement. As a consequence, when in mid-November US supersonic planes, flying over 10,000 miles landed in New Delhi, they were given a cool reception. From the Indian side Air Marshall A.M. Engineer was present to welcome the American crew, while the US ambassador Chester Bowles was keen that the Defense Minister should do so. Nehru’s efforts to down-play the US assistance were not helpful when the *People’s Daily* described the joint air exercise as a threat to the security of Asian countries. It added “the (joint air) maneuvers were proof that the Indian government was deliberately creating tension on the Sino-Indian border under its own fabricated pretext of Chinese aggression.” In order to malign India’s

²⁴ Guha, n. 13, quoting from *Galbraith to Kennedy*, January 29,1963, copy in Dean Rusk Papers, University of Georgia.

credibility as the leader of the Non-aligned, the *People's Daily* further said, "The description of India as Non-aligned was sheer mockery to countries which really pursued the policy of non-alignment".²⁵

In the absence of a copy of the letter, the 'air umbrella' controversy created quite a furor in Indian Parliament on March 15, 1965, when Sudhir Ghosh, a member of the *Rajya Sabha*, raised the issue in the *Rajya Sabha* on that day. Angry demands for his expulsion were made for daring to speak in Parliament the truth about the desperate appeal for help made by Nehru to President Kennedy when India lay open to a serious invasion by the Chinese. Explaining his position Mr. Ghosh said in the *Rajya Sabha* on March 15, 1965, "... it is not widely known that in those dark days of India's peril, there was standing just outside Calcutta, near the mouth of Hoogly river, about a couple of miles outside the territorial waters, one of the largest and newest aircraft carriers of the United States navy, fitted with a full complement of supersonic aircraft and all the latest gadgets of destructions, sufficient to pulverize an advancing Chinese army, however large. One great power knows how to give signal to another great power, and it is not widely known that a signal was given by one side to the other that if they advanced any further, they would be forcing the hands of the President of the United States." He further asserted that "the American aircraft carrier with all its means of destruction was there, not on the initiative of American President; it was there at the request of Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru, who had asked for American air protection, which was provided by President Kennedy. In the hour of our danger, so proud a man as our former Prime Minister, realized that, in the last analysis, it was not a practical proposition to defend India from the military might of communist China without using the military might of the United States..."²⁶

Nehru's letter of November 19, which is now available, makes it clear that he didn't ask for the deployment of the aircraft carrier. Ambassador Gailbraith, however, wrote in his memoir, "...I also proposed that

²⁵ Pradhan, n.16, p. 104.

²⁶ *Rajya Sabha Deb.* March 15, 1965, cc.3466.

we ask that the elements of the Seventh Fleet be sent into the Bay of Bengal, although this violated my rule that we do nothing that Indians did not request...’’²⁷ Is there any causal connection between the deployment of the Seventh Fleet and China’s unilateral offer of cease fire on November 20, 1962? According to K. Subramanyam, the Chinese had offered unilateral cease fire on November 20. *Enterprise*, the nuclear powered aircraft carrier that USA deployed in the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 Bangladesh War took three days from Tonkin Gulf to Singapore, one day to move up the Malacca Straits. *Enterprise* is a much faster vehicle than the carriers deployed by the *Seventh Fleet* in 1962. Before one links up the Chinese offer of cease fire with any US moves, some of these facts must be taken into account. On the other hand, the Chinese had reasons to worry that their logistics were getting over-extended and consequently their offer of unilateral cease fire was a brilliant diplomatic move to cover up their military limitations.²⁸

3.3. Intensified Cooperation between Intelligence Agencies

Yet another major offshoot of the Sino-Indian war of 1962 in the triangular relations was the intensification of cooperation and confidentiality of the intelligence agencies of the two countries between Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the USA and Intelligence Bureau (IB) of India. The CIA, however, had been active in Tibet, at least during the uprising there and the flight of Dalai Lama to India in 1959, the CIA had been air-dropping a limited amount of supplies to the Tibetan resistance. These flights first staged from erstwhile East Pakistan and later from Thailand, briefly crossed Indian Territory on their way to Tibet. Publicly India feigned ignorance, but the CIA on the flights had unofficially briefed Intelligence Bureau (IB) Director B.N. Mullick. Mullick, who had long harboured concerns about a Chinese military threat, privately assured the CIA that he supported these efforts; he

²⁷ Galbraith, n. 14, p. 487.

²⁸ K. Subramanyam, “U.S. policy towards India”, *The China Report*, January- April, 1972, p. 47.

also claimed that Nehru, who sympathized with the Tibetans and had been soured by Beijing's heavy-handed tactics, did not oppose overt American aid. However, since Nehru was still committed to maintaining cordial ties with China, the best Mullik could offer was a wink and a nod.²⁹

Immediately after the 1962 war, USA assisted India in raising certain paramilitary formations in the India-China border. The creation of Tibet Force was one such instance, which was conceptualized to harness the unconventional mind of the Tibetan refugees and convert them into warriors. With the help of American financial aid and a CIA instructor, General Sujana Singh Uban set up the camp in the tranquil hill village of Chakrata. In the end, the Tibetan unit exceeded all expectations. The Tibetans particularly excelled as parachutists and had the distinction of conducting jumps at the altitude up to 15,400 feet using chutes specially procured by the CIA. A second joint CIA-IB project involved raising a cadre of long-term Tibetan Agents that could establish a resistance network inside their homeland. The agents would receive extensive tradecraft training at a CIA base in Colorado. As the project was originally conceived, India would provide limited assistance during their infiltration back into Tibet.³⁰

A third joint programme with the objective to lend air support to the Tibetan commandos and agents was the Aviation Research Center (ARC), an aviation outfit. It was actually a subsection of the IB and was staffed by IB officers and aircrews from the Indian Air Force. Its aircrafts consisted of transport and light planes mostly from USA, courtesy the CIA. Mr. Biju Patnaik, the then Chief Minister of Odisha and a veteran Parliamentarian, was instrumental in setting up the project. Patnaik visited USA to work out the concept with the CIA. The American saw merit in the plan and dispatched two officers to India for initial fact finding tour. Rameshwar Nath Kao was its first Director. Patnaik had also provided land for the air base at Charbatia in Odisha for the use of ARC³¹.

²⁹ M.S. Kohli and Kenneth Conboy, *Spies in the Himalayas: Secret Mission and Perilous Climbs*, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2003, p.15.

³⁰ Ibid, p, 16.

³¹ Ibid.

3.3. The U-2 Incident

As USA was deeply concerned about China's nuclear programme, it wanted to keep a tab on the development of nuclear weapons by China. Not many options were available to monitor China's nuclear programme. One option available to the USA was satellite imagery, which was not very developed then and the resolution of the imagery was not of very high quality. Another U.S. option, the U-2 spy plane, had its own set of problems. As China's test sites were believed to be concentrated in distant Xinjiang, spy planes launched from airstrips on Taiwan did not have the range to make the round trip. The CIA had earlier made discreet use of an airfield at Peshawar, Pakistan, which put Xinjiang within the range. But that had ended after the diplomatic furor following the 1960 shoot-down over the Soviet Union of a U-2 launched from Peshawar. It was against this backdrop that the ARC airbase at Charbatia configured between USA and India. When the agency appealed for use of Charbatia as a U-2 staging facility, India agreed³².

In May 1964, a small CIA team arrived at Charbatia with an unmarked spy plane. As planned, the plane performed a single mission over Xinjiang and headed back to Charbatia. As it touched down, its brake failed, and the U-2 rolled off the end of the runway. Wary of the media exposure, ARC personnel put the aircraft into the hanger and waited for the CIA technicians to make the necessary repairs. Once they were completed, the plane was discretely flown out without attempting further over-flights from Indian soil. Later in December 1964, India reconsidered its ban and it allowed a single CIA-piloted U-2 to briefly stage from Charbatia.³³

Years after, Kohli and Conboy wrote about the U-2 incident, in a report based on the latest set of declassified documents obtained from the CIA under the freedom of Information Act in August 1963 whereas the independent National Security Archive (NSA) shed more light on

³² Ibid, p.23.

³³ Ibid, p.24.

the incident. According to this report, the use of Charbatia, was agreed during a meeting between President Kennedy and the visiting Indian President S. Radhakrishnan on June 3, 1963, but Indian work to improve it took longer than expected, so the missions presumed from Thailand's Takhili. The report further said that the first mission out of Charbatia did not take place until May 1964. The operation ceased consequent upon the death of Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru. The US detachment stayed on at Charbatia till 1967 and served as an adjunct to the main operational base in Thailand.

The report further said, the pilots and aircraft left Charbatia, but others remained in place to save staging costs. In December 1964, when Sino-Indian tensions increased along the border, Detachment G returned to Charbatia and conducted three highly successful missions, satisfying all requirements for the Sino-Indian border region. By this time, however, Takhli had become the main base for Detachment G's Asian operations, and Charbatia served merely as a forward staging base. The information gathered from aerial surveillance was yet another aspect of the close Indo-US cooperation in the immediate aftermath of the Sino-Indian war of 1962.

3.4 Did Kennedy contemplate nuking China after 1962 war?

A book entitled *Listening In: The Secret White House Recordings of John F. Kennedy*³⁴, co-authored by Ted Widmar and Caroline Kennedy published in 2012 claimed that six months after 1962 India-China border war, the US had contemplated using nuclear weapons in the event of another attack from Beijing as it was determined to prevent an Indian defeat at the hands of the Communists. The then president John F. Kennedy at a meeting with his top military aide on May 9, 1963, had expressed clear determination not to let Beijing defeat New Delhi, with his defense secretary even talking about using nuclear weapons against China if it

³⁴ Ted Widmar and Caroline Kennedy, *Listening In: The Secret White House Recordings of John F. Kennedy*, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB434/docs/U2%20-%20Chapter%205.pdf>

launched another attack against India. It quoted Kennedy saying in an inaudible voice, “I gather we’re coming to the defense of Israel and Saudi Arabia. What I think we ought to think about is, (unclear it’s desirable (?) for us, to give India a guarantee, which actually we would carry out. I don’t think there’s any doubt that this country is determined that we couldn’t permit the Chinese to defeat the Indians.” Kennedy was quoted by the book as making these remarks in the White House meeting with his defense secretary Robert McNamara and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Davenport “Max” Taylor.

This claim can be taken with a pinch of salt. In yet another place Strobe Talbott, the then secretary of state of US writes, “In 1964, the year that Nehru died, China conducted its first test of a nuclear weapon. India sought security guarantees from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. That idea went nowhere. Washington regarded India as a country that was, if not playing for the Soviet side, then at least rooting for Moscow from the sidelines. *In any event, the United States was not about to commit itself to going to war with China if there was another Sino-Indian conflict* (emphasis added).³⁵

³⁵ Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb*, Penguin Viking, New Delhi, 2004, p.11.

POST 1962 DEVELOPMENTS

After the Sino-Indian war of 1962, India's policy of non-alignment was questioned both inside as well as outside the Parliament. There was also demand that India must align with the West, particularly the USA. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru initiating the resolution on the proclamation of emergency and aggression by China on November 8, 1962 in *Lok Sabha* acknowledged the swift help extended by western democracies like the USA and the UK, France and friendly countries like the Soviet Union. There were demands from the member(s) to acknowledge this in the resolution.³⁶

4.1. Move towards closer cooperation with U.S.A.

It is worthwhile to recall the initiative and efforts of a very prominent Member of Parliament and a close confidant of Prime Minister Nehru, Sudhir Ghosh, who pleaded with Nehru to forge strategic cooperation with the USA. In a written memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister Nehru on January 2, 1963, Mr. Ghosh proposed for a diplomatic arrangement between India on the one hand and a group of Parliamentary democracies including the USA, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand on the other side. His proposal was to supply military equipment necessary for enlarging Indian Army and Air Force so as to effectively deal with threat to India's territorial integrity, freedom and democracy. Ghosh asserted that the proposed arrangement was to be directed only against China and not any other communist country of the world. Ghosh further pointed out that he was not envisaging the kind of military involvement that existed between Pakistan and the USA, with American military installations located in Pakistan territory nor was he proposing military pacts like SEATO or CENTO. What he suggested was that simple letters were exchanged

³⁶ *LS Deb.*, November 8, 1962.

between the Prime Minister of India and the Prime Ministers of Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the President of the U.S.A to the effect that India requested and these countries agreed that if at any time during the next ten years, if China threatened to violate the territorial integrity and the independence of India, these countries would automatically come to the defence of India.³⁷

Nehru in his reply to Ghosh said that the proposal was tantamount to a military alliance and that it would be bad for India as well as from the point of view of world peace. Nehru, however, allowed him to visit USSR and USA to canvass support for India. Ghosh, thus, visited Washington in March 1963 and interacted with the key men in the US Senate, the House of Representatives and the American Administration, and rounded it off with a talk with President Kennedy himself. Ghosh found the response of the US Senators extremely supportive and sensitive to the Indian cause. He was given a seat on the Senate floor to sit with the Senators to watch the proceedings. He felt that there was no lack of feeling for India and they were eager to hear all that he had to say as Mr. Nehru's unofficial emissary. The forty odd leading men with whom he discussed the India-China situation included most of the leading members of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and their counterparts in the House as well as leading men in the Administration like Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara and Mr. Harriman. He also met Mr. McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Adviser to President Kennedy.

