

ASSESSING VARIOUS OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN INDIA-US STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

In the post-Cold War period, the US and India established a strategic partnership in line with their domestic and international political environment. Most of the literature on the subject covered the converging points of their strategic partnership without giving much attention on their differences. In this backdrop, the focus of the study is not only on the opportunities and prospects of Indo-US strategic partnership but would also identify challenges. Thus, the study covers both converging and diverging points in the forging of their strategic partnership. The first part of the paper discusses Indo-US strategic cooperation vis-à-vis China in the Indo-Pacific region. In the second part the study probes challenges associated with the US contentions vis-à-vis Indo-Russian strategic partnership in defense sector and also highlights the implications of Indo-Russia joint venture in the Arctic region for the US. Furthermore, the paper also covers other independent variables such as Iran and Pakistan factors having implications for dependent variables of Indo-US strategic partnership. The study finds out that some of the main challenges to US strategic cooperation with India include: Russia's domination in Indian defence and commercial market and cooperation in the Arctic region, Indo-Iran cooperation, and Pakistan factors. The study concludes that due to the challenges, the Indo-US Strategic cooperation have not developed into a comprehensive strategic partnership, however, they would continue their cooperation to contain the rise of China and maintaining balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: Challenges, Indo-US Strategic Partnership, Asia, Indo-Russian Strategic Partnership, Arctic

INTRODUCTION

The end of Cold War led to disintegration of USSR which provided multifarious opportunities to India to diversify its foreign policy especially to develop its relations with US. Another factor which transformed India's relations with the US was the rise of China. The US interests also coincide with India due to its Asia-Pacific strategy. Moreover, India was considered a great market opportunity for the US commercial interests. These factors helped both states to develop strategic partnership in the post-Cold War period especially in the post-9/11 era. Both nations' bilateral relations were strengthened by strategic agreements. The Bush administration and Indian leaders agreed on "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP)" in 2004. NSSP has provided to set up goals for establishing cooperation on number of issues in the field of civilian nuclear technology, high technology trade, missile defense program, civilian space program ("United States-India Joint Statement" 2004). The implementation of NSSP began when both nations signaled cooperation in civilian nuclear technology, economy, non-proliferation, security, development, democracy, high-technology trade and cooperation in civilian space program ("Indo-US Joint Statement", 2005).

Additionally, both sides agreed on strategic cooperation in maritime security, energy, climate change, education and development, economics trade and agriculture and health in 2012 (Khambatta & Sedler, 2012). There has been a lot of literature available on the opportunities and prospects of Indo-US strategic partnership but very little attention has been paid on challenges in developing a comprehensive strategic vision between the two states. If we deeply analyze the Indo-US strategic ties it can be easily identified several constraints and challenges in their relations. Some of these challenges include: India's defense cooperation with Russia and expanded cooperation to the Arctic region, the US disappointments of using India as counterweight to China and its role in other strategic issues.

In addition to Russia, there are many other factors affecting the US strategic partnership with India. The first such factor is India's relations with Iran. Second, India's failure to play any constructive role in Afghanistan as per the US expectations. Third, Pakistan factor was another independent variable in the Indo-US cooperation especially in the backdrop of Pakistan's role in counter-terrorism as a non-NATO ally and recently its critical role in the peace process of Afghanistan. Fourthly, India could not play the role the US expected to counter China's influence in the region as India has been the member of regional organizations such as SCO and BRICS where it has developed close cooperation with China and Russia. In the recent years, due to Prime Minister Modi's aggressive domestic policies towards minorities especially against Muslims and lockdowns of Kashmiries in the wake of Kashmiries uprising against revocations of Article-370, Indian role to fulfill the US expectations in the Indo-Pacific and other regions are badly affected.

In the light of these challenges, this paper would explore the impacts of these challenges on the strategic cooperation between the US and India which are normally ignored in various analysis and studies. This makes this study unique as it highlights emerging challenges to Indo-US strategic beyond the context of existing cooperation. First, The Indo-Russian ties have been questionable to US. This is because Russia is a top supplier of defense equipment's despite Indo-US growing strategic partnership. Second, India has begun investing in the Arctic region with Russia. Russian projection in the Arctic region is detrimental to the US national interests where India is also cooperating with the Russian companies. Re-calibration of India's cooperation with Russia is a significant challenge for the US security interests vis-à-vis India and the US defense cooperation including the Arctic region. Third, the China factor between India and the US in terms of balancing the rising power of China is cooperative in the case of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, however, the element of friction also exists on the demarcation of Indo-Pacific region. The study raises several questions such as 1) How and why Indo-US strategic partnership emerged? 2) How India is cooperating with Russia much to the dismay of the US in the defense and Arctic environment? 3) What implications of India's close cooperation with Iran will have on their strategic partnership? 4) What would be the impact of India's ability to meet the US expectations of its role in Afghanistan and in Indo-Pacific region especially countering China?

