

Indo-US Relations: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

The Indo-US relations are strategically very significant. Both the countries have many purposes that they can be fulfilled from each other. India is strategically important for US due to many reasons like both the countries followed the democracy having common ideas and aspirations, increasing dominance of India in international politics, to counter the growth of China, security of Indian Ocean, fastest growing economy with huge consumers for US, strength and experience to counter terrorism, second largest importer of India etc. On the other hand, friendship with US is also very vital for India from various points of view like safeguarding its security interests with Pakistan, China and other neighboring countries, desire to become permanent member of UNSC, countering China in Indian Ocean region, provide higher and advanced technology in aerospace, intelligence, defense, commerce and to grow economically. Hence, it is very important to study the issues and challenges prevailed in Indo-US relations if someone wants to understand the relations between these two states.

Keywords: Indo-US relations, issues and challenges.

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Introduction

The relationship between the world's first democracy United States (US) and largest democracy India is a topic of all time concern. These two are very significant on the map of world. As President George W. Bush had correctly said that "India and United States are separated by half a globe yet, today our two Nations are closer than ever before." In the words of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh "India and US share the common goal of making this one of the principal relationships of our countries." Also, Nicholas Brins, Secretary of State clearly marked that "within a generation many Americans may view India as one of two or three most important strategic partners."

India and the United States relations were remaining very uncertain over a long period of time. After the independence of India, the relationship between both the countries were started on a good note having certain sympathy for each other. With the supply of 200 Sherman tanks of worth 19 million dollars the US become the first country to initiate defence trade with India. Moreover, S-55 helicopters and 54C-119 Fairchild military transport aircraft was supplied by US to India. There were only few moments when these two countries were agree and co-operative to each other such

as food help to India by US in 1950s' and 1960s', arms help to India by US during war against china, bringing Green Revolution in 1963, Tarapur Atomic Power Station (TAPS) was established in India, in 1984 signing of 'Agreement of Technology Transfer'. But all these occasions were only for limited span and these could not get fruitful for future relations.

Historically the links between India and US was marked in 1492 when Christopher Columbus discovered America while searching for a new route to India. However, the official relations between India and US were begun with the Second World War. US had been following the isolationist foreign policy upto the Second World War but after the Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, US totally changed her foreign policy. After this attack America understood the need of cooperation from India in this war. Due to the strategic importance of India as a base of operation against Japan forced US president Roosevelt took interest in political problems of India after realising the strategic importance of India against Japan (Chattopadhyay, 2007).

Issues and Challenges

The relations between India and United States face many issues. Sometimes the relations were very friendly and cooperative whereas on other times the relations were very cold and passive. India and United States differ from each other in traditions, customs, culture, race, political setting and geographical setting. They have remained colonies of British for a long time (Gupta, 1969). US became independence before India and turned out as a world power during World War II. Speech of President Wilson in the congress became the great source of inspiration for freedom fighters of India (Singh, 1962).

India and US share many similarities such as believe in human rights, law, believe in peace and freedom, individual freedom, liberty of press. Both states are the mixer of various races, culture and religious. After India got independence from British rule, India tries to build friendly relation with US. Leaders of India appreciate the positive influence of US president in Indian Independence. Indian leaders especially Nehru devoted a friendly hand towards US after the World War II. US shifted its policy from containment to communism whereas India followed Non-Alignment policy. This difference in policies followed by two becomes the major source of misunderstanding between them.

However, the political relations between India and US were started in 1941. But at that time neither the countries were in position to glorify these relations due to World War-I and II and slavery of India. After the world war-II was over in September 1946, India formed an interim government. US showed its interest in developing diplomatic relations with India's interim government. That time US president Harry S. Truman did efforts to establish relations between two. But, Jawaharlal Nehru as a first PM of Independent India followed the Non-Alignment policy of interim government. Nehru clarified his view point on Non-Alignment the Henry Grady, the first US ambassador to India, that India did not want to favor either of the power blocs but at the same time wanted to establish friendly relations with US. However, US did not give any official reaction on India's policy but it tilted towards Pakistan by providing military help to it. India sustained its policy of Non-Alignment and opposed the Pacific Pact, the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the US military aid to Pakistan, the Manila Pact, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). In this way, India opposed both the super powers- US and Soviet Union. This Non-Alignment policy created distance between India and US. However, Nehru considered Non-alignment policy as an effective policy but US was not of that viewpoint. US doubted the India's purpose and diverted its attention away from it. As a result, India after Independence did not become the priority of US.