Thus, the post 1962 witnessed arguably the high point of India-US security ties, which coincided with the Cuban missile crisis, and Washington's relief programme, which began in the early 1950s and extended into the next decade. According to a Canadian scholar, who had worked on India, "In the late 1950s and early 1960s, both humanitarian and security concerns worked to India's advantage in the containment of China. In the view of the State Department, "South Asia became a testing ground for the free world. In this area, it was

³⁷ Sudhir Ghosh, *Gandhi's Emissary*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2008, pp.267-68.

determined whether nations could surmount tremendous economic and social problems, and achieve far-reaching changes in their entire pattern of life without resorting to the totalitarian system of communism.”³⁸

³⁸ Arthur G. Rubinoff, “Missed Opportunities and Contradictory Policies: Indo-American Relations in the Clinton-Rao Years”, *Pacific Affairs*, September 1996, pp. 499-515

1971-1991: SINO-US CONVERGENCE, AND INDO-US ESTRANGEMENT

The two decades 1971-1991 occupies a very significant period not only in the context of international relations, but also in the triangular relationship among the three countries. In the Indian sub-continent, it witnessed the victory of India defeating Pakistan and the birth of a new nation, Bangladesh. This had a salutary effect on the regional geopolitics and power configuration. Earlier, India had signed the Friendship Treaty with the USSR in 1971. Internally China recuperated from the internal convulsion of the tumultuous Cultural Revolution (1966-69) and set on the process of rapprochement with the USA, which started with the secret visit of President Nixon's national security advisor Henry Kissinger, to China in 1971. Pakistan played a very critical role in the rapprochement between the USA and China. Indo-US security relationship, which the Chinese attack of India had impelled, however, didn't continue for long. The reason for this was not difficult to fathom. The cold war and India's security pact with the erstwhile USSR and finally the 1971 war in which USA tilted in favour of Pakistan, more accurately a tilt towards China, and the sending of the US carrier *Enterprise* soured the Indo-US relations. This period further witnessed the convergence and synchronization of the foreign policy goals of USA, China and Pakistan in the subcontinent. Pakistan played a catalytic role in bringing the rapprochement between USA and China.

President Nixon in his Foreign Policy Report to the US Congress on February 9, 1972 declared, "It makes no sense to assume... that a country's democratic and political system or its size requires our automatic agreement with every aspect of its foreign policy"³⁹. The

³⁹ Subramayam, n. 28, p. 36.

historic Shanghai Communiqué, which President Nixon signed with Premier Zhou Enlai on February 28, 1972, facilitating the diplomatic relations between the two countries clearly and unambiguously reflected the US tilt in favour of a Sino-Pak nexus. The Communiqué much to the annoyance of India said, "...It firmly maintains that India and Pakistan should, in accordance with the United Nations resolution on Indo-Pakistan question, immediately withdraw all their forces to their respective territories and to their own side of the ceasefire line in Jammu and Kashmir and firmly support the Pakistan Government and people in their struggle to preserve their independence and sovereignty and the people of Jammu and Kashmir in their struggle for right of self-determination..."⁴⁰

In the wake of the emerging Sino-US rapprochement and Washington's tilt towards Pakistan, New Delhi was worried that a US-China alliance was planning to open a third front during the Bangladesh war in 1971. However, apart from accusing India of infringing on the territory of Tibet along the Sikkim border and mobilizing some troops locally, China made no military intervention during the war⁴¹.

5.1 THE END OF COLD WAR, 1991: SINO-INDIAN ENGAGEMENT

The disintegration of the erstwhile USSR and the end of cold war in 1991, not only transformed the geo-political spectrum, but also had their bearing on the US factor in Sino-Indian relations. India restored diplomatic relationship with China in 1976 with the appointment of Mr. K.R. Narayanan as its ambassador to Beijing. The end of Cold War removed the major obstacle in the Sino-Indian relations, which in turn gave fillip to strategic trust to Sino-Indian relations. In India also, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, initiated bold economic reforms and unveiled 'look east' policy in the sphere of foreign policy. The Tiananmen Squire incident of 1989 had also strained the relationship

⁴⁰ Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, February 28, 1972, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d203>

⁴¹ Sidhu, n.1, p. 20

between the USA and China. The disintegration of the erstwhile USSR and the end of cold war also resonated in the triangular relationship among the three countries. It paved the way for engagement between India and China. US didn't construe Sino-Indian engagement detrimental to its interest. USA's strategy, on the contrary, was to checkmate India by empowering Pakistan. This was also the period during which the Indo-US strategic partnership was yet to start. All these factors put together provided a very conducive geo-strategic environment for a heightened engagement between India and China.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China in 1988, during which the Joint Working Group (JWG) for settlement of the border dispute was established. The visit created a very conducive pitch for Sino-Indian engagement. Rajiv Gandhi, however, didn't live long to carry forward Sino-Indian engagement to greater heights. The responsibility fell on the succeeding government headed by Narasimha Rao. It was against this backdrop that the visit of then Defence Minister Sharad Pawar to China took place in July 1993. Pawar's was the first ever visit by a Defence Minister of India to China. During Pawar's visit, the Chinese military leadership emphasized the importance of troop reduction in the border region as a result of prohibitive costs.

The visit of Defence Minister Pawar was followed by the visit of Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao in September 1993, during which an important Confidence Building Measure (CMB), the *Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Area*, was signed. The Agreement was indeed a breakthrough. It affirmed that the India-China boundary question shall be resolved through peaceful and friendly consultations and that neither side shall use or threaten to use force against the other. It also stipulated that "pending an ultimate solution of the boundary question between the two countries, the two sides shall strictly observe the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and that no activities of either side shall overstep the LAC".

The Agreement further envisaged that: (1) each government will keep its military forces in the area along the LAC to a minimum level compatible with the friendly neighbourly relations between the two countries, (2) that the two sides agree to reduce their military forces along the LAC in conformity with the requirement of the principle of

mutual and equal security to ceilings to be mutually agreed upon, and (3) that the reduction of military forces shall be carried out by stages and sector-wise in mutually agreed upon geographical locations in the areas along the LAC.

Three years later, this CBM was followed by *Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas* during the visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin to India in November 1996. The Agreement, while reiterating and reaffirming the intent and spirit of the 1993 CBM, among other things, stipulated that the major categories of armament to be reduced or limited include combat tanks; infantry combat vehicles, guns (including howitzers) with 75 mm or bigger caliber, mortars with 120 mm or bigger caliber, surface-to-surface missiles, and any other weapon systems.

5.2. Pokhran Nuclear Explosion, 1998 and Indo-US Estrangement

While during this period Sino-Indian relations witnessed substantial progress in terms of mutual trust and Confidence Building Measures, India's second nuclear explosion on May 11, 1998, carried out by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) played out in the triangular relations among the three countries. In a letter to the US President Bill Clinton, which was published by the *New York Times*, Vajpayee sought to explain the rationale for the underground nuclear test. He wrote, "We have an overt nuclear state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Although our relations with that country have improved in the last decade or so, an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours to become a covert nuclear state." He, however, assured Clinton that India would continue to work with USA in a multilateral or bilateral framework to promote the cause of nuclear disarmament.⁴²

⁴² "Nuclear Anxiety; Indian's letter to Clinton on the Nuclear Testing", *The New York Times*, May 13, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/13/world/nuclear-anxiety-indian-s-letter-to-clinton-on-the-nuclear-testing.html>

Indo-US relations hit rock bottom in June 1998. While Bill Clinton was upset with India immediately after Pokhran, his anger only seemed to increase in the following weeks.⁴³ Clinton called the tests “self-defeating, wasteful and dangerous” and said they would make the people of India and Pakistan “poorer and less secure”. He bore down harder on India than Pakistan, accusing the BJP government of betraying “the ideals of non-violent democratic freedom and independence at the heart of Gandhi’s freedom struggle to end colonialism on the Indian subcontinent. He applauded China’s willingness to chair the Geneva meeting of the P-5, citing it as “further evidence of the important role China can play in meeting the challenges of the twenty first century and constructive Chinese leadership that will be essential to the long-term resolution of issues involving South Asia”.⁴⁴

5.3. Clinton’s visit to China

It was against this backdrop that Clinton visited China in June 1998. The Sino-US Joint Statement issued by the two sides criticized the nuclear tests by both India and Pakistan. The Statement said that the two countries had agreed to work closely together, within the P-5, the Security Council and with others, to prevent an accelerating nuclear and missile arms race in South Asia, strengthening international non-proliferation efforts, and promoting reconciliation and the peaceful resolution of differences between India and Pakistan⁴⁵. Strongly rejecting the Sino-US Joint Statement, India said, “it categorically rejects the notion of these countries arrogating to themselves; joint or individual responsibility for the maintenance of peace, stability and security in the region”. This approach reflects the hegemonistic mentality of a bygone era in international relations and is completely unacceptable and out of place in the present day world.

⁴³ William H. Avery, *China’s Nightmare, America’s Dream: India as the next global power*, Amaryllis, New Delhi, 2012, p. 46.

⁴⁴ *Strobe Talbott, Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb*, Penguin Viking, New Delhi, 2004, p.74.

⁴⁵ US-China Joint Statement on South Asia, June, 1998, <http://www.acronym.org.uk/proliferation-challenges/nuclear-weapons-possessors/china/us-china-joint-statement-south-asia-june-1998>,

Without mincing words, it further said, “The statement contains a number of references to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It is almost ironical that the two countries that have directly and indirectly contributed to the unabated proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery systems in our neighbourhood, are now presuming to prescribe norms for non-proliferation... We would also like to make it clear that India cannot consider the suggestion contained in the statement for curtailing our nuclear weapons or missile development programs. India will continue to take decisions in this regard on the basis of its own national security requirements.”⁴⁶

India’s underground nuclear test initially evoked a studied and measured response from Beijing. When India conducted the second round of tests and Vajpayee’s letter to President Clinton was published in the *New York Times*, in a statement by the foreign affairs ministry, China condemned the tests. It said:

In disregard of the strong opposition of the international community, the Indian government conducted two more nuclear tests on May 13 following the May 11 tests. The Chinese government is deeply shocked by this and hereby expresses its strong condemnation. This act of India is nothing but an outrageous contempt for the common will of international community for the comprehensive ban on nuclear weapon proliferation. It will entail serious consequences to the peace and stability in South Asia and the world at large.⁴⁷

The Kargil war of 1999, however, gave a twist to the triangular relations between India and USA. USA’s positive and proactive role averted a major war between India and Pakistan. China also remained neutral in the Kargil war. The post Kargil years witnessed some degree of convergence of approach between the US and China with regard to India although the tilt of USA towards India was discernible. This tilt was distinctly manifested when President Bill Clinton visited India in 2000. President Clinton’s visit to India, the first by a United State’s

⁴⁶ Statement of Official Spokesman, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, June 27, 1998, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://fas.org/news/india/1998/06/980629-goi.htm>

⁴⁷ “China’s Statement on India’s Nuclear Tests”, *Beijing Review*, June 1-7, 1998, p.7

President since Jimmy Carter visited the country in 1978, marked a further shift in Washington's orientation in the region away from its previous Cold War alliance with Pakistan and towards a new, as yet tentative, strategic and economic relationship with India.⁴⁸ President Clinton signed a "joint vision" statement with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, which was effusive and pledged to create "a close and qualitatively new relationship" between "two of the world's largest democracies". In many ways, the document claimed, "the character of the 21st century world will depend on the success of our cooperation for peace, prosperity, democracy and freedom".⁴⁹

Political trust between the India and China was also strengthened during the visit of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to China in June 2003, during which the two countries signed the Memorandum on expanding border trade between the two countries. According to this memorandum, India agreed to designate Changgu in Sikkim state as the venue for border trade, and the Chinese agreed to designate Renqinggang of the Tibet Autonomous Region as their venue for border trade. The political and strategic significance of this agreement was that, for the first time, China recognized Sikkim as an integral part of India.