Concept of the Strategic Partnership

Realists both offensive and defensive admit that strategic partnership has been used as a tool of grand strategy by state in the post-Cold War era. Sean Kay argues that it is a new institutional form of post-Cold War international relations. Both offensive and defensive groups of realists have viewed strategic partnership is related to the grand strategies of states. States through this arrangement have targeted twin objectives of primacy and balancing. Primacy means here one power tends to maintain unipolar primacy and management of the system, while other states may use it for global politics towards multipolarity of international system. It can also be used as a rhetoric tool by diplomats who can support them around the rough edges of international politics. For example, policy pundits in the US prefer the rhetoric and the operational characteristics due to ambiguity in the term. Some strategic partnerships are different

from other ones due its meaning. Some have clear meaning while others are ambiguous in structure. Strategic partnerships have impacted other foreign policy tools such as alliances. The US have been involved through its foreign policies arrangements in various programs such as alliances, reassurance based cooperation, managed power decline, justified cooperation and finally balancing. The US uses balancing as a part of foreign policy to maintain its primacy in the international system (Kay, 2000). Strategic partnership has become an instrument of states foreign policy to maintain the balance of power.

Indo-US Strategic Partnership: Setting the Context

Relationship between the two largest democracies was described as “the cold peace” and “comrades at odds”. Many renowned scholars have examined Indo-US strategic partnership with different angles and aspects. For example, strategic partnership was not emerging because the contentious course of bilateral relationship between New Delhi and Washington during the Cold War era. Historians have revealed that the US policies were at odds with India on containing communism in Asia and beyond. The US personal dislike for India, Pakistan as a strategic partner of the US, the Korean War, the Hungarian crisis, the Vietnam war, India’s tilt towards former Soviet Union, India’s nuclear program and others issues that did not allow to make an alliance during the Cold War era. However, other experts in strategic studies have noted that after the dissolution of former Soviet Union the geostrategic and geo-political dynamics shifted India’s internal and external policies and so too in the US. Arthur Rubinoff argues that many events such as Former Soviet Union demise, India’s march towards neo-liberalism, the 1998 nuclear test both by India and Pakistan have no longer left the US policy on discrimination towards Asia and particularly towards India (Rubinoff, 2006). The relations between India and the US no longer remained estranged when the Cold War archetype of alliances were eroding and new form of alignments were emerging in Asia. When new form of security governance was emerging in the form of strategic partnership Indians and Americans needed to protect their shared and common concerns with the help of new type of alignment that is described as strategic partnership.

Indo-US strategic partnership means to promote India and the US economic cooperation and address common security challenges from China. At the core of Indo-US relations connote shared interests and common concerns are principal reasons when leaders in both sides successively engaged to forge a strategic partnership in the post-Cold War era. Correlates and dynamics of this partnership are Shared interests including internal security issues and common interests are maritime security and the protection of vital strategic areas in a stable environment around in the Asian premises. This kind of Indo-US strategic is guided by complex interdependence. However, their strategic partnership is framed by realism when both Washington and New Delhi calculate their concerns about the transformation of balance of power towards China in the Asia-Pacific region. B.M Jain argues both Washington and New Delhi watch the rise of China in the Asian context where the later have created security challenges. American and Indian policy makers clinched Indo-US strategic partnership first with the announcement of Next Steps in Strategic Partnership in January 2004 (Ahmed et al., 2020). This step led to define the real nature of emerging partnership in a Joint Statement between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the US President George W. Bush on July 18, 2005 in the following areas such as nuclear energy, Defense, high technology trade, missile defense, counter-terrorism, environment and investment. Indo-US strategic partnership was declared by both sides as a global partnership (Jain, 2016). The US recognition of Indian rising economy made the two to cooperate and other crucial security aspect of India and the US strategic partnership to counter China’s ascendancy.

