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INDO-US STRATEGIC RELATIONS IN 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The disintegration of Soviet Union had positively impacted Indo-US relations in post Cold-War era. The post Cold-War strategic scenario provided a chance to both countries to redefine their bilateral priorities. The US was always keen to improve bilateral relationship with India and therefore India initiated Defence cooperation with the US in changing strategic environment. India's nuclear explosion [1998] had posed some divergences in Indo-US relationship. India and the US signed strategic partnership in 2000 and therefore the US set-aside its sanctions against India. India signed 'Next Steps in Strategic Partnership' [NSSP] with the US in 2004 and both countries started strategic dialogue in 2009. Both the nations signed a 'New Framework for Defence Relationship' in 2005 and '123 Civil Nuclear Agreement' in 2008. India has always supported US's 'pivot-aria' policy and played a meaningful role in counter China strategy. India and the US renewed their 'New Framework for Defence Relationship' in 2015 and signed 'Logistic Support Agreement' in 2016. Indo-US strategic relations were touched new heights when the Obama administration had declared India as a major Defence partner in 2016. The new US President Trump also showed its softness towards India and called Indian Prime Minister Modi as a 'True Friend of US'. The decline of US-Pakistan strategic relations has positively affected Indo-US relations. The Pakistan factor has always affected Indo-US relations. The US administration considers that India would play a meaningful role in counter China planning. The study explores the *raison d'être* of Indo-US strategic partnership. The present paper intends to look into the Indo-US strategic cooperation and points out the improvement in Indo-US strategic relations in 21st century.

Keywords: Cold-War; Defence Cooperation; Strategic Partnership; 21st Century.

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1. Introduction

Indo-US relations have gone through many ups and downs especially in Cold War Era [1945-1990]. During India-China war [1962], the US President Kennedy, had supported India, while in Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971, the US had criticized India's stand against Pakistan. When India conducted a nuclear explosion in 1974, the US with their counterpart [Western European

Countries] imposed strong economic sanctions against India. The US was strategically in opposite camp to India throughout the ideological clashes of two superpowers [US and USSR] in Cold War. The Pakistan-US defence relations and India-USSR strategic relations had further deteriorated the Indo-US bilateral relations. Moreover, India's non-alignment policy was not liked by the US.

Indo-US relationship has been reasonably mature and travelled a long path in the past. The cooperation between India and the US is multiple both at the bilateral and at the global level. Since the Cold War culmination, Indo-US bilateral relationship has been on the track to reinforce strategic ties. Both countries want to enhance cooperation through strategic partnership and defence collaboration. Both sides have identified potential areas of strategic cooperation, especially in defence, space, maritime and science and technology.

After the disintegration of USSR, India began to review its foreign policy in a uni-polar world and took steps to develop close strategic ties with the United States. Both the nations initiated defence cooperation due to common security interests and challenges. It is widely considered that, at the culmination of Cold War in 1990's, Indo-US relationship had started to be improved. After the disintegration of USSR; its influence on Indian economy came to an end and India had to open its economy under the new guidelines of IMF. India for the implementation of IMF orders had adopted new economic policy known as LPG [Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization] in 1991. These steps were welcomed by the US and other developed countries and they started to pump in their investment in India. These were the time when US initiated the military cooperation with India. However on another front, the Nuclear Test Treaty [NPT], Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty [CTBT], they did not like each other's views and always remained in opposite camp till 2005 when nuclear cooperation had taken place in between them.

India had conducted nuclear explosion in 1998, the US and Western Countries imposed strong economic and nuclear sanctions against India. The US President Clinton visited India in 2000 and Vajpayee-Clinton dialogue had changed dynamics of Indo-US historic relationship. The then Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee called Indo-US relations as a 'natural ally'. The Clinton administration had started dawdling defence relations and the Bush administration taken serious steps towards US defence cooperation with India. The talk between Talbott and Jaswant Singh was scheduled for deepening defence cooperation. The Bush administration dealt with India as a strategic partner on par level. Indo-US relations touched new heights during the Bush era and Bush Junior called pro-India President in US history. The Bush administration considered India as an emerging economic and military power and therefore India occupied an important position in the US foreign policy. The Obama administration focused on build strong bilateral security and defense ties with India, make India an important export market for American goods and services and situate India in the strategic pivot to Asia to counter China. The Obama administration considered India's strategic importance vis-à-vis indo-pacific region. At present, the Indo-US strategic partnership is focuses on to countering China emergence. The Trump administration wants to sells more weapons to India and both countries wants to initiate co-production and co-development of Weapons.