The upward swing of strategic trust and defence and military engagement between the two countries was given a further boost when Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited India in April 2005. The two countries signed two important agreements during the visit, the first being the Protocol on Modalities for the implementation of the CBMS in the military fields along the LAC, and the second, politically more significant, being on *Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question*. Article VII of the Agreement provided that in reaching a boundary settlement, the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas, indeed a breakthrough in a contentious border dispute between the two countries as it was interpreted that China would eventually accept a swap deal, agreeing to recognize India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh with some adjustment, considering India's acceptance of Chinese sovereignty over Aksai Chin in the Western Sector.

⁴⁹ "The Clinton-Vajpayee joint statement: The full text", accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2000/sep/16pmus2.htm>

INDO-US STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE AND THE SINO-INDIAN TRUST DEFICIT

It is an irony of history that two of world's largest and most vibrant democracies couldn't maintain the best of relations in the post-war years. What prevented the two democracies from coming together? Perhaps the most plausible reason for this yawning gap was India's decision to aim for a socialist pattern of regime, giving primacy to the state sector of the economy, and not the corporate sector as in the USA. India's Non-Aligned policy, which regarded Soviet Union as a natural ally of the Non-Aligned Movement, and its leading role there further, divided the two countries; India's friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1971 had the same effect. India's victory in the Bangladesh War of 1971 with Pakistan, then a close ally of the USA, established India's pre-eminent position in South Asia and further heightened the hiatus of close cooperation between the two countries. The prejudiced mind of the legislature (Congress) and the executive bureaucracy in the USA also did not help the relationship to improve, and there were no serious efforts on part of the intelligentsia, academia, or media to correct popular perceptions and predilections.⁵⁰

What changed the situation, as mentioned earlier, was the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of Cold War. Yet another aspect of the contour and contents of geopolitics has been the tectonic shift from the West to the Asia-Pacific. What provided resonance to all these changes and transformations in Indo-US relations was India's own economic reform and liberalization, which India initiated during the same period.

⁵⁰ See Arthur G. Rubinoff, "Legislative Perceptions of Indo-American Relations" in Ashok Kapur, Y.K. Malik, Harold A. Gould and Arthur G. Rubinoff (edited), *India and the United States in a changing world*, (Sage, New Delhi, 2002), pp. 412-457.

It was against this background of the changing profile of India and the unfolding geopolitical scenario that the US began shifting its attention to India. The unqualified American support to India in the Kargil War of 1999 was just a precursor to the changing US attitude towards India. President Bill Clinton visited India and opened a new chapter in Indo-US relations. In November 2001, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Vajpayee affirmed their commitments to transforming the bilateral relationship and agreed that the two countries should try to give this partnership the inherent strength to survive all future political changes in the two democracies. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, at the helm of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government, and President Bill Clinton agreed that India and the US would be partners in peace in the new century and share common responsibilities for ensuring regional and international security. History took its full circle when Atal Bihari Vajpayee, while speaking at the Asia Society in New York in September 2003, described the US as a “natural ally of India.”⁵¹ A landmark event in the bilateral relations was the announcement of the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) in January 2004 after a protracted negotiation. Tellis argues that the NSSP heralded a breakthrough in US-Indian strategic collaboration because despite continued disagreements on other issues such as trade, Iraq, and the United Nations, it committed both countries to work together in four difficult arenas – civilian nuclear energy, civilian space programs, high technology trade, and missile defence.⁵²

6.1. Indo-US Nuclear Deal

The high point of this comprehensive engagement was the Indo-US nuclear deal. On July 18, 2005, President Bush announced that he would work to achieve full civil nuclear energy cooperation with India and would also seek agreement from Congress to adjust US policy in the context of a broader, global partnership with India in order to promote stability, democracy, prosperity, and peace. India and the US subsequently

⁵¹ “Address by Atal Bihari Vajpayee”, Asia Society, accessed on July 16, 2012, <http://www.asiasociety.org/policy/address-shri-atal-bihari-vajpayee>

⁵² Ashley J. Tellis, *India as a New Global Power* (India Research Press, New Delhi, 2005), p.2.

announced on July 27, 2007 that they had reached agreement on the text of a nuclear cooperation agreement.

In terms of the bilateral relationship between the two countries, the Indo-US nuclear deal is unprecedented. India's nuclear explosion in 1974 had soured the relationship between the two countries and the US Congress retaliated by passing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1978, imposing tough new requirements for US nuclear exports to non-nuclear weapon states—full scope safeguards and termination of exports if such a state detonates a nuclear explosive device or engage in activities related to acquiring or manufacturing of nuclear weapons, among other things. Internationally, the United States created the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) in 1975 for nuclear transfers for peaceful purposes, to help ensure that such transfers would not be diverted to unguarded nuclear fuel cycles or nuclear explosive activities.

History was rewritten when the same USA put all its influence at the same NSG to get a nod for the Indo-US nuclear deal, and President George Bush put his best into facilitating a smooth passage of the Indo-US nuclear deal for the approval of Congress. The nuclear deal ended what is called India's decades-long apartheid and paved the way for India to sign similar deals with other countries, reflecting the deal's global implications beyond bilateral relations between India and the US.

Never before in the history of the US Congress has such an issue related to Indo-US relations been as intensely debated as the Indo-US nuclear deal. Unlike in a parliamentary forum of government, in which foreign policy issues are dealt with primarily by the executive, the legislature in a presidential form of government such as the US wields ultimate authority and grants its seal of approval to foreign policy postulates and pronouncements. The passage of the US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, also known as the 123 Agreement, in the House of Representatives and earlier in the all-powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was unprecedented, demonstrating bipartisan support in the House of Representatives and ultimately garnering a 298-117 backing.

The Bill received overwhelming support in the House because of sustained canvassing and campaigning by the Congressmen sympathetic

to India, as well as the proactive role of the Indian-American community. Five leading US Congressmen wrote to their colleagues in the House of Representatives urging them to expedite the passage of the US-India Civil Nuclear Deal. “Dear Colleagues,” a letter dated September 16th said, “We refer you to the September 12, 2008 *Washington Post* editorial written in support of the US-India Civilian Nuclear Agreement. As past and present co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans, we are asking you to support this agreement, which provides for peaceful nuclear cooperation between the two democracies. Passage of this measure in an expedient manner will be beneficial to both of our countries.”⁵³

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Washington from November 22-26, 2009 at the invitation of President Obama as his first state guest. The visit focused on the common interests and shared values in a strategic partnership of global relevance and reflected the vision and resolve of the two leaders to embark upon a new phase in their bilateral partnership. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh conveyed to the President that the rapid socio economic transformation underway in India holds several opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries.

6.2. Sino-Indian Trust Deficit

It was at this juncture that growing strategic proximity between India and the US was a dampener on the relationship between India and China. In trying to find out reasons for China’s hardening attitude towards India, Chellaney argues, “The only major development in that period was the new Indo-US strategic tie-up, as defined by the defence framework accord and nuclear deal, but the US-India military alliance has always been a strategic nightmare for the Chinese... and apparently, Chinese policy makers began to believe that India was being groomed as a new Australia to America.”⁵⁴ In fact, in some quarter the historic

⁵³ Aziz Hanifa, “US law makers urged to support Nuclear Deal in Congress”, Rediff news, September 17, 2008.

⁵⁴ Brahma Chellaney, “Three’s a Crowd in the India-China Theater,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (2009), p 17.

Indo-US civil nuclear initiative of 2005 was perceived “as a part of a strategic effort to boost India as potential counterweight to China.”⁵⁵ Beijing, which suspected that India is being drafted into US, led containment right against China, attempted to block the approval of the civil nuclear liability in the Nuclear Suppliers Group in the autumn of 2008. When it could not, Beijing announced a nuclear deal with Pakistan that was similar to the one between Delhi and Washington.⁵⁶

The Chinese, in an article in *Renmin Ribao*, accused the US of double standards saying that the ‘Indian exception’ could be used by other nations to give nuclear advantages to their friends and thus weaken the international non-proliferation regime.’ ‘A domino effect of nuclear proliferation, once turned into reality, will definitely lead to global nuclear proliferation and competition’, said the paper. It added, ‘U.S. acts leave people more and more dubious: is it striving to prevent nuclear proliferation or actively pushing in the opposite direction?’⁵⁷ Commenting on the salutary impact of the Indo-US nuclear deal on Sino-Indian relations, Chinese scholars wrote, “The formal signature of the civilian nuclear deal in 2008 was a milestone in an enhanced Indo-US partnership, convincingly marking the depth of the strategic engagement. The Bush administration promised to help India to be global power in the 21st century and appeared as having a strategic allusion to China’s rise.⁵⁸ Yet another eminent Chinese scholar Zhang Li wrote, “... Washington’s rhetoric on the bond of the oldest democracy and the largest democracy and its initiative to forge an Asian alliance of democracies has made Beijing more vigilant about any undermining changes of its strategic environment”⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ C. Raja Mohan, “Sleeping in New Delhi”, *The Indian Express*, January 10, 2012, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/sleeping-in-new-delhi/897876/>

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ David Watts, “Blunting the NPT Regime”, *Asian Affairs*, May 2006, pp. 4-5

⁵⁸ Zhanh Yyan and Zhang Jingchun, “China-India Relations in Asian Economic integration”, *Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*, Beijing, Issue 2, 2006

⁵⁹ Zhang Li, “China-India Relations: Strategic Engagement and Challenges”, *Asie.visions*34, September 2010, P. 27.

China's hardening attitude was reflected in various stances, such as in describing Arunachal Pradesh as "Southern Tibet." China also retracted from Article VII of the 2005 Agreement that had said that in reaching a settlement, the two sides would only "safeguard the interests of their settled populations." The Chinese foreign minister, Yang Jiechi later told India's external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee on the sidelines of a meeting in Hamburg that according to China, the settled population did not mean that it had given up its claim over Arunachal Pradesh⁶⁰.

There was discernable shift in China's stance towards Indo-US nuclear deal towards the end of 2006, when Beijing realized that the Indo-US nuclear deal was a fait- accompli, and tried to make virtue out of necessity. This was evident during the Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to India in 2006. The Joint Declaration issued on November 21, during the visit of the Chinese President said, "Considering that for both China and India, expansion of civil nuclear energy programme is an essential and important component for their national energy plans to ensure energy security, the two sides agree to promote in the field of energy, consistent with their respective international commitments". The change in Chinese stance came only few days after US Congress' overwhelming approval of the Indo-US nuclear deal in first week of December 2006. Responding to comment on Indo-US nuclear deal, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said, "We consider the co-operation between countries to use nuclear energy for peaceful purpose as it will be beneficial to maintain the principles and effectiveness of international nuclear proliferation".⁶¹

6.3. The US Return to the Asia Pacific and its Overtures to Co-opt India

The US efforts to mentor India to soft-balance China in the Asia-Pacific gave a new dimension to the triangular relationship. While economic engagement with China has brought economic benefits for

⁶⁰ P. Stobdan, "India-China Relations," *Think India Quarterly* 13.2 (2010), p. 132.

⁶¹ "China backs Indo-US nuclear deal", Rediffnews, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/dec/13nddeal.htm>

countries in the region, China's military rise has given rise to consternation, if not outright fear, in the minds of the leaders of these countries. The United States, which has been the resident power in the region, reinvigorated its strategic engagement there. Many countries in the region are now looking towards India not only for economic engagement, but also for strategic reassurance to soft-balance China.