The changing nature of Indo-US relations provided leaders in both Washington and New Delhi to conclude strategic partnership in the first decade of twenty first century. S. Paul Kapur & Sumit Ganguly have highlighted changes at the structural, domestic and individual leaders in

India in the post-Cold War era. At the structural level, the thaw of Cold War between former Soviet Union and the US brought India to reshape its foreign policy towards the US and the latter also changed viewing the former with anti-Soviet lenses. At the domestic level, India's economic reforms such as abandoning socialist model of economy for liberal model of economic policies closed the two towards common interests. Changes in the nature of leaders attitude in political decision regarding each other concerns sometime risky was aimed to create an environment to forge an Indo-US strategic partnership. It means in case of Indo-US strategic partnership the change in the nature of bilateral relations in the post-Cold War is a radical factor (Kapur & Ganguly, 2007). The end of the Cold War changed external and internal dimensions of India and the US relations where the outcome of this change made both the states to forge a strategic partnership.

Attitudes of leaders in both capitals overcame many decades of lost opportunities to agree on strategic partnership. For example, the US wanted India a signatory of non-proliferation regimes, however, this policy attempt did not yield any desired outcomes. Other policy options were used in Washington such as readjusting its non-nuclear proliferation policies towards India. This attempt was successful to shift Indo-US relations from lost opportunities towards strategic partnership. Bronson Percival briefs that a powerful India will help the US against Chinese policies in South Asia and beyond. China by its assertive policies has its effects on the US policies towards India. With this the US has enhanced its security ties and publically India "act East" rather than "Look East". India was allowed to conduct military to military links and purchase \$10 billion military related materials from the US. The US adjusting of India has helped the US in case of Iran to slow Tehran's nuclear acquisition (Bronson Percival, 2013). The US has made many efforts to bring India into its strategic ring both at the domestic and international level for addressing issues related to security in Asia vis-à-vis China.

After the US successful attempts forging strategic partnership with India, many issues still exist between the two states. First, India's policy towards the peacekeeping mission, non-proliferation export control and arms control has a moderate or highly aligned with the US. Second, India's policy in other six areas have moderate to low convergence such as Pakistan, China, Iran, Afghanistan, the Indian Ocean Security. Third, India is at odd in other three areas with the US policies such as the US investment in nuclear contracts, control of arms in nuclear technology and the issue related with the Iraq War in 2003. Dinshaw Mistry examines that India is uneven in its policies due to its domestic political set up and economic factors create lack of fully converged strategic partnership on the key strategic issues. However, India has policy overlaps when the US increases military and economic power against its rivals (Mistry, 2016). The forging of Indo-US strategic have addressed some issues while in other areas both states find solution to overcome those challenges.

India has changed its continental geopolitical outlook towards Indian Ocean in the post-Cold War era. Within this context, Washington has considered New Delhi as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean. For example, the defence strategy has shown in 2012 that the US wanted long-term strategic partnership with India is a regional economic power and security provider in the Indian Ocean. The report of Ajay Kumar Das has shown that India wanted to ensure its maritime interests in the Indo-Pacific that would integrate the two ocean spaces for economic and political objectives. Moreover, the US concluded nuclear deal that ended India's long estrangement in 2005 (Das, 2012). However, the inking of nuclear deal which is considered as the base of Indo-Strategic partnership became contentious among the political actors inside India. It has significant implication for Indo-US strategic partnership. It means that domestic political actors have considerable impacts on strategic partnerships. Secondly, domestic coalition politics has emerged is an important factor shaping New Delhi and Washington strategic ties (Sasikumar & Verniers, 2013). Besides shared naval interests and domestic contentions the US wanted India close to the treaty obligation of Non-nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The civil nuclear deal considered by Washington that would benefit both sides.

Civil nuclear deal as a pillar of Indo-US strategic partnership will benefit both India and the US. The deal has made India to buy civilian nuclear technology. For example, after the deal India can buy nuclear reactor fuel and other related materials from the US and other suppliers. On the other side of this deal it has provided the US goal of bringing India under the protocols of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). India will not test and transfer nuclear technology to other states. The deal has other benefits for NPT. According to Nicolas Burns, Under-State for Political affairs, India will safeguard its nuclear facility under NPT inspectors. Moreover, Condoleezza Rice has calculated the benefits that while India has aimed to purchase eight nuclear reactors if the American contractors succeeded just in two in them will create thousands of jobs for Americans (Shuja, 2006). Additionally, India is now able to counter challenges with the US across its border and beyond. Many scholarly comments on Indo-US strategic have examined that China is a strategic challenge for New Delhi and Washington in the post-Cold War era.