Korean War was begun between North Korea and South Korea from 1950 to 1953. Soviet bloc backing North and US was South Korea. Nehru was afraid that if atom bombs would be used in this war then this Korean War would turn into third World War. India also sent its forces on the request of UN but on humanitarian ground, India sent its medical unit. This leads to the deterioration of relationships of India with US for not supporting it.

Some important issues and challenges prevailed in the relations between India and US are discussed as following:

Non-Alignment Policy of India

India followed Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). After the World War II, the major problem in front of newly independent countries was the maintenance of their independence. Their other problems were the fight with food, security and poverty, that why they favored the Non-Alignment Policy. However, US wanted to spread its influence on the NAM countries and it succeeds to some extent. On an international platform US always talked about the inclination of India towards Soviet Union. For a long time, US were doubtful about the credibility of India as a Non-Alignment nation. During Korean crisis, India took different stand and did not contribute to US. This act of India was taken as favor toward Soviet Union and this misunderstanding continued till Soviet Union was disintegrated.

US always favored Pakistan as US did not like Non-Alignment Policy. At the time when India was facing border dispute with China which finally changed into war between them in October 1962. Nehru denied the help offered by President Kennedy whereas Soviet Union remained mute to this situation for a long time. After long time when it offered for the help, India refused the assistance. However, Nehru stands sturdy to his NAM policy after the war was over. Nehru thanked President Kennedy for his act of kindness. This attack of China on India and offer of US military support during the war was proved helpful for creating better environment for the relations between two countries. These friendly relations continued for some time (1962-63) but soon the NAM policy of India and Cold War politics obstructed the way of these new friendly relations. Even after this Indo-China war of 1962 India did not favor US and followed its NAM policy which made US angry and frustrated.

Although the influence of NAM had diminished in present context but it is still somewhat relevant in international politics because its principles of promoting peace, cooperation and development still resonate in certain diplomatic discussions.

US-Pakistan closeness and Indo-US Relations

India was a founder member of NAM so it did not join any military bloc, but Pakistan joined the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) as well as Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) which makes Pakistan a reliable friend of US in South Asia. In May 1954, although oppose of India, US and Pakistan signed Mutual Defense Assistance Pact in Karachi (Dutt, 1993). After that, the context of problems between India and Pakistan especially issue of Kashmir was transformed. The third party interfered into the bilateral relations of India and Pakistan. Since US involved in the Kashmir issue, it always inclined towards Pakistan without considering the side of India. This issue of Kashmir was not resolved by UN Security Council which transformed into 1965 war between India and Pakistan. Due to the strategic links between US and Pakistan, US supported Pakistan on Kashmir issue throughout cold war.

Since India got independence in 1947, Pakistan remains a dominant factor between Indo-US relations. Pakistan's policy towards India is guided by distrust, suspicion and hatred (Ganguly, 2019). Four wars were fought between India and Pakistan in 1947, 1965, 1971 and 1999. From these four, the reason for three was Kashmir. US tilted towards Pakistan during those days because of cold war politics. Pakistan was a strategic partner for US to counter the growth of communism. India could not support strategically to US due to its Non-Alignment policy.

The war of 1965 between Indo-Pak was the result of contradiction over Kashmir issue. This contradiction in the ideas of two led to war on August 14, 1965. In June 1965, Pakistan military penetrating guerrilla forces into valley of Kashmir. To counter this step of Pakistan, India attacked on Punjab near Lahore by crossing international border. The war reached to settlement with the intervention of UN by signing the Tashkent agreement on January 10, 1966 (Jha, 1972).

Indo-US relations got offended due to offer of US military assistance to Pakistan. Pakistan used 45 ton American Patton tanks whose photographs were taken by Indian Air Force Pilot over Barbet on 26 April and were released on 28 April by Indian Defense Ministry. These photographs were presented by India as evidence to prove that Pakistan was using equipment against India which was received under the CENTO and SEATO arrangements (Kux, 2001). US was failed to fulfill its promise that Pakistan would not use the US weapons against India in war. Washington shopped the economic and military assistance to both the countries.