6.4. Condoleezza Rice Statement, 2005

The US motives and interest can be gauged from a statement by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during her 2005 visit to Tokyo. Asked whether she viewed China as a strategic partner or competitor, Rice replied:

When I look at China's role in this region, I think it's a very important thing that China plays an increasing role. It is nonetheless a good thing that China plays that role in the context of democratic alliances like the United States and Japan. I really do believe that the US-Japan relationship, the US-South Korean relationship, the US-Indian relationship are all important in creating an environment in which China is more likely to play a positive role than a negative role. These alliances are not against China; they are alliances that are devoted to a stable security and the political and economic, and indeed, values-based relationships that put China in the context of those relationships, and a different path to development than if China were simply untethered, simply operating without that strategic context.⁶²

The National Security Strategy of the USA, unveiled in May 2010, also saw India, China, and Russia as the "key centers of influence" in the contemporary world – countries with whom Washington would like to deepen its partnership. "Certain bilateral relationships – such as US relations with China, India, and Russia – will be critical in building broader cooperation in areas of mutual interest," the fifty-two-page

⁶² Condoleezza Rice address at Sofia University, Tokyo, Japan, March 19, 2005, accessed on February 1, 2015, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0501qus_china.pdf

document stated. Noting that Asia's dramatic economic growth has increased its connection to America's future prosperity and acknowledging India's "responsible advancement," the report asserted that the US and India are "building a strategic partnership that is underpinned by our shared interests, our shared values as the world's two largest democracies, and close connections among our people." The report further added, "We value India's growing leadership on a wide array of global issues, through groups like G-20, and will seek to work with India to promote stability in South Asia and elsewhere in the world."⁶³ US National Security Adviser James Jones, in his comments during a media briefing, said: "India, with our growing relationship, is one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century."⁶⁴

6.5. Asia-Pacific: India's Nuanced Approach

Interestingly, Indo-US strategic partnership was further strengthened in the backdrop of China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. The coming into being of the India-US Strategic Dialogue in June 2010 was the clear indication of the strategic convergence between the two countries. Inaugurating the Dialogue, Ms. Hillary Clinton, the then US Secretary of State referred to their joint responsibility "to determine the course of the world". Commenting on this later Jayant Prasad a distinguished Indian diplomat wrote, "Given their different histories and distant geographies, Indian and U.S. geo-strategic interests can never completely converge. Yet, there is consonance in their concern about the consequence of the rise of China. China and the United States have adversarial relations with each other. So do China and India".⁶⁵

⁶³ *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, accessed on February 1, 2015, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

⁶⁴ "India among 'key centers of influence' in Obama security strategy", *Hindustan Times*, May 28, 2010, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/Americas/India-among-key-centres-of-influence-in-Obama-security-strategy/Article1-549620.aspx>

⁶⁵ Jayant Prasad, "Estrangement and Engagement", *The Hindu*, January 16, 2014, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/estrangement-and-engagement/article5580472.ece>

The nature of adversarial relationship that the US shares with China is not same as that India shares with its northern neighbour. First of all, India and China are two great neighbours and are Asian countries, who suffered colonialism and imperialism. Secondly, the US fought against China both in Formosa (Taiwan) and also in Korea, where India, as elucidated earlier, played proactive role. In the present context also, US and China are locked in the Asia-Pacific. India and China fought a war in 1962. But China predominantly puts the blame of the border dispute on the colonial historic legacy of the Macmohan Line of 1914. Secondly, India and USA, both being vibrant democracies, didn't share a very comfortable relationship for a better part of history at least prior to the end of cold war. This explains India's nuanced approach to US overtures to India to contain China.

Be that as it may, the call to engage India in the Asia-Pacific was renewed by the US when President Obama visited India in November 2010. Addressing members of Parliament, a rare honour extended to very select Heads of State or the Government, President Obama said,

...more broadly, India and the United States can partner in Asia. Today the United States is once again playing a leadership role in Asia – strengthening old alliances, deepening relationships, as we are doing with China, and we're reengaging with regional organizations like the ASEAN and joining the East Asia Summit – organizations in which India is also a partner. Like your neighbours in Southeast Asia, we want India not only to "Look East," we want India to "engage East" – because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations.⁶⁶

A close analysis of President Obama's exhortation to India suggests that US expects New Delhi to be more active in the Asia-Pacific to hedge China through deepening security and strategic relations with

⁶⁶ Lynn Sweet, "Obama speech to India Parliament. Transcript", *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 9, 2010, accessed on February 1, 2015, http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2010/11/obama_speech_to_india_parliame.html

the countries in the region, particularly American allies like Japan and South Korea, and other countries like Vietnam, which has adversarial relationship with China. China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and America's strong advocacy for freedom of navigation and the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) have offered challenges to India to calibrate a nuanced approach to the Asia-Pacific, which can be discerned from India's foray into the South China Sea. India has maintained that its engagement in the South China Sea is purely for commercial purposes to explore hydrocarbon. Secondly, India is not a party to South China Sea and that the dispute in the South China Sea should be resolved by the concerned countries in accordance with international law. Thirdly, what riles China, and which supports US position is India's articulation of freedom of navigation. India's strategic autonomy on various issues on Sino-Indian relations and Indo-US relations have been reiterated by India from time to time including during President Obama's address to the members of Indian Parliament. While media paid attention to Obama's speech, little attention was paid to the opening remark by the Vice-President of India, Hamid Ansari, who is the Chairman of the Upper House of Indian Parliament. In his opening remark, he very thoughtfully said, "As vibrant democracies, we cherish the right to disagree within a framework of our endeavour for the common good..."⁶⁷

The appeal to exhort India was reiterated when US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited India, on July 2011. Speaking in Chennai she said, "Much of the history of the 21st Century will be written in Asia which, in turn, will be influenced by the partnership between the US and India and its relationship with neighbours."⁶⁸ She said that India could build a leadership role in the Asia-Pacific in forums like the East Asia Summit and the Asian Regional Forum, contribute more to

⁶⁷ Address by the Vice-President of India and Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Shri Mohammad Ansari, *The Journal of Parliamentary Information*, Vol. Lxvii, No 1, March 2011.

⁶⁸ "As China looms, US tells India to lead Asia", *Hindustan Times*, July 21, 2011, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/Chennai/As-China-looms-US-tells-India-to-lead-Asia/Article1-723313.aspx>

maritime security, democracy promotion, explore a new Silk Route into Central Asia, support rebuilding Afghanistan and even help stabilize Pakistan. The US renewed its appeal to India to reinvigorate its engagement in the Asia Pacific when President Barack Obama addressed Australian Parliament in November 2011.⁶⁹

The US reiterated its stand to India in its Pentagon report titled “Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21 Century Defense” in January 2012. The new strategy, envisaged in the report, is aimed at tackling the emerging threat from China’s military build-up. It takes forward the process of reorienting American military might from the Atlantic to the Pacific. At the strategy’s core, US forces would fight fewer counter-terror campaigns in far-flung areas, but will focus on its air and naval forces to balance China or face down Iran. Turning to India, the report stated that the US is geared to “investing in a long term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region.”⁷⁰

Such exhortation to co-opt India was reinforced in February 2011 in Singapore, when US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Geoffrey Pyatt, suggested that New Delhi “adopt a ‘Be East’ policy.” The objective was to encourage India to “expand (its) market and security integration across the Asian region.” He was equally candid about the US wanting to revolutionize its military relationship with India. According to one opinion, acquiring unexplored meaning in such an evolving ambience reflects Mr. Pyatt’s view that “one of the areas in which we see great potential for the US and India is indeed in East Asia.” Such a potential partnership in East Asia can be viewed as part of “US support for India’s expanding global reach.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ “US President Barack Obama’s speech to parliament”, *The Australian*, November 17, 2011, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/obama-in-australia/obamas-speech-to-parliament/story-fnb0o39u-1226197973237>

⁷⁰ Harsh V. Pant, “Tectonic rumblings in the region”, *Indian Express*, January 11, 2012, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/tectonic-rumblings-in-the-region/898178/>

⁷¹ P.S. Suryanarayan, “U.S. move tormentor India in new East Asia”, *The Hindu*, February 22, 2011.

There seemed to be slight moderation in US strategy towards Asia-Pacific with the exit of Ms. Hillary Clinton and the assumption of the position of the secretary of state by John Kerry, presumably soft towards China. But when Tom Donilon, the US National Security Advisor, while speaking at the Asia Forum, said, “US and Indian interests powerfully converge in the Asia-Pacific, where India has much to give and much to gain. South East Asia begins in Northeast India, and we welcome India’s efforts to ‘look East’, from supporting reforms in Burma to trilateral cooperation with Japan to promoting maritime security”⁷². It clearly conveyed the message that there would be change with continuity as regards USA’s engagement with India as far as Asia Pacific is concerned.

This stance of USA was further reiterated by the Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel in his speech at the Shangri-la dialogue in Singapore in June, 2013. Essentially, he was elucidating on the USA’s strategy of ‘rebalancing’ in the Asia-Pacific. After mentioning the security cooperation with treaty allies like Japan, South Korea, Australia, Philippines, and Thailand, he alluded to such cooperation with other allies like Singapore, New Zealand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Myanmar. Referring to India, he first of all alluded to the US-Japan-India trilateral cooperation. Articulating on India, he said that an important example of this security cooperation was with India, one of the leaders in the broader Asian region, where US is “moving beyond purely defense trade towards technology sharing, technology trade and co-production”. He further said, “As the world’s largest democracy, India’s role as a stabilizing power is of growing importance with the increase of trade and transit between the India and the Pacific Oceans. The United States considers India’s efforts to enhance its military capabilities as a welcome contribution to security in the region.” Elaborating further, he said, “Our vision for Asia-Pacific region is an open and inclusive one. Along with India, other rising powers also have a special role to play in a

⁷² “Indo-US ties one of the defining 21st century partnerships: US security adviser Tom Donilon”, *The Economic Times*, March 12, 2013, accessed on February 1, 2015, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-03-12/news/37651075_1_adviser-tom-donilon-northeast-india-asia-society

future security order as they assume the responsibilities that come with growing stakes in regional stability. To that end, a critical element of our long term strategy in Asia is to seek to build strong relationships with rising powers—including India, Indonesia and China.” The priorities of the countries in the pecking order are quite clear. With regard to China, he said, “Building a positive and constructive relationship with China is also an essential part of America’s rebalance to Asia. The United States welcomes and supports a prosperous and successful China that contributes to regional and global problem solving. To this end, the United States has consistently supported a role for China in regional and global economic and security institutions, such as the G20, We encourage our allies and partners to do the same”.⁷³ The expectation from India as compared with China is loud and clear.

If these statements of US officials are deconstructed, it clearly suggests the hedging strategy of USA towards China and expected role of India in this exercise. Considering China’s military rise and the mutual economic interdependence between USA and China, and India’s compulsions to manage its tenuous relations with China, USA adopts a hedging strategy. According to George J. Gilboy and Eric Higginbotham, “...over the last decade, US policies towards China and India appear increasingly to reflect an underlying assumption that India, a democracy, is more likely to foreign policies commensurate with US interests than China, an authoritarian system with roots in both imperial traditions and communism”. Extrapolating from democratic peace theory, he further writes that “lack of common values and institutions is said to make international conflict with China more likely than with India...”. In support of the assertion, the authors quote US Senator John McCain who opines, “Until China moves towards political liberalization, our relationship will be based on periodically shared interest rather than the bedrock of shared values.” They further quote Winston Lord, US ambassador to China during the Clinton

⁷³ Speech delivered by US Secretary of Defence Chuk Hagel at Shangri-La Dialogue, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1785>

administration and Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs under Clinton that “there is a limit to our relations with China because we share only interests, not values. The fundamental reason for India and the US coming together is our shared value⁷⁴.”

The basic idea is not to confront China, but check its growing assertiveness through deterrence by empowering its allies and strategic partners, which is evident from the growing defence cooperation between India and USA. The real strategic intents of the USA’s hedging strategy and India’s expected role are couched in subterfuge in official pronouncements; they are more explicit in private writings by US scholars and liberated diplomats. In a very provocatively titled book *China’s Nightmare, America’s Dream*, William H. Avery, an American diplomat earlier posted in India writes, “...China is well on its way to building the economic and military strength required to become a great power. Its leaders may be hoping that, having achieved this level of power, it will be able to dominate Asia. India is the only Asian nation standing on its way. An India that pursues and achieves great power status is China’s worst geopolitical nightmare⁷⁵.” He compares India’s expected role in this joint venture with that of the United Kingdom during the haloed years of its power. To put in his words, “An India that amasses the power needed to fill the void left by the United Kingdom would be an American dream comes true”.

This trend of thinking in the US strategic circle was yet in another occasion articulated by former US under secretary of state for political affairs Nicholas Burns in December 2013, while speaking at the ‘*Hindustan Times* Summit’. Mr. Burns made a case for building bridges with an “aggressive” China, but called for revitalizing Indo-US ties to manage the rise of Beijing. Articulating the triangular relationship, he said, “China will be most important relationship for the US in the next half-a-century and so would be for India. While we are partners with

⁷⁴ George J. Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham, *Chinese and Indian Strategic Behaviour: Growing Power and Alarm*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 53-55.

⁷⁵ William H. Avery, *China’s Nightmare, America’s Dream: India as the Next Global Power*, Amaryllis, New Delhi, 2012, p.xvi.