Experts believe that the US nuclear deal with India can promote democracy in Asia. The deal is one of the US key motivations to make New Delhi as a counterweight to China's authoritarian regime. Rohan Mokherjee & David M. Milone write that Washington has provided New Delhi access to many elite decision-making groups in different international groups such as multilateral trade, climate change, and management of global economy. India is also willing with the deal to overcome security challenges at the domestic and beyond. China is an element of fear in India's strategic consideration (Milone & Mukherjee, 2011). The civil nuclear deal provides the US to promote India in different platforms and will overcome the threats from China.

This paper further looks beyond the current contribution of scholarly work on India and the US as strategic partnership where both strategic partners have cooperation against China, however, in case of Russia, India's strategic cooperation with Moscow in many areas is questionable for the US. Within this context, it is equally crucial to examine how India has behaved in the case of Russia. The contribution of this paper is to probe international challenges of India-Russia and China factors.

Converging Factors in Indo-US Strategic Partnership

The literature review shows that the foundations of Indo-US strategic partnership lies in their common interests countering the rise of China which is the core converging factor for consolidation of Indo-US strategic partnership. The US' containment policy of China many believe that India would remain a pivot in the US Asia-pacific policy of containing China. In this backdrop, the forthcoming section of this paper we will critically evaluate the impact of China factor on Indo-US strategic partnership in the context of South China Sea, US Indo-Pacific strategy and US-China trade dispute. Some of the important questions which this section would include: how China factor affects Indo-US strategic partnership? How the issues in South China Sea create troubles in the US relations with China and create opportunity between the US and India? What are the implications of the US Indo-Pacific strategy for its strategic cooperation with India?

China Factor

One of the important independent variables affecting Indo-US strategic partnership is the China factor. Although, China has time and again assured the US that it would not challenge the first position of the US but the way China is enhancing its economic and military power resulting in expansion of its economic military clout in Asia. In this regard, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), establishment of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and its role in regional organizations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS shows its increasing prominence in the world order (Gul, 2021).

The Case of South China Sea

For India, China has challenged its position in many ways. First, China has been a military threat to India due to unresolved border issues. Second, China has more influenced in the international institutions such as UNO, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and other multilateral forums. Third, China's deeper strategic partnership with Pakistan and other South Asian nations to contain India's power. Forth, China has become more powerful in economy than India (Rajagopalan, 2017). To counter these challenges, India has been willing to cooperate with the US and other littoral states in the backyard of China's South China Sea. India has pursued this through strategic concept such as "extended neighborhood" and "Indo-Pacific" to keep South China Sea in its strategic horizon. The extended neighborhood that emerged in 2000 has aimed to defend India's strategic interests beyond South Asia (Scott, 2009). According to External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha in 2004 that India has extended neighbourhood policy to engage South China Sea (Sinha, 2004). Similarly, India's strategic interests were revealed when India's Maritime Military Strategy considered South China Sea as a blue water area in 2007 ("Indian Navy Freedom to Use the Sea, 2007). It reflects that India has begun to respond to China's strategic backyard of South China Sea.

The Case of Indo-Pacific

Indo-Pacific spans from Western Pacific Ocean to Western Indian Ocean. It is an important geostrategic region for trade, investment, energy supplies, cooperation and competition in the 21st century (Malik, 2014). The US Indo-Pacific strategy where key actors India, Australia and Japan are in competition with China. China is reluctant to be the part of Indo-Pacific strategy and Chinese leaders believe that the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy aims to contain China (He & Li, 2020). The US Indo-Pacific strategy gives an important role to India. China's rise in the Indian Ocean is a strategic challenge which is considered by New Delhi to balance China with the US Indo-Pacific strategy. India's strategic partnership with US Indo-Pacific strategy is an opportunity to target its foreign policy key points. First, Indo-US strategic will leverage New Delhi to overcome an emerging strategic security environment. The partnership allows India to increase its diplomatic influence. Second, India will address issues related to China's increasing collaboration with littoral states such as Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and Seychelles. In 2018, Modi has considered the importance of strategic partnership with US in Shangri-La to address Indian interests in the Indo-Pacific region (Baruah, 2020). The Table shows the US and India approach towards the Indo-pacific.