The war of 1971 between India and US was unique in the sense that it did not involve the issue of Kashmir infact it was due to the crisis created by the political battle over East Pakistan. East Pakistan demanded for the declaration of independent state- Bangladesh from West Pakistan. India interfered into the ongoing Bangladesh liberation movement. In response to this Pakistan attacked at several places along the western border of India with Pakistan. But Indian army responded very quickly and held their positions successfully. After the two weeks of fighting, Pakistan surrendered to the joint forces of India and Pakistan which result in the creation of new state Bangladesh. But during the Bangladesh crisis, US tilted more towards Pakistan.

Another recent war between India and Pakistan was fought in 1999 commonly known as Kargil War. Pakistani troops cross Line of Control (LOC) and occupied Indian Territory in Kargil district. In response to this India launch military force to evacuated Pakistani troops. The conflict continues about two months and India became able to take control back over the region occupied by Pakistan. International community led by US pressurized Pakistan to withdraw its forces from the Indian territory. This war was the major defeat for the Pakistan.

Apart from these four wars in 2019, India cut off all bilateral relations with Pakistan after the terrorist attack in Pulwama in India held Kashmir region and also India airstrike the suspected militant camp at Pakistan. India alleged Pakistan for supporting cross-border terrorist activities while Pakistan blamed India for repression of Muslim populated Kashmir valley. Relations between India and Pakistan further got complicated with the developments in Afghanistan since mid of 2021. According to the assessment of US intelligence, this conflict has potential to go upto the higher level. In March 2022, a missile (without detonation) from New Delhi was landed in Pakistan region which was claimed by India as a 'technical malfunctioning' led to the 'accidental firing'. But Pakistan did not agree with this argument of India and blamed that it was a 'technical lapses of serious nature in Indian handling of strategic weapons.'

China intervention and US Reaction

China and India are the two neighboring countries separated by Himalayas, the highest mountain of the world. The bilateral relationships between these two states influence the peace and stability of region and globe. Both the countries are growing economically and are declared nuclear power. In order to dominant the regional as well as on international politics, both India and China want to become economic power. India and China relationships witnessed the continuous up and down which ended up as a war in 1962. This aggression of China on India plays an important role in bringing US and India close and in understanding the problems of each other. At that time, Pakistan and China came closer as both of them signed a border agreement on March 22, 1963 and gave hundreds of miles of territory of India in Kashmir to China. On the other hand, India looked up to the US.

Relations of India with China have been tense from last decades but from the recent years the enmity among them has increased significantly. In 2020, the India-China relations witnessed its worst border conflict after Sino-India war in 1962 which reduces the mutual trust and confidence. The reason for this can be the friendship of China with Pakistan- enemy of India and growing influence of China on territories of India including Indian Ocean, the issue of China with the presence of Dalai Lama in India.

The officials of India as well as of US blamed China for this 2020 border aggression which arise the fear of two-front war for India from China and Pakistan. This military aggression from Beijing is the price India paying for

joining hands with western powers. Since then, India adjusted its economic relations with China. In response to this conflict, India banned more than 250 mobile apps, still China is the second largest trade partner of India after US and import to India is continuously reported very high whereas export to China is at modest level. In order to negotiate the whole matter 18 rounds of military-to-military talks were arranged however the tension on India-China Line of Actual Control (LAC) remains high. Also, China occupied the 580 square miles territory which was previously patrolled by India. Hundreds of soldiers were martyred from both the sides. Both countries organized 50,000 troops and heavy weapons at LAC by estimating the fear of wider conflict. Both of them are improving their military capabilities and infrastructure in the region. India's capabilities were boosted with the supply of defense equipment from US and US provided intelligence services to India which helps Indian forces to repel the latest incursions of Beijing.

India's closeness to Soviet Union and Indo-US Relations

India followed NAM and did not take a side of one power bloc. But as US always support Pakistan so India came close to Soviet Union. This closeness brings bitterness in relations between India and US. US always questioned the non-alignment of India as it bent towards Soviet Union. In December 1979, the military forces of Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in order to solidify the country and to change the regime. The intervention of Soviet in Afghanistan alarmed the US and this move of Soviet forced United States to reframe its policy towards South Asia and West Asia. To counter this move of Soviet in South Asia, US made Pakistan as a frontline state in its policy. Pakistan was trusted friend of US and also the strategic position of Pakistan was very appropriate to counter Soviet. India felt annoyed with this decision of US due to the pose of direct threat to its security. However, US did not like the stand taken by India to defend the intervention of Soviet in Afghanistan and blamed India as ally of communist. Casper Weinberger, US Secretary of Defense in 1986 set back the relations between two states with the announcement of providing Boeing 707 Advanced Warning and Control System (AWACS) to Pakistan as a part of new multi-year military and economic aid package.