2. Indo-US Strategic Relations in 21st Century

The Indo-US bilateral relations can be expressed into the broad era. These are Cold War era and the aftermath of Cold War. The post Cold War era, can be divided into the era before and after September 11, 2001. We will be discussing Indo-US bilateral strategic relations in 21st century. We will focus on Indo-US defence and strategic relationship especially in the 21st century. In the early phase of 21st century, a major shift in the US policy towards India. The dissolution of USSR brought about many changes in the global security arena. It opened new doors of cooperation for India and the United States. The US President Clinton visited India in 2000, which was a new beginning for two countries in the early phase of 21st century. The terrorist attack on US on 11 September 2001 promoted India to make the outstanding offer of bases to US for cooperation in defence and strategic field. However, due to changing US perception towards India, the military exercises were further initiated and became a regular event in the Indo-US bilateral relations. But the US President W. Bush waived the sanctions against India in 2001. It was the high time to settle disputes and improve bilateral relations. That fact cannot be denied that the main strategic challenge to the US foreign policy was the rise of China. In the view of the above, in the 21st century India and US were coming closer due to mutual strategic interests. In 2000, the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited the United States; both leaders signed a strategic partnership between the two countries and called it the next steps in strategic partnership. These efforts included bilateral collaboration in civilian nuclear technology and military to military cooperation.

Both the nations expressed a strong interest in transforming the Indo-US bilateral relations. In January 2004, the India and the US signed the 'New Steps in Strategic Partnership', which was an outstanding beginning in bilateral relations. The United States has given special preference to India in its South Asia foreign policy. Indo-US defence and strategic cooperation had huge potential to maintain status-quo in international water and combat rise of China in Indo-Pacific region. These reasons improved Indo-US bilateral relations time to time. In June 2005, India and US signed "New Framework for the Indo-US Defence Relationship". It covered the entire spectrum of defence cooperation. The main focus of the Indo-US ties was to enhance "capacity building and capability sharing". India and US reached Henry Hyde peaceful Act in 2008. The 123 agreement was made that would facilitate concrete civilian nuclear cooperation between India and US. This agreement can be used to tie up with NSG and IAEA guidelines. After the incident of 26 November, 2008, India and US collectively planned to fight against terrorism. Both the countries had signed counter terrorism initiative in 2010. In 2009 and 2010, the Indo-US joint working group initiated to discuss bilateral cooperation in combating terrorism. The Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation pact was signed to strengthen cooperation on energy, one of the most important challenges of the 21st century.

The Indo-US bilateral relation is widely seen in the context of its search for friendly Asian powers and that may be necessary to prevent future Chinese influence. The strategic dialogue took place in June 2010, at the place of Washington. The US President Obama also made a similar 'Comment in the strategic document, which leadership: Priorities for 21st century Defence'. In the new US defence strategy, called "pivot" to the east, the US experts that India should play an important role in the region. The United States had also recognized India as a major ally in South Asia region. In the second phase of 21st century Indo-US bilateral relations

may be stronger at that time even before. Both are playing important role to resolve global problem like that terrorism, nuclear proliferation and energy crisis. The Indo-US strategic alliance plays a great role to prevent 21st century global security crisis. Both the countries have focused on defence and strategies cooperation.

This fact cannot be denied that the Indo-US can be proved a global partner in 21st century. It is high time to strengthen bilateral strategic ties. India and the US share converging strategic interests and similar outlooks on the strategic changes taking place in the Indo-Pacific region and the beyond. The US's transfer of advance technology to India is the paramount area of Indo-US cooperation. The US has become an expertise in the advanced technology and showed its interests in defence modernization of India. Therefore, India and US have signed Logistic Exchanges Memorandum of Agreement [LEMOA] pact for logistic support and sharing each other's bases for military purposes. The US recognized India as a major defence partner in December 2016. This is well known fact that Indo-US strategic relations have been improving day by day.

3. Conclusion

The starting point of Indo-US relationship is to go back deep in the annals of the past which has evolved and taken shape through various up and down. The dissolution of the erstwhile Soviet Union has been an impetus for Indo-US relations. Since the early phase of 21st century, the Indo-US strategic relationship is evolving at greater pace. At the bilateral level, both sides have identified key areas of cooperation in the fields of defence, technology and maritime and space etc. There is a good opportunity of security cooperation between Indo-US through strategic partnership which will also bolster their bilateral relations. Besides, the emerging Indian market is important for the US trade interests. India can use the US expertise to meet its energy demands and arms manufacturing. At the multilateral level, The US has been supportive of India's permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council and four export control regime. Therefore, we can say that Modi-Trump will work continually for the interests of Indo-US relations.

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