Date	Country	Publication
December 12, 2015	India and Japan	Issue first joint statement on Indo-Pacific and the World
October 10, 2015	India	The Indian Navy releases Indian Maritime Security Strategy, identifying the shift to Indo-Pacific
Dec-2017	United States	The US identifies Indo-pacific a new theater in its national security strategy
May 30, 2018	United States	The US renames Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command
June 1, 2018	India	Modi presents India's Indo-Pacific Vision at the Shangri-La Dialogue

Indo-Pacific is a deal breaker at some critical time with the US in the security domain for India. President Trump like his predecessor has laid out a vision for Indo-Pacific in APEC Summit at Honi in 2017. The National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy of the

US as shown in Table 2 has termed Indo-Pacific “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) concept. These two documents define three pillars such as security, economics and governance. Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR) has specified the security pillar clearly that how the National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy would apply it to Asia. The US-led network in Asia has marshalled India. India is quite willing as a part of Indo-pacific strategy which serves its strategic interests in the region of Greater Middle Eastern Region (GMR) and the Western part of the Indian Ocean. Besides the energy needs, Indo-pacific strategy helps India in some conflict with its two rival China and Pakistan in the areas of Ladakh in case of China and Kashmir in case of Pakistan (Malik, 2020). Indo-Pacific strategy covers India’s and the US security perception vis-à-vis China.

China factor will always be there to promote India and the US cooperation (Lou, 2012). The Trump administration has adopted the term Indo-Pacific and has elevated this region to top regional priority in the National Security Strategy in 2017. National Security Strategy has placed Indo-Pacific a region of competition between the free and repressive visions of the world order. The document has described China in terms of economic inducement and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agendas. The US NSS has called Australia, Japan and India known as Quadrilateral cooperation (QUAD) to address issues in the Indo-Pacific region. China factor unites India and the US cooperation in the maritime domain in the Eastern part of region such as Southeast and Northeast Asia, however, both New Delhi also compete for their national security preferences for some areas. For example, New Delhi wants cooperation in the Western portion of region spanning Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Gulf, the island nations of Indian Ocean and the Eastern coast of Africa (Ayes, 2019). Although China’s fear is common to both India and the US national security interests, however, mutual concerns exist in the geographical distribution of Indo-pacific region.

Diverging Factors/Points of Differences

In the above section, the foundations and converging factors in Indo-US strategic partnership has been highlighted. The existing literature on Indo-US strategic partnership is mainly focus on the prospects of Indo-US strategic partnership and little attention paid to the challenges to their strategic partnership. There are multiple factors such as Indo-Russian defence cooperation and expansion of cooperation to the Arctic region and the US failure to pursue India to contain China are some of the diverging factors which also need an analysis. The following section will discuss various challenges of Indo-US strategic partnership associated with the US contentions vis-à-vis Indo-Russian strategic partnership in defence sector and also highlights the implications of Indo-Russia joint venture in the Arctic region for the US. Furthermore, the other diverging factors such as Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan have been examined.

The Russian Factor

In spite of developing strategic partnership with the US, India in parallel is also continuing its defence and economic cooperation with Russia with as its old reliable partner. On several occasion the US has raised concerns on India’s cooperation with Russia. For instance, a high-flying Republican senator from Florida Marco Rubio who is also acting chairman of the US Senate Intelligence Committee, and ranking member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations has warned India not to develop close cooperation within Russia which is currently close strategic partner of China (Bhadrakumar, 2020). Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi has told, “An old friend is better than two new ones” in the annual India-Russia Summit to President of Russia Vladimir Putin. The comments of PM Modi have signified that India-Russian ties are more privileged and unique than Russian emerging ties with Pakistan and China (Siddiqui, 2016). Indo-Russian defence cooperation has developed since 1950s in many areas.

The Cold War era expanded Indo-Russian defence ties on the bases of commonalities of emerging strategic trends.

The warming of defence relations provided Russia to export aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, surveillance and reconnaissance aircrafts/helicopters, joint manufacturing of SU-30 MKI aircrafts, upgradation of Sukhoi aircrafts, T-90 main battle tanks along with refurbishing of many other weapons to India. Russia has inducted modern military weapons at the par with US military abilities. For example, S-400 Triumf missile system. S-400 missile system became the part of Indo-Russian defence deals when Russian President Putin signed 16 defence projects with India on October, 15, 2016. Russian S-400 missile technology has great strategic value for India. It can hit 36 targets of airborne threats. Through S-400 deal India will get five of this system. India will deploy three of them against Pakistan and two against China. The system can detect aircraft, drones, cruise, ballistic missiles and other airborne threats with a range of 400 kilometres. The system will be equipped with eight launchers, control centre, radar and 16 missiles will be available as a reload. S-400 system can detect an aircraft travelling at 17,000 Kmh (Rehman, 2018). Indo-Russian defence ties in many areas reveal India's strategic benefits while for Russia it is a leverage to sell its most lethal weapons to upset the US arms sale to the former. Figure 1 shows defence cooperation between India and Russia in different areas below.