China, we are also strategic competitors”. The former US official emphasized that while China has been growing its military and economic powers, both India and China should have dialogue on issues such as climate change, terrorism, non-proliferation and crime cartels. “At the same time, both India and the US should be strong enough, politically and militarily to disagree with the Asian giant”. Turning to South China Sea issue, he further said, “...China has over played their hands in South China Sea. As a private citizen, I can say that the US is going to stay in the region. We will build up our security cooperation in the region and most definitely with India.”⁷⁶

6.5. Beijing’s Suspicion: A Ring of Encirclement

American efforts to court India to soft-balance China have evoked mixed reaction in China. Commenting on Ms. Clinton’s visit to India in 2011, an opinion piece article in *China Daily* stated, “In the current Obama administration, Clinton has emerged as one of the most vocal proponent of the ‘China balancing’ theory.”⁷⁷ In her official press conference in India, Clinton urged India to play a leading role in Asia-Pacific, which either directly or indirectly hints at the balancing of China’s influence in the region. Her speeches in Africa, and now in Asia, clearly hint at the US concern about its receding influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Referring to Indo-US relations, the article said:

Overall, Indo-US relations have improved over the last decade, but it will be an exaggeration to say that India is a US ally in the region. A 2005 Indo-US civil nuclear deal did not change the status of the Indo-US strategic relationship in a large way. The emerging new relationship between the two democracies is only a late recognition of their converging interest in combating global terrorism sponsored by state and non-state actors. There is a long

⁷⁶ “Be Strong Enough to Disagree with China: Ex-US official”, *Economic Times*, December 7, 2013, accessed on February 1, 2015, http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2013-12-07/news/44909530_1_south-china-shyam-saran-east-asia

⁷⁷ Binod Singh, “Clinton’s India visit reached no consensus on fighting terrorism”, *China Daily*, July 27, 2011, accessed on February 1, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2011-07/26/content_12985144.htm

way to go for before an Indo-US strategic relationship, and it will be immature at this stage.

Beijing is critical of the efforts of the US to cultivate countries in the region, including Japan and India, to hedge against China in the region. This concern can be gauged from writings and views in Chinese authoritative journals and commentaries in the newspapers. As written in the *China Daily* in February 2010, “China is in a crescent-shaped ring of encirclement. The ring brings in Japan, stretches through nations in the South-China Sea to India, and ends in Afghanistan.”⁷⁸ In an article by Garver and Wang, the authors quote a PLA Colonel that the United States is constructing a ring of encirclement, stretching from Japan, South Korea, and Mongolia in the North through the South China Sea and India in the South, as steps towards the final “carving up and destruction of China.”⁷⁹

China’s unease and discomfort at US efforts to put in place an anti-China alliance aimed at containing China was also reflected a year later in an article published by Chinese Communist Party Journal *Qinshi*. The article asserts, “The US seems highly interested in forming a very strong anti-China alliance. It not only made a high profile announcement of its return to East Asia but also claimed to lead in Asia⁸⁰.” The article further elaborates, “What is particularly unbearable is how the US blatantly encourages China’s neighbouring countries to go against China.” It added, “Countries like Japan, India, Vietnam, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Korea are trying to join the anti-China group because they either had a war or another conflict of interest with China.” Turning to India it said, “The probability for India to cooperate with China is also not great” and “India has stayed closely allied with the US. In recent years, US President Barack Obama proposed to support India for a permanent membership in the UNSC (United Nations Security Council).”

⁷⁸ Qin Jize and Li Xiaokun, “China circled by chain of US anti-missile systems”, *China Daily*, accessed on February 1, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2010-02/22/content_9481548.htm

⁷⁹ John W. Garver and Fei-Ling Wang, “China’s Anti-encirclement Struggle”, *Asian Security*, 6.3(2010), pp. 238-261.

Ma Jiali, author of *Rising India* in a *Global Times* interview in response to a question as to whether the US is shifting its strategic focus to Asia and whether it supports India in containing China in Asia stated, “The US does have the strategic intent to use India to contain China, as we can learn from some US official documents. But we should see that India is independent in its foreign policy. There are voices against the US in India, and some Indian intellectuals know clearly that the US kindness to India has a strategic intent.”⁸¹ Replying to another question as to if there is a zero-sum game between the two Asia giants and recalling former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s oft-quoted assertion that Asia has enough room to accommodate the development of both China and India, he further asserts, “The development of China and India is not a zero-sum game, but could be a win-win situation.”

It seems that in China there are also scholars who argue for better India-China cooperation to counter the US policy of expanding influence in Asia. An opinion piece in the *People’s Daily* in February, 2012, commented, “The development of the China-India relationship is being tested by the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, which will have complicated and in-depth influence on the future of India-China relations.” Referring to the US-Japan-India Trilateral meeting, the article said that the effort was to beseech China instead of getting into an apparent anti-China effort, and that India should enter into a strategic partnership with China that will create mutual trust and benefit.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ananth Krishnan, “China’s Communist Party sees India as part of U.S. “containment” strategy”, *The Hindu*, February 12, 2011, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/chinas-communist-party-sees-india-as-part-of-us-containment-strategy/article1415091.ece>

⁸¹ http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/commentary/2011-03/634998_3.html

⁸² Sutirtho Patranobis, “Paper calls for China-India alliance against US”, *Hindustan Times*, February 21, 2012, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/China/Paper-calls-for-China-India-alliance-against-US/Article1-814493.aspx>

6.6. The Salience of the triangular relations in the maritime domain

At a time when seas and oceans are poised to occupy considerable significance in the strategic calculus of contemporary geo-politics, it is interesting to analyze as to how the triangular relations among the three countries are playing out in the maritime domain. The jostling for influence and strategic control is being played out in two theatres. Firstly, it is Pacific, where the two dominant players are the USA, which consider it to be the resident power, and China, which has made a foray into the Pacific. The US and most countries in the region including Japan and countries belonging to the ASEAN expect India to soft balance China to check its assertiveness in the region. India has its own inherent limitations in terms of both its capability and inclination. In line with its policy of strategic autonomy, it prudently adopts a nuanced approach. While India has been reasonably successful in managing its delicate and sensitive relations with China as far as Asia-Pacific is concerned, India's articulation and posturing falls short of the expectations of the key strategic players in the region- the US, Japan and the ASEAN.

India's nuanced approach to the triangular relationship in the theatre of Indian Ocean, for example, can be gauged from its *Malabar* series of naval exercise, which India has been conducting in last few years. Earlier in 2007, the Indo-US *Malabar* exercise was held in the "eastern theatre" of Bay of Bengal. It was expanded to include Australian, Japanese and Singaporean navies as well. Viewing it as an "axis of democracy" designed to "contain" it, China had let loose diplomatic protests. Since then India has largely restricted the annual Malabar exercise to a bilateral one and holds it in the Western theatre of Arabian Sea to avoid ruffling China. But this has not stopped the US for describing India as "a linchpin" in its new strategy to "re-balance" forces towards the Asia-Pacific, even though it has its own "security concerns" vis-à-vis an "assertive" China. India is keen to be seen as "neutral player" in the unfolding great game.⁸³ The Malabar 2013, though smaller in size,

⁸³ Rajat Pandit, "India strikes a fine balance with combat exercises with US, China", *The Times of India*, November 5, 2013, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-strikes-a-balance-with-combat-exercises-with-US-China/articleshow/25226511.cms>

represented the high-end of the expansive military-to-military engagement between the two countries. The US Navy deployed the Arleigh Burke class guided missiles destroyer USS McCambell and P3C patrol aircraft for the Malabar exercise held in November 2013. India fielded stealth frigate INS Shivalik missile destroyer, INS Ranvijay and TU-142M maritime reconnaissance aircraft. Malabar is designed to advance military-to-military coordination as well as the capacity to plan and execute tactical operations in a multilateral environment.

While India has been active in the Southeast Asia historically, traditionally, and politically, the dispute over South China Sea issue, particularly between China and Vietnam, and US's strong advocacy of freedom of navigation and sea lanes of communication has riled China. The metaphor Indo-Pacific has been coined by the US and other Pacific countries, more particularly, Japan to enlist India in this seamless maritime dimension linking Pacific with the Indian Ocean. In its economic dimension the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has been embedded to the Indo-Pacific architecture. China's counter to TPP has been the advocacy for RCEP.

China's foray into Indian Ocean in response to India's presence in the South China Sea, where its OVL is engaged in off-shore oil drilling, adds interesting dimension to the maritime rivalry between the two. China has floated the concept of 'Maritime Silk Route'. and has asked India to join the Maritime Silk Route initiative. China's offer has put India into a dilemma.

INDIA'S CALIBRATED APPROACH

Despite the US attempts to mentor India to balance China in the Asia-Pacific, New Delhi has calibrated its approach to the region and China with a great degree of finesse. The reality has been that this strategy is easier said than done, but such is the challenge before diplomacy. India's approach has been to prod China to be a responsible stakeholder to ensure and facilitate peace and stability in the region through institutional mechanism like the East Asia Forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and ADMM Plus. US Secretary of Defense Leone Panetta, during his visit to India in June 2012 articulated the same sentiments in his address at India's Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) when he said, "The United States supports South-east Asia's multilateral forums such as ADMM Plus. These mechanisms will prevent and manage regional tensions... India's voice and involvement in these international forums will be critical." Panetta said that defense cooperation with India is the linchpin in the American "rebalancing" strategy, and that India is one of the countries whom US would help develop the capabilities to share common values. Turning to China, he hastened to add, "As the United States and India deepen our defense partnership with each other, and both of us will also seek to strengthen our relations with China." He further asserted that the US recognizes that China has a critical role to play in the security and prosperity in the region – "The United States welcome the rise of a strong, prosperous, and a successful China that plays a greater role in global affairs – and respects and enforces the international norms that have governed this region for six decades."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ <http://idsa.in/keyspeeches/LeonEPanettaonPartnersinthe21stcentury>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

It seems both Washington and Beijing have noted India's strategic autonomy in its relationship with both of them; they have also been reconciled to India's stance. The Chinese media have been very circumspect to convey the message to USA. It may be mentioned in this connection that when the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met his former Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao on the margins of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, *China Daily* quoted Prime Minister Manmohan Singh saying, "... India will not tolerate anybody conducting anti-China activities on Indian Territory and will not join any action aimed at containing and encircling China."⁸⁵ It is clear that while the former refers to the activities of Tibetan refugees in India, the latter is an allusion to the USA.

India's stance on Asia-Pacific in relation to China can best be explained in the words of the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his address at the Central Party School in Beijing on October 24, 2013, where he said, "...Above all, India and China need a stable, secure and prosperous Asia Pacific region. The center of gravity of global opportunities and challenges are shifting to this region. In the coming decades, China and India, together with the United States, Japan, Korea and the ASEAN community will be among the largest economies in the world. While this region embodies unparalleled dynamism and hope, it is also one with unsettled questions and unresolved disputes. It will be in our mutual interest to work for a co-operative, inclusive and rule based security architecture that enhances our collective security and regional and global stability." Debunking the theories of alliances and containment he asserted that "old theories of alliances are no longer relevant. India and China cannot be contained and our recent history is testimony to this. Nor should we seek to contain others". Alluding to India's strategic relationship with other countries and setting to rest all speculation, he further said, "...Our strategic partnerships with other countries are defined by our own economic interests, needs and

⁸⁵ Lan Lan and Qin Jize, "Rio 'reflects efforts of developing nations'", *China Daily*, June 22, 2012, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-06/22/content_15517845.htm, accessed on February 1, 2015.

aspirations. They are not directed against China or anyone else. We expect a similar approach from China”⁸⁶.

The Depsang incident of April 15, 2013 in which Chinese troops intruded into the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and remained in occupation of the territory for about three weeks not only exacerbated the security dilemma between the two countries, but also inflicted a serious jolt to the strategic trust between the two countries. It was a different matter that the two sides could resolve the stand off through discussions. It was in this back drop that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to both Japan and USA preceded to that of China. Although the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to USA in September 2013 to participate in the UN General Assembly was scheduled earlier, a meeting with US President was quickly arranged on the occasion of his visit to USA to participate in the UN General Assembly. It is not customary for Prime Minister to participate every time in the UN General Assembly. In the past the Prime Minister on some occasions had skipped the UN General Assembly and had deputed a senior cabinet colleague to represent him. Further, it is not every time that Prime Minister meets the President of USA during his visit to USA to participate in the UN General Assembly. The fact that security and defence cooperation between the two sides occupied a significant space in the deliberations between the two leaders echoed the security dilemma of the Depsang incident.