After the collapse of Soviet Union and formation of Russia, the reason for US displeasure towards India was somewhat decreased but its foreign policy was not fully transformed. Hence from the formation of Russia, India and Russia have close relations. During the Ukraine war, this relation between India and US became awkward. Russia remains the top supplier of arms to India from past many years but India blamed the war of Ukraine to the inability of Russia to deliver defense equipment on time hoping for the more deepen defense cooperation between two. Whereas US always encouraged India to reduce its dependence on imported Russian arms. Ongoing purchase of Russian weapons by India can trigger the sanctions from US under section 231 of the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act. In 2022, the neutrality of India on aggression of Russia against Ukraine as well as abstention of India on all the votes of UN for condemning or criticizing the disappointment to some members of congress and many western analyst who had hoped that most populous democracy of World- India will give its view firmly.

NPT and Indo-US relations

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) was the global binding agreement that prevents the comprehensive spread of nuclear weapons. NPT signed in 1968 and implemented in March 1970. NPT divided the countries of the World into two parts i.e. nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states. The nuclear weapon states such as US, UK, France, China and Russia but India, Israel and Pakistan have never signed the NPT hence they were considered as non-nuclear weapon states.

Concern of India for NPT was started when US dropped two nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki cities of Japan. Prime Minister Nehru considered atomic bombs as 'symbol of evil'. Non-Proliferation Treaty did not join by India and it was justified by India by saying that this treaty is discriminatory. It differentiates between non-nuclear weapon states and nuclear weapon states as it has applied different set of rules to nuclear and non-nuclear weapon

states. India decided to move on idealistic path after the death of Nehru and if nuclear weapon became necessary for India then it would be definitely prepared by India.

US Reaction to the Nuclear Dilemma of India

In 1966, Indira Gandhi came to power in India. She wanted to improve relations between India and US. In Indo-Pak war Iran supported Pakistan with military equipment. At the end of Vietnam War, it was supposed that the friction in the relations between India and US must be reduced but nuclear test of India in 1974 caused setback in relationship. US were a party to nuclear co-operation agreement with India for building and supporting the nuclear power reactors at Tarapur near Bombay, hence there was a huge protest in US.

India conducted its first nuclear test on May 18, 1974 at Pokhran, Thar Desert in Rajasthan which is about 100 meters underground site. India's this test proved that India is capable to manufacture Nuclear Weapons. After this test, US took very strict reaction on it. US blocked aid and imposed numerous sanctions without any warning. Nuclear Supplies Group (NSG) reduced transfer of related nuclear technology after 1974 not only for India but also for other state of Proliferation concern. This event was of the major shock for US as most of the nuclear material used for this weapon program was imported from US for civilian purposes. India assured the world that this test was a peaceful use. This event influences the hold of US in South Asia.

The Atomic Energy Commission of India stated that India hold no intension of producing nuclear weapons and retold its strong opposition to use nuclear explosions for military purpose. US had mixed reaction having feeling of anger that India conducts nuclear test through peaceful manner, feeling of envy that India became first developing country to conduct nuclear test and feeling of contempt that poor country thinks beyond its objective of increasing food production. The US and other western countries suspected on intensions of India that India is trying to own nuclear weapons by creating new term "Peaceful Nuclear Explosion".

In May 1998, India conducted its second nuclear test. This was a series of five underground nuclear tests which brings numerous sanctions from west. US gave strong condemning statement over the Pokhran II and imposed economic sanctions on India including cut off on all financial assistance except humanitarian aid, banned export of certain technologies and defense material and also opposed the financial aid from various financial institutions of the world. US got so angry to such an extent that it refused to have any dialogues with India related to this topic for two months and implement Glenn Amendments on India. That entire scenario gave a vibe that the relation between two would never recover. After that the most comprehensive talk was held for over two years on nuclear policy issue between Foreign Minister of India Jaswant Singh and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. In this talk, US tried to make India member of CTBT and NPT but India stands firm on its decision of not joining these groups. Hence inspite of the US pressure, India did not become ready to sign any of treaty which challenges the national security of India. This talk was continued on the assumption that security concerns of India must be fully understood. India got success in its objective which was clear with the visit of President Bill Clinton to India and vice-versa visit of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited US in 2000. This bilateral talk also laid the path for Civil Nuclear Deal in