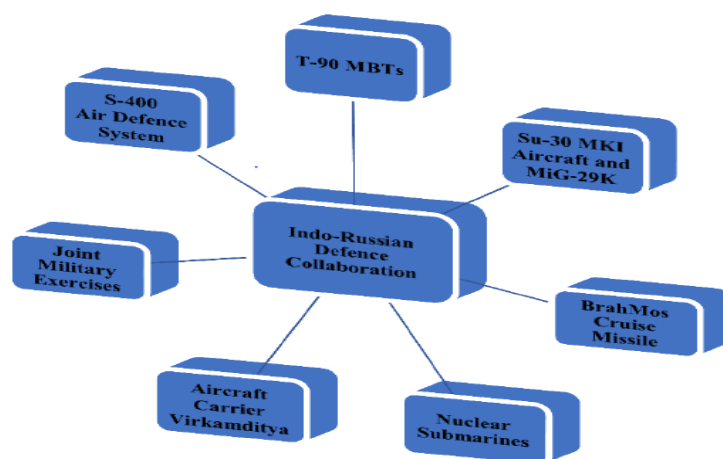


FIGURE 1
INDIA AND RUSSIA DEFENCE COOPERATION

India imports bulk of arms from Russia. Both India and Russia have engaged in strategic partnership for over 70 years. Additionally, Russia has supported India in United Nations Security Council for permanent seat, support in India-Pakistan conflict on Kashmir, support for becoming member of Nuclear Supplier Group, support for permanent of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS and both strive for a multipolar world. India and Russia became special and privileged strategic partners in 2010 despite the former increasing strategic engagement with the US during the President George W. Bush era. The trade volume is expected to hit \$100bn soon. The Russian arms supply to India the most upsetting weapons against the balance of power in South Asia is the S-400 surface to air missile. The deployment of S-400 system will strike aircraft in Pakistan's own territory (Khan et al., 2018). India's defence ties are an indicator of Russian significance for the former at level. However, the US has noted Russia as a top supplier of defence equipment to India with reservations on S-400 missile defence system. The US questioning of India's defence relation with Russia stems based on many reasons.

The US and India's ties with Russia are different. When India and Russia signed the S-400 missile defense contract on October 5, 2018 eventually the US Congress passed law of "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act" or CAATSA. The \$5.4 billion Triumf missile system clouds on India and the US strategic relations. According to External

Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in a meeting with his counterpart Mike Pompeo in Washington that one of a US official reminded him the "risk" attached to the deal. However, India's ties with Russia are significant and particular. The new defence ties between India and Russia are at a point of inflection now. Washington concerns the current deal between India and Russia with economic aspect primarily. Russia has emerged the top supplier of defence equipment's that cast cloud on the US and India strategic partnership (Haidar, 2018). India's recalibration in defense ties with Russia are significant, however, it has affected US-India ties tipping to the lower level due the rise of Russian defence market in India.

Issues related to Indo-US strategic partnership particularly arises due to differences in foreign policies trajectories vis-à-vis defence supply. India's choice for the Russian made weapons therefore become a preferable foreign policy option. Russia's willingness to transfer military technology and joint production to India is unique which upsets the US to cast doubt on its strategic relations with the former. Although for a decade or more India-US growing strategic partnership was an opportunity to slow down India's reliance on the Russian made weaponry, however, until recently Russia and India have reset to boost trade in the defense sector besides other amicable relations at the political, economic and social relations. Besides deal of S-400 missile system India has finalized deal in four Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates as well as the manufacturing of Ka-226T helicopter in India (Kapoor, 2019). The increasing defence reliance of India on Russia and the latter's as an opportunity to fill the vacuum when the US was bringing India to become its defence partner. In fact, the data in the table 2 below highlights what India imports from Russia.

Year	Deal	Amount
2018	S-400 missile defense system	\$5.2 bn
2018	Project 11356 frigates (2)	\$950 million
2019	Akula class nuclear power submarine	\$ 3bn
2019	T-90 tanks	\$2 bn
2019	Igla-S Very Short-Range Air Defense System	\$1.47bn
2019	JV to manufacture of Ak-203/103 rifles	\$1bn