Significantly, the Joint Statement issued by the two sides affirmed “that the partnership between the two democratic nations is stronger today than at any point in their 67-year history”. The statement added, “rooted in common democratic values and strong people to people ties, the United States and India have developed a comprehensive and global strategic partnership, both in name and in substance that has made their citizens safer and more prosperous”. The statement further said

⁸⁶ “Manmohan Singh’s speech on India-China relations at the Central Party School, Beijing”, *The Hindu*, October 24, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/manmohan-singhs-speech-on-indiachina-relations-at-the-central-party-school-beijing/article5268097.ece>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

that President Obama and Prime Minister Singh pledged to make the next decade equally as transformative, challenging their governments to reach the full potential of this partnership, *particularly in the areas of security cooperation*, (emphasis added) bilateral trade and investment, energy and environment, higher education, and global architecture. Applauding bilateral defense cooperation, including trade and military exercises; both sides expressed satisfaction with the progress achieved so far in defence relations. They emphasized the need for more intensive defence cooperation. The leaders reiterated their desire to further strengthen defense trade cooperation endorsing a Joint Declaration on Defence Cooperation as a means of enhancing their partnership in defence technology transfer, joint research, co-development and co-production. President Obama encouraged the further participation of US firms in partnering India's efforts to enhance defence capabilities.⁸⁷

During the visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to USA, a Joint Declaration on Defence Cooperation between the two countries was signed. The Joint Declaration proclaimed that the USA and India shares common security interest and place each other as their closest partners. Spelling out further details of the defence cooperation, it said that it includes defence technology transfer, trade, research, co-development, and co-production of for defence article and services including the most advanced and sophisticated technology. It further said that the United States and India are also committed to protecting each other's sensitive technology and information. It also said that the US will continue to support India's full membership in four international export control regimes which would further facilitate technology sharing.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Joint Statement on Prime Minister's Summit Meeting with President Barack Obama in Washington D.C (September 27, 2013), <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/22265/Joint+Statement+on+Prime+Ministers+Summit+Meeting+with+President+Barack+Obama+in+Washington+DC+September+27+2013> article.htm?22265/Joint+Statement+on+Prime+Ministers+Summit+Meeting+with+President+Barack+Obama+in+Washington+DC+September+27+2013, accessed on February 1, 2015.

⁸⁸ "India-US Defence Relations", <https://www.indianembassy.org/pages.php?id=53>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

There has been a slew of defence related exchanges of visits in recent times after the signing of the Indo-US Joint Declaration. Chairman, Chief of Staff and Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshall A.K. Browne, paid a goodwill visit to US during July, 2013. From US side, General Raymond T Odierno, Chief of Staff of US Army visited India in July 2013. Significantly General Odierno in an interview denied that growing military ties and joint exercises between Washington and New Delhi were attempts by the US to co-opt India to ‘triangulate’ or ‘contain China’. In an interaction at the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute, the US Chief of Army Staff said, “One of the things we have to remember is that they (India) maintain their strategic autonomy”⁸⁹

Elucidating further he added, “Where you get into a policy of containment is when you start having land forces forward stationed in countries and that’s not our plan”. Without mincing words he said, “So ours is not to contain China, ours is to build relationship to build better support for the United States Pacific Command and to see it tends to ensure that we don’t get into conflict, we don’t build animosity between all the major powers in Asia-Pacific.” Shedding more light, he added, “As you look to Asia-Pacific, it’s about competition for limited resources, it’s about making sure that everyone is able to sustain their sovereignty and meet their own interests.” Disclosing his discussions with his Indian counterpart, he said, the “discussions we had were really about where we can help each other and look ahead on how we try to ensure that some of these issues don’t get blown out to something much bigger than needed”⁹⁰. This indicates that perhaps US has reconciled India’s stance with regard to China and India’s strategic autonomy in its foreign policy.

⁸⁹ Aziz Haniffa, “US army chief: Growing ties with India not to contain China”, *Rediff*, <http://www.rediff.com/news/slide-show/slide-show-1-us-army-chief-growing-ties-with-india-not-to-contain-china/20130805.htm>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Later, the US Deputy Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter, who has since been elevated to the position of Defence Secretary, visited India during September 2013 and met senior Indian officials and defence industry leaders. In his meetings, Deputy Secretary Carter reiterated that United States and India are destined to be partner on the world stage due to their shared common values and outlook on a wide range of issues. General Odierno's visit was reciprocated by the visit of Chief of Army Staff of India, General Bikram Singh to USA in December, 2013. General Singh utilized the opportunity to carry forward the growing understanding and relationship with senior US Army leadership, and sought to sensitize them the emerging security dynamics from India's perspective. He also appraised the US side for the latest modernization plan being implemented in India, and sought to understand the challenges faced by the US Army in their ongoing transformation after their experience in US and Afghanistan.

The Indo-US relationship, however, suffered a major setback with the Devyani Khobragade episode. Interestingly, the Chinese media reported the Devyani Khobragade incident in detail and had a measured reaction to it. The Chinese communist party controlled *Global Times* published an article written by a scholar at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies. In a very carefully worded article, the author said that the US and India had been caught up in a diplomatic row in recent days over the arrest of Ms. Devyani Khobragade in US, who was accused of visa fraud and abusing her Indian maid. The article further said that Ms. Khobragade claimed that she was mistreated, which aroused a storm of public outcry in India over the humiliation by the US. Indignant groups staged protests in front of the US Embassy in India and burned effigies of the US president, Barack Obama. Having reported the incident comprehensively, it commented that *"the occurrence and progress of the Khabragade case unveiled the complicated nature of US-India relations and different expectations on bilateral ties of both sides"*. Claiming the independence of India's foreign policy, the article further said, *"There are already risks that may explode at any moment in the US-India relations. The two have different expectations of bilateral ties: India hopes to rely on the US to improve international position, strengthen strategic advantage and boost economy; but it is unwilling to be a tool of the US in containing China, while the US aims at making use of India to balance China and wants a more open Indian market. These mismatching goals offer the potential of conflict"*. Ever since then, both India and USA are

trying their best to repair the damage and put the relationship back on the track. It was in this backdrop that Dr. S. Jaishankar, who demitted office as India's ambassador to China, took over the charge as India's ambassador to the US from Ms. Nirupama Rao, consequent upon the end of her tenure. In an address at the Carnegie Endowment, identifying the key drivers of Indo-US relationship, he said that first and foremost was the geo-strategic and political convergence, something that could manifest itself after the Cold War⁹¹. Quite significantly, he said that the new level of the relationship between the two countries was animated by the strategic vision in both the nations. Without mentioning China, he said that the fact that the two countries "discuss East Asia regularly" reflected the confidence levels of the two countries. East Asia in India's diplomatic parlance subsumes China. He also alluded to the US-Japan-India trilateral relations.

What further exacerbated Indo-US relations, besides the diplomatic row over the alleged ill treatment meted out to Devyani Khobragade, were the slew of unhelpful measures by the US like the blockage of Indian generic drugs allegedly on the grounds of non-compliance to its domestic standards. Also, the US International Trade Commission (USITC) and the US Trade Representative (USTR) threatened to take New Delhi to WTO on trade and investment policies like solar energy and IPR regime. It was against this backdrop that the visit of Nisha D Biswal, US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, to India took place in the first week of March, 2014. In an article in a leading English daily ahead of her visit to Delhi, Ms. Biswal wrote, "It is becoming widely accepted that our converging interests will shape Indo-Pacific strategic and economic geography and with it the future of the 21st century and half of the world's population that call this region home...our diplomatic and service-to-service partnership in the Indian Ocean will keep vital sea lanes free for navigation and commerce, and co-development: and co-production of defense

⁹¹ Speech by Ambassador S. Jaishankar on US-India Relations, https://www.indianembassy.org/press_detail.php?nid=1998, accessed on February 1, 2015.

platforms will enhance the security of both our nations for generations to come...”⁹²

Elucidating further, she wrote, “In a globalized world, a relationship like ours can’t be focused on development in Delhi and Washington only, nor can it be limited to our bilateral interests. India is an essential partner in America’s broader engagement with Asia, where our interests naturally converge.” Reference to China’s assertiveness was unmistakable, although China was never mentioned by name, where she said, “... Over the course of this century, our government need to work with partners across the Indo-Pacific region to ensure that all countries can enjoy the benefits of peace, stability and freedom that come with open societies and open markets. To that purpose, we should seize the historic opportunity afforded by Myanmar’s opening to connect South and Southeast Asia into an integrated economic landscape. Through our trilateral dialogue with India and Japan, we are doing just that...”

In her interaction with India’s Foreign Secretary Ms. Sujatha Singh, the latter underlined the need for officials on both sides to expeditiously resolve outstanding issues, to enable both sides to focus their energies on the substantive and strategic issues that underpin this vital partnership. Both sides reaffirmed the priority attached to India-US strategic partnership, and discussed ways in which existing dialogue mechanisms could be energized to generate fresh momentum.⁹³

7.1. Indo-US Defence Cooperation

In spite of the spat over Devyani Khobragade incident, defence cooperation between India and the USA continued as per schedule.

⁹² Nisha D. Biswal, “Special, Strategic Relationship”, *The Times of India*, March 4, 2014, <http://lite.epaper.timesofindia.com/getpage.aspx?articles=yes&pageid=14&max=true&articleid=Ar01400§id=5&edid=&edlabel=TOICH&mydateHid=04-03-2014&pubname=TimesofIndia+-+Chennai+-+Editorial&title=Special%2C+Strategic+Relationship&edname=&publabel=TOI>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

⁹³ Elizabeth Roche, “US disputes: India for early resolution”, *The Mint*, March, 2014, <http://www.livemint.com/Home-Page/xd1LAv3rOzd3rVQ1eJd0AO/US-disputes-India-seeks-early-resolution.html>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

India and USA signed the second contract worth \$1.01 billion for purchase of six additional C-130J “Super Hercules” aircraft in December 2013 under “foreign military sales” (FMS) programme. Indian Air Force earlier had acquired the first batch of six C-130Js tactical airlift aircraft ordered for \$962 million in 2007, which are based at the Hindon airbase at the outskirts of Delhi. The six new C-130Js, also meant for “special operations” as the first six are slated to be based at Panagarh in West Bengal.⁹⁴ Panagarh will also house the headquarters of the mountain strike corpse with a total of 80,000 soldiers, being raised by the Army in a project worth around Rs. 90,000 crore. The proposal to form the mountain strike corpse was initiated by the Indian Army some time in 2010. The Cabinet Committee on Security, however, asked the services chief to redraw the plan with components from each service to avoid chances of any repetition in future. Subsequently, the plan was reviewed by the Chief of Staff Committee, which had since been cleared by the defence ministry.

The C-130J had already landed at the Daulat Beg Oldie airstrip in the eastern Ladakh at an altitude of 16,614-feet just 7 kilometers from Line of Actual Control on the India-China border. Besides, the C-130J, India also signed with USA in June 2011, to acquire ten C-17 Globmaster III airlifters, making India the largest C-17 customer outside the U.S. C-17 is bigger than C-130-J, but C-130J can land at small forward base on a semi-prepared runway. Capable of carrying India’s T-72 tanks closer to the China border, C-17 Globmaster III can take off or land on a small runway. Under normal operation, a C-17 Globmaster III airlifter can carry a T-72 or T-90 into, or out of, a high altitude air field. It can carry armoured vehicles as well as the tanks. During the field trials in India, the C-17 Globmaster III demonstrated ability to fly at high altitudes, take off and land on short and unprepared runways and carry heavy loads. Both the C-130-J and C-17 Globmaster

⁹⁴ Rajat Pandit, “India, US ink \$1 billion deal for 6 more Super Hercules”, *The Times of India*, December 28, 2013, accessed on February 1, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-US-ink-1billion-deal-for-six-Super-Hercules-aircraft/movie-review/28025763.cms>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

III are stationed at Panagarh, as an air arm to the mountain strike corps. The Defence Ministry also negotiated with the USA to buy 145 ultralight-weight howitzers for operational use in the hilly terrains. All these acquisitions of advance aircraft and their positioning in strategic locations are suggestive of India's threat perception emanating from China.

Interestingly enough, India's acquisition of these heavy lifter aircrafts and weapons picked up the momentum when India's threat perception of China registered a high degree of salience. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence for the year 2010-11 observed, "...India is conscious and watchful of the implications of China's evolving military profile in the immediate and extended neighbourhood. India's policy is to engage with China on the principles of mutual trust and respect and sensitivity for each other's concerns..." The Annual Report of the Ministry of Defense for the year 2014-2015 reiterated that "... India remains conscious and watchful of the implications of China's increasing military profile in our immediate neighbourhood as well as the development of strategic infrastructure by China in the border areas." It further said, "India is also taking necessary measures to develop the requisite capability to counter any adverse impact on our own society." Yet in another place, the report mentioned that "China is engaged in creating a favourable environment aimed at achieving its core objective. China's is extending its lines of access towards the India Ocean through Myanmar and Pakistan. It's footprints in India's immediate neighbourhood has also been increasing as a result of its proactive diplomacy through political, military and economic engagement". Thus, it is India's threat perception as emanating from China that impels India to forge and deepen defence cooperation with the USA, which in turns riles China creating a vicious circle.