The Arctic Factor

Arctic is an oceanic part of the world surrounded by continents. Five core states comprising this region are the US, Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway and Russia (Tamnes & Offerdal, 2014). Arctic region has become valued position in international relations because it is a region of competition and cooperation. The oil and gas resources are important core of geo-strategy of the concerned states in terms of international political economy in the arctic today (Raszeewski, 2018). The value of Arctic is measured through geopolitically, military-strategically, socioeconomically and environmentally. It has a considerable political and economic issues related to energy, shipping and fishing, and military and environmental issues in coming decades. Neo-realists admit the importance of the resources and there is rising tension that could become confrontation in the Arctic. Confrontation will emerge among the littoral states such as between the US and Russia on the bases of different level of national interests. For example, the US has general and particular interest towards the hydrocarbon and Russia views security, economic and identity related issues. Russia has the largest estimated potential with 52% oil and gas in Arctic (Kiel, 2014). Russian activities for dominating the strategic resources have considerable implications for the US to protect its national interest in the Arctic region. The distribution of hydrocarbon among the five arctic coastal states is shown in the table below.

Rank	Country	Total estimated resources in oil equivalent (billion barrels)	Percentage (%)
1	Russia	215.94	52
2	USA	83.31	20
3	Norway	47.46	12
4	Denmark/Greenland	44.49	11
5	Canada	20.08	5
Total		413.28	100

The Sino-Russian developments in the Arctic region are viewed by the US detrimental to its security interests. On the other side China and Russia feel the same against the US (Sorencen & Klimenko, 2017). The entry of China and Russia may increase security challenges and decrease the US to maintain its influence in the Arctic in key areas of natural resources. Besides China's cooperation with Russia, India has extended cooperation with the latter in Arctic. Both India and Russia have begun cooperation in the field of energy where the Russian companies are involved through Novetak's future LNG projects and other joint ventures. CEO of Novetak has said that India's fast growth has needed energy procurement in the region. Russia's cooperation with India will expand its energy companies towards Asian markets. President Putin has guided Prime Minister Modi about "Lider" project which is the 120MW icebreaker will make routes in the Arctic ice ("India Looks towards Russian Arctic", 2019). India considers Russia for its exploration of hydrocarbon as an important strategic partner in the Arctic. This secures its future energy demand and strategic interests (Sinha, 2019). The entry of India in line with Russia besides China indicates Arctic a region of emerging strategic and commercial significance in coming decades. However, Russian resurgence has worried the US about India's participation with its rival.

India's cooperation with Russia in the Arctic is another challenge for the US in coming decades. India's cooperation in the energy sector with Russia is a construct of strategic interests in the Arctic. This cooperation may affect India and the US strategic partnership in the domain of energy sector. This is because the Russian step towards linking Vladivostok to Chennai in India through Maritime route which means Russia through its Far East development will dominate much like defense materials with India in the Indian markets in near future. The joint venture too supports India's "Look East" policy but both Russia and India do not have deep pockets like China in the East Asia (Chandran, 2019). North-South Corridor through Iran will help trade development between India and Russia once Vladivostok-China maritime becomes operational. The Russian investment in artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, outer space and nanotechnology in India will disappear the US investment to dominate in the Indian markets in coming decades (Godbole, 2018). Increasing the Russian technological influence in the India markets through newly developed projects through India's Arctic policy is an indication of a likeness in strategic interests, however, it has a lot of policy implications for the US towards India.

The Russian developments in the Arctic with India will complicate the US strategic presence. The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavov has considered India as the first non-Arctic state to extract minerals. For example, India invests in three fields in the Vankor area and to build 600km pipeline to the North coast of Arctic Ocean. The Indian investment will be under the Russian company Rosneft. Rosneft will provide shipping facility and in the Vostok oil project. Moreover, India participates in the coal projects with Russia in the Arctic. India's cooperation will make Russia to dominate the European and the Asian markets through the Arctic Sea routes development in near future. Besides Russian funding of 2, 5 trillion rubbles, India's pouring of its money will help the Rosneft to speed up its drilling for oil and gas in the

Arctic (Staalesen, 2020). It is under observation that Russia has already asserted to claim sovereignty and influence in the Arctic region against the under-resource combatant command position of the US geographically (Oren, 2019). India with its huge market for energy consumption will increase strategic cooperation with Russia in the Arctic region.

The Iranian Factor

The Iranian factor is one of the important irritants in the strengthening of India and the US strategic partnership. India has the second largest shia population and its cooperation with Iran in defense, economy and trade and crude oil has made them close friends. Although, India has compromised its critical relations with Iran due to American pressure especially its withdrawal from Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline. India and Iran has developed close cooperation for building peace and development in Afghanistan. Iran has very close economic cooperation with India in crude oil and energy. India like many other states is facing challenges of the US sanctions on Iran for trading in the refined petroleum product. In this respect, several major Indian business organizations faced challenges in getting loans from the US Export and Import Bank (Exim Bank) close to US\$900 million for the purchase of US equipment (Hafeez, 2019). The US would not like any close ties between India and Iran. As and when India tried to develop relations with Iran the US put pressure on India that any such endeavours would negatively affect India's civil nuclear agreement. For instance, in 2012 when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pursued India to curtail its ties with Iran, India reduced its oil 11% oil import from Iran.