THE ELECTORAL VICTORY OF BJP AND ITS IMPACT ON THE TRIANGULAR RELATIONS

8.1. The Chinese Response

While the sixteenth general elections to the Lok Sabha will be remembered as water shed for many reasons, it is interesting to analyze how both China and USA tried to reach out to BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, in the run up to the elections and after the election results were declared. While Indo-US relations remained on the plateau without any major initiative to repair the damage caused by the Devyani episode, Beijing continued its charm offensive and even extended overtures to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Narendra Modi. Beijing hosted him in November 2011 and facilitated a meeting for him with Wang Gang, member of the CPC Central Committee. Chinese media showed a lot of interest on the long drawn national elections in India that started on April 7 and ended on May 12. Positive vibes were exuded towards BJP's prime ministerial candidate, while acknowledging the contributions of the outgoing regime under the leadership of the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and pointing out the continuity and stability of Sino-Indian relations. Beijing based correspondent of a major English daily extensively quoted a Chinese scholar Lan Jianxue from the China Institute of International Studies saying, "Unlike some western countries, China doesn't feel uncomfortable with any Indian parties or candidates. When he first became chief minister in Gujarat, he had been 'studied' by Chinese scholars. A large amount of Chinese investment has been putting in Gujarat. Some believe he is very pragmatic and has some 'Chinese way'. In 2011, he was invited to visit China. The visit was very successful and good to build some personal linkage and working relationship".⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Sutirtho Patronobis, "Shakti or Shanti, Chinese experts analyse Modi's plan", *The Hindustan Times*, April 6, 2014.

In the same news story, the former Consul General of China in Kolkata, Mao Siwei had a similar view on Modi's business policies. Mao was quoted saying, "There is a saying in India that Gujarat is India's Guangdong. This reflects a trend that Indians are recognizing the importance of manufacturing to the economy... If Mr. Modi becomes the next Prime Minister of India, I believe the Chinese government would say that "We respect the decision made by the Indian people". The news report further quoted another Chinese scholar, who is known for his favourable disposition towards India, as saying, "No matter which party comes to power, the current momentum of Sino-India relations will be maintained". The aforesaid narrative suggests how deterioration in Indo-US relations encourages China to extend overtures of goodwill and strategic gestures towards India.

8.2. The US Response

Unsure of his electoral victory, the US administration reached out to Modi late, only when exit polls suggested his impending victory with thumping majority in the second week of May 2014. The U.S. State Department described the Indian elections, as "an inspiring example of the democratic process in action." Its spokesman Jen Psaki said, "We view our relationship with India as one that's vitally important for economic and strategic reasons. We look forward to work with the leaders chosen by the Indian people to advance this important partnership and to set an ambitious agenda". Ashley Tellis, a South Asia expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said that if Modi were elected, Secretary John Kerry should visit India as soon as possible and Modi should be invited to the United States.⁹⁶

In a statement, Obama said, "The United States and India have developed a strong friendship and comprehensive partnership over the last two decades, which has made our citizens safer and more prosperous and which has enhanced our ability to work together to

⁹⁶ "U.S. would welcome Modi as PM despite past visa ban", *Reuters*, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/05/12/modi-pm-usa-visa-idINKBN0DS1M120140512>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

solve global challenges.”⁹⁷ The US factor in Sino-Indian relations was very much evident in an article by Ashley Tellis in the website of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace carried just a few days before the election results were declared on May 16, 2014. In the article, Tellis argued that “Washington should remember that a strong India is in America’s strategic interest on its own merits. Especially in the face of an increasingly assertive China, the United States benefits from the presence of a robust democratic power that is willing to and capable of independently balancing Beijing’s rising influence in Asia”.⁹⁸ Without mentioning the ‘Pivot to Asia’, he, however, extrapolated it in his assertion that “a deeper Indian relationship with Japan, Singapore, and other trading states of East Asia will bind New Delhi closer to countries that are otherwise American allies and partners. These states will profit from any renewed Indian engagement in their region, in the process of advancing U.S. interests even if doing so was not India’s primary intention. Even an effort by Modi to improve Sino-Indian ties would not necessarily undermine American aims in Asia. Modi is astute enough to recognize the nature of threats posed by rising Chinese power to Indian security, so it is unlikely that improved relations between Beijing and New Delhi would ever come to constitute strategic “bandwagoning” against Washington”.

Sensing the electoral victory, Modi had a studied response to a tricky question raised by a correspondent of a leading newspaper as to whether he would build upon better relationship with China than with the USA, he avoided a direct answer and said that relations between India and USA “cannot be determined or be remotely influenced by incidents related to individuals... The oldest democracy in the world and the largest democracy in the world are natural allies and we must work together towards global peace and prosperity.” Regarding China,

⁹⁷ “Exit poll effect: Obama to ‘work closely with NDA’, *The Pioneer*, May 14, 2014, <http://www.dailypioneer.com/world/exit-poll-effect-obama-to-work-closely-with-nda.html>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

⁹⁸ Ashley Tellis, “Productive but Joyless? Narendra Modi and U.S.-India Relations”, May 12, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/12/productive-but-joyless-narendra-modi-and-u.s.-india-relations/han1?reloadFlag=1>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

he said that it was possible to solve the problems with China and take the relationship with it to another level. “If India and China want to work together towards improving our relationship and resolve our differences, it would be helpful to both the nations. The 21st century belongs to Asia. More than 60% of the world’s population resides in Asia. It would be thus in the interests of the world that Asia develops and concentrates on improving the standard of living of its people”.⁹⁹

The reset in ties between the two countries started with a congratulatory telephone call from President Obama to Prime Minister elect Modi on May 16, 2014 that was also accompanied by an invitation to visit Washington. It was on the same day that the White House announced the lifting of the visa ban on Modi.¹⁰⁰ Few days later, US secretary of state John Kerry called up foreign minister Sushma Swaraj on May 29, 2014 and followed it up with a visit to New Delhi on July 31 for the fifth India-US strategic dialogue. Another high profile visitor from the US administration was Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel, who visited New Delhi in August 2014.

China also tried to reach out to India with equal alacrity. Its foreign minister Wang Yi visited New Delhi as a special envoy of the Chinese government on February 11, 2014. After the formation of the new government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2014, Beijing wanted to invite him to visit China. Sensing that a visit by Prime Minister Modi might not be possible immediately, Beijing invited Vice-President Hamid Ansari to participate in the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of Panchsheel held in Beijing on June 28-29,

⁹⁹ “NarendraModi interview: Only constitutional authorities should be trusted on Gujarat riots”, *The Times Of India*, May 8, 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/lok-sabha-elections-2014/news/Narendra-Modi-interview-Only-constitutional-authorities-should-be-trusted-on-Gujarat-riots/articleshow/34843479.cms>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Roche, “Advent of new govt. opportunity to renew ties: Obama, Modi?”, *The Mint*, October 1, 2014, <http://origin-www.livemint.com/Politics/ZzaBkISPeY1MBBJ5R2npUL/Advent-of-new-govt-opportunity-to-renew-ties-Obama-Modi.html>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

2014. *Jansangh*, the precursor of the nationalist BJP was critical of the *Panchsheel* agreement in the Indian Parliament in the 1960s. Prime Minister Modi, however, sprang a surprise by deciding to visit Bhutan as his first port of call after assuming power. Priorities of the countries, which Prime Minister Modi decided to visit, certainly reflected his foreign policy priorities. Be that as it may, Prime Minister Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the sixth BRICS summit held at Fortaleza (Brazil) on July 15, 2014. Interestingly while alluding to India-China relations President Xi Jinping remarked that “when India and China meet, the whole world watches”, Prime Minister Modi said, “If India and China amicably resolve the boundary question, it would be an example for the entire world on peaceful conflict resolution”. The difference of emphasis is quite clear. President Xi tried to exhibit the strategic solidarity between the two countries; Modi drew attention to the contentious border dispute. Prime Minister Modi visited Japan, a close ally of the USA in September 2014, ahead of the visit of Chinese president Xi Jinping to India, which took place from September 17, 2014.

It was against this backdrop that foreign policy orientation of India witnessed certain discernible shift towards the USA and its strategic allies like Japan, a process which earlier started with the Congress led UPA government under Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. The subtle tilt of the Modi government towards the USA manifested when he visited USA towards the end of September within few months of the formation of his government. The Joint Statement issued on September 30, 2014 said that President Obama recognized that India’s rise as a friend and partner is in the United States’ interest. Noting that the two way trade between the two countries had increased fivefold since 2001 nearly to \$ 100 billion, the two sides pledged to facilitate the actions necessary to increase bilateral trade to five fold. Significantly, the issue that rattled Beijing was the reference to South China Sea. The Statement asserted that “the two leaders agreed to intensify cooperation in maritime security to ensure freedom of navigation and unimpeded movement of lawful shipping and commercial activity, in accordance with accepted principles of international law. To achieve this objective, the two sides considered enhancing technology partnerships for India’s navy including assessing possible areas of technology cooperation. They also agreed to upgrade their existing bilateral exercise MALABAR.” The Statement

also contained convergence of approach with regard to Asia-Pacific and South China Sea articulating that “India’s Act East policy and the United States’ rebalancing to Asia, the leaders committed to work more closely with other Asia-Pacific countries through consultations, dialogues, and exercises. They underlined the importance of their trilateral dialogue with Japan and decided to explore holding this dialogue among their Foreign Ministers.” The Joint Statement for the first time perhaps expressed concerns about rising tensions over maritime territorial disputes, and affirmed the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially South China Sea. The Joint statement further said both sides called on all parties to avoid the use, or the threat of use, of force in advancing their claims and urged the concerned parties to pursue resolution of their territorial disputes through all peaceful means in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Although this stance was in line with India’s stated position on the issue, its articulation in a Joint Statement rattled China. Referring to the statement, Beijing reacted that China’s position was that the dispute in the South China Sea should be resolved by countries; directly concerned through negotiation and consultation, and any third party should not be involved.¹⁰¹

Barely two weeks after Prime Minister Modi’s visit to the USA, President Pranab Mukherjee, ahead of the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to India, visited Vietnam, a close strategic country for the USA, from September 14 - 17, 2014. The Joint Communiqué between the two countries reiterated that freedom of navigation in the East Sea/ South China Sea should not be impeded and called the parties concerned to abide by and implement the 2002 law, including the UNLOS-1982. The two countries also welcomed the collective commitment of the concerned parties to abide by and implement the 2002 Declaration of

¹⁰¹ “Third party should keep off South China Sea: Beijing to India ,US”, *The Hindustan Times*, October 9, 2014, <http://www.htsyndication.com/htsportal/article/Third-party-should-keep-off-South-China-Sea%3A-Beijing-to-India,-US/5707737>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea on the basis of consensus and called for cooperation in ensuring security of sea-lanes, maritime security, combating piracy and conducting search and rescue operations.¹⁰² The three day visit of President Xi Jinping to India which concluded on September 19, 2014, was an important event in the narrative of complex relationship between the two countries. The visit, however, didn't result in any major breakthrough. The Joint Statement between the two countries largely reiterated earlier stated positions on different issues. Sixteen agreements were signed between the two countries during the visit. A tangible out come of the visit was the agreement to establish two industrial parks in India. The border transgression by the People's Liberation Army of China along the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), on April 10, 2015, however, exacerbated the security dilemma between the two countries. This impelled Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assert: "Respect for each other's sensitivities and concerns, and peace and stability in our relations and along our border, are essential for us to realize the enormous potential in our relations."

While persistent security dilemma and increasing Chinese footprints in India's neighborhood stymied strategic partnership between India and China, the same factor and the Chinese assertiveness forged Indo-US relations to greater heights. Prime Minister Modi created a history of sort when he invited President Barack Obama in November 2014 to be the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebrations on January 26, 2015. White House accepted the invitation swiftly. It was against this backdrop of heightened bonhomie that President Barack Obama's three day visit to India took place from January 25-27, 2015. It was for the first time that a President of USA was the Chief Guest at the ceremonial Republic Day parade. The US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region evoked a studied response from China. The Vision document reiterated "the importance of

¹⁰² "Joint Communiqué between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of India", Hanoi, Vietnam, September 15, 2014, <http://www.presidentofindia.nic.in/press-release-detail.htm?1105>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flights throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea.” It further called on all parties to avoid the threat or use of force and pursue resolution of territorial and maritime disputes through all peaceful means, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea.¹⁰³ The document also sought to strengthen the East Asia Summit on its tenth anniversary to promote regional dialogue on key political and security issues, and to work together to strengthen it. All these affirmations and articulations clearly suggests US efforts to mentor India to be a stake holder in the maritime security in the Asia-Pacific in the backdrop of China’s growing assertiveness in the region with the strategic objective of creating the regional equilibrium or a new Asian balance of power. This was very much evident in the Joint Statement released on January 25. It recognized “the important role that both countries play in promoting peace, prosperity, stability and security in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” and noted that India’s ‘Act East Policy and the United States’ rebalancing to Asia provide opportunities for India, the United States, and other Asia-Pacific countries to work closely to strengthen regional ties.¹⁰⁴ The defence and military dimensions of the growing strategic convergence were manifested in the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) in developing new areas of technology cooperation in the defence sector through co-development and co-production. The Joint Statement further “committed to continue to work towards India’s phased entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement, and the Australia

¹⁰³ “US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region”, January 25, 2015, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24728/USIndia+Joint+Strategic+Vision+for+the+AsiaPacific+and+Indian+Ocean+Region>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Joint Statement during the visit of President of USA to India-”Shared Effort; Progress for All, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 25, 2015, http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24726/Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_President_of_USA_to_India_Shared_Effort_Progress_for_All, accessed on February 1, 2015.

Group. President Barack Obama affirmed that the United States and India meets MTCR requirements and is ready for NSG membership and that it supports India's early application and eventual membership in all four regimes. Speaking before a select gathering on January 27, President Obama reiterated the support of USA for India's candidature for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council.¹⁰⁵

Beijing keenly watched the visit and reacted very cautiously. Reporting the development, *China Daily* quoted Foreign Ministry spokes-women Hua Chunying, "China hopes that the development of US-India relations will help promote mutual trust and cooperation among countries in the region, and safeguard peace, stability and prosperity of the region as well." The report also quoted the congratulatory messages of President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang to President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Modi on the occasion of the 66th anniversary of Indian Republic pledging that China was willing to work with India to deepen their mutually beneficial cooperation, build close partnership in development and elevate the bilateral strategic cooperation partnership to a higher level.¹⁰⁶ Quoting the article of an Indian professor carried in its own columns the previous day, it said, "Modi must realize that since the Chinese economy has increased from 2.5 times that of India in 2000 to five times today, he has to focus on economic diplomacy and build partnerships with one and all to replicate China's policies".

While *China Daily* was conciliatory in its comments, the ultra nationalist Party controlled *Global Times* was more critical of the President Obama's India visit. It criticized western media for pitting India against China. It described American strategic outreach to India as a 'craftily set trap', which will be revealed eventually.

¹⁰⁵ "Want India as permanent member of UNSC: President Obama", *Yahoo News India*, January 27, 2015, <https://in.news.yahoo.com/want-india-permanent-member-unscc-president-obama-065302481.html>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Chen Weihua, "Obama's India trip triggers triangular concern", *China Daily*, January 27, 2015, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-01/27/content_19415778.htm, accessed on February 1, 2015.

CONCLUSION

Unsure of China's strategic intention and the persistent security dilemma existing between the two countries and given the asymmetry in the military strength between India and China, New Delhi beefs up security relations with the USA so as to create deterrence. Thus the 2005 New Framework Agreement laid strong foundation leading to mutually beneficial defence cooperation activities through security dialogue, service level exchanges, defence exercises and defence and technology collaboration. The new US Strategic Military Guidance announced in January 2012 by President Obama puts greater emphasis on the Pacific region and refers to India as a 'Strategic Partner'. The common strategic and security interests are, however, couched in subterfuge like maintaining security and stability, defeating violent religious extremism and terrorism, disaster relief, preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and associated materials, data and techniques, protecting the free flow of commerce and resources through the vital sea lanes of Indian Ocean.

In the triangular relations, the US attitude towards India has been to mentor it to play a pivotal role in the Asian balance of power to create equilibrium to deter Chinese assertiveness. Sino-Indian relations on the contrary have been resilient, but the undercurrent of strategic distrust and security dilemma persists. Border incursions take place and security dilemma persists. Although government avoids articulating them in so many words, certain military defence and strategic measures do indicate them. Moreover China's charm offensives and overtures do not match with its infrastructural developments in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK), which exacerbates India's security concerns. China is yet to extend support to India's candidature for the UNSC, while India had done so even at the height of border war in 1962. This is because the nature of relationship between the two countries continues to be adversarial in spite of the claims of both the countries that there is enough space for both to cooperate and compete. But there is a qualitative difference in the nature of relationship that India shares with USA and China. One fundamental difference in the nature of relationship that India shares

with US and China is that India-China relations even if they are resilient continues to be competitive, if not adversarial, which is not the case with the USA. So far as China's claim of Asian identity of India and China; and the US claims of shared values of democracy are concerned, it may be asserted that to a large extent they are both symbolic and rhetoric. It is the national interest that drives the foreign policy postulates of the three countries. Indo-US difference can be attributed to the vibrant nature of the democratic polity of the two countries with robust judicial system and also a fiercely independent media. The differences in Indo-US relations at different levels are articulated freely; whereas Sino-Indian relations, at times, are concealed or muted.

Can India trust USA? The answer is complex. Before an answer can be drawn, USA's past attitude and behaviour will help us to formulate answer. As discussed in the preceding sections, US in the past had supported Pakistan on Kashmir issue much to the chagrin of India. It had supplied arms and ammunitions to Pakistan targeted against India. It sided with Pakistan in 1971 war and sent the *USS Enterprise* to deter India. USA had imposed sanction against India for India's nuclear explosion in 1998. It didn't pay heed to India, when it suffered terrorism until the twin tower attack. Although in the past, in 1962 war, USA extended all material and political support to India, to the extent as the economies of the USA and China are intertwined like the "con-joined Siamese twins", it is only a hazardous guess if US would support India in the event of a conflict situation like 1962.

How is India's experience with China? At the level of rhetoric, the two countries claim cultural intercourse for about 2000 years; both suffered colonialism and imperialism, and fought against them. Both championed the cause of the Afro-Asian countries. Both argue that current world governance structure should reflect the tectonic shift from Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific. The similarities end here. The divergences are quite enormous. The two have different and yet competitive political systems-India, a boisterous democracy; and China, a totalitarian system. Both are two of world's largest economies competing for strategic resources, and markets; and for global clout and influence. Will they have to inevitably come to a conflict of war like situation to resolve their claim and counter claim? Not necessarily; because, the nature of geo-politics has changed. Not only that the theatre of geo-politics has

shifted from Atlantic to Asia-Pacific, but also the nature of geo-politics has changed after the end of cold war—from politics in command to economy in command. Globalization and mutual economic interdependence has added new dimension to contemporary geo-politics. The intense negotiations for Free Trade Agreement of different hues, both at bilateral and multilateral level have the potential to convert challenges into opportunity. Yet another highlight of contemporary international politics is the slew of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between and among nation states and multilateral architectures, which have been found useful to diffuse acrimonious situations. Secondly, today's China is not the China of 1950s or 1960s. It has long shed its isolationism and is an important stakeholder in global governance. Thus the triangular relations need to be seen in these perspectives.

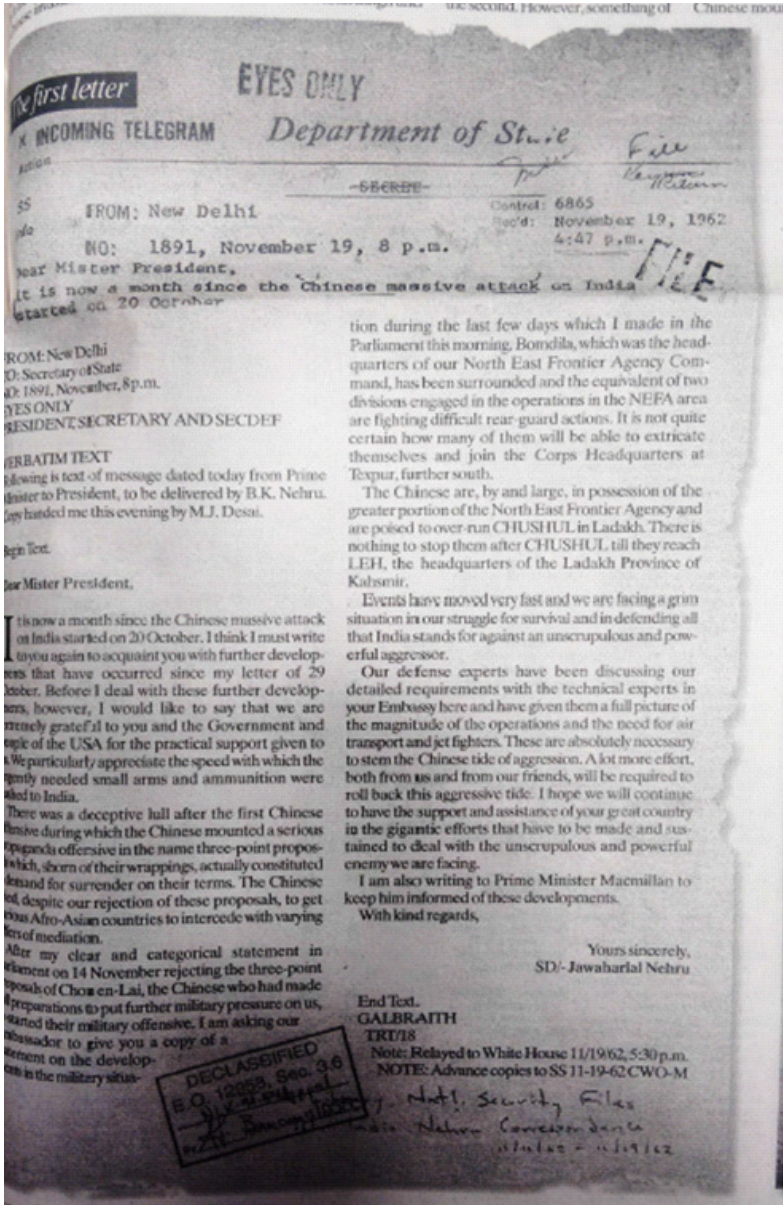
It is in India's interest that there is effective strategic communication between USA and China particularly with regard to Asia-Pacific. Similarly, a robust engagement between India and China is in the interest of USA. It augurs well that such an understanding exists between and among the three countries. The assertiveness of China will continue to be a challenge. This, however, needs to be managed thoughtfully, both through engagement and hedging strategy. Strategic equilibrium in the Asia-Pacific is the need of the hour. All the stakeholders in the region—US, China, Japan and India should collectively endeavour for architecture in the nature of what Japan's former defence minister and national security adviser Yuriko Kolke calls a “concert system that gave Europe a century of almost complete peace in the 19th century.” Kolke further writes, “Such a system requires China to set aside its goal of regional hegemony. Clear-sighted Chinese must already see that, short of a victorious war, such dominance is impossible. Now is the moment for China to anchor its rise in a stable and mutually acceptable Asian regional order. For China, this may be the ultimate tipping point in its modernization”.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Yuriko Kolke, “Tipping points to Asia's future”, *The Mint*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/NZoT1x9xpF8whiXVOEOdEJ/Yuriko-Koike—Tipping-points-to-Asias-future.html>, accessed on February 1, 2015.

Recommendations

- India should continue and strengthen the engagement with China, and should articulate its concerns boldly. The CBMs and the dialogue mechanisms between the two countries have been to a large extent satisfactory. The 'hot-line' telecom between the two Prime Ministers and the military establishments should remain active to diffuse any kind of strategic miscalculation or misperception.
- The military-to- military and defence dialogue should be made more robust. New posts for border personnel and flag meetings should be opened. Joint military exercises and the naval exchanges should be more regular.
- In the strategic and security dialogue with China, India should appraise China of similar dialogue with USA and make it clear that the security cooperation with USA is not targeted against it.
- India should further strengthen its infrastructure in the India-China border. The border roads should be strengthened. Defence is the best way to deter offence.
- India's defence budget should be further increased and to supplement the governmental budget, Foreign Direct Investment in select sectors and private participations should be encouraged.
- As far as the US is concerned, it must provide India advanced defence technology and support co-production of advanced defence equipment and help India indigenization of its defence production and industry.

ANNEXURE I



ANNEXURE II



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In the narrative of India-China-US triangular relations, the United States occupies some degree of strategic space notwithstanding the fact that Sino-Indian relations, like Sino-US relations, or for that matter, Indo-US relations have their own dynamics and imperatives. The monograph seeks to determine the extent to which the US is a factor as an intervening variable in the complex relationship between the two countries. The study attempts to probe the research question as to how China perceives U.S policy towards India in particular, and whether growing Indo-US ties can affect China's security interest negatively. Related to this research question is how India is trying to calibrate its relationship with both USA and China, and how far India has been successful in this endeavour in the context of strategic distrust and security dilemma between both the countries.



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