In terms of its geostrategic imperatives India considered Iran as a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia. India is competing with Pakistan and China for having influence in Tehran and Central Asia. India's cultural and historical ties with Iran also compel it to have closer relations with Iran. In the present international situation the Indo-Iran ties are facing more challenges than opportunities in view of the US withdrawal from Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action JCPOA. Some experts believe "India will continue along its doctrine of strategic autonomy while balancing its interests among its various allies" (Pethiyagoda, 2018) "One of the important questions related to sustainability of Indo-US strategic partnership is how much India would compromise its international interests and regional priorities especially its energy security link with Iran. For a long time it would be difficult for India to accept the US pressure on its relations with Iran. Therefore, Iran would remain a potential challenge for the sustainability of Indo-US strategic partnership.

Pakistan Factor

The US relations with Pakistan also from time to time created challenges for Indo-US strategic cooperation. Pakistan's strategic value enhanced in the post-9/11 world due to the US war on global terrorism, where Pakistan played a critical role encountering terrorism as a non-NATO ally. There have been ups and downs in their relations but recently due to Trump decision to withdraw forces from Afghanistan and find political solution has again brought the US closer to Pakistan being an important stake holder in the political settlement of Afghan issues. Trump administration has appreciated Pakistan's role in bringing Afghan Taliban on the negotiation table resulting into the US and Taliban Peace agreement signed in 29th September, 2020. To help resolve issues between India and Pakistan the US President Trump has offered mediation on Kashmir dispute. The US President in a two days official visit to India on February 25, 2020, reiterated his promise of mediation. US President, Donald Trump while meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan at the World Economic Forum on January 22, 2020, offered mediation on Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan. Last year, on July 22, 2019, India was surprised by Trump's willingness to mediate on the Kashmir conflict and this continued when Imran Khan and Trump met 2019.3 at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September, 2020 (Gul & Ahmed, 2020). Many experts believe that US-Pakistan close

cooperation on Afghanistan will marginalize Indian role in Afghanistan which may impel India to enhance its cooperation with Iran and Russia to protect its interests in the region.

CONCLUSION

This discussion reflects that Indo-US strategic cooperation has not developed into a comprehensive strategic partnership due to various irritants and constraints. This study has highlighted that there is a lot of work done on the prospects and potential of consolidation of strategic cooperation between India and the US. However, there has not been much attention paid on the challenges hindering the development of their strategic cooperation into an enduring broad strategic partnership. While discussing the evolution and foundation of Indo-US strategic partnership the study has highlighted the main facilitating factors resulting in the consolidation of their relations include: geopolitical and geostrategic shift in the world order, shift of policies both in the US and India towards each other, converging of interests in containing rise of China, building common strategy in the Indo-Pacific. The study finds out that the US considered India an economic market for its defence selling and making India a pivot in its strategy of countering the rise of China. India was also considered useful in US war on terrorism. Further, India was considered as natural ally being one of the largest democracies in the world. On its part India after the disintegration of USSR find it useful to align its self with the US for getting benefits of transfer of technology in the defense sector. One of the important questions addressed is the challenges in Indo-US strategic partnership in the form of India's defence cooperation with Russia and development of their cooperation in the Arctic region contrary to the US security interests.

Another aspect covered in the study is various variable affecting Indo-US strategic cooperation. India's cooperation with Iran in one way or the other is affecting implementation of the US strategies of containment especially the US sanction on Iran on nuclear issues. Contrary to the US aspirations India is enhancing oil and energy cooperation with Iran and asking for New Delhi specific waivers. Furthermore, the US Afghan strategy of peace talks with Taliban does not suit to Indian priorities in Afghanistan that may result in enhancement of cooperation with Iran and Russia to maintain its regional influence. As Pakistan played a critical role in the signing of peace agreement between the US and Taliban it would expect from the US to play a mediatory role on Kashmir which could also create a trouble for the US and India relations. With these emerging challenges the study has analyzed the impact of these challenges on the US future cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific region. The intensification of China's conflicts with both the US and India would compel to increase their strategic cooperation and at the same time both states will have to accommodate each other on the challenges they are facing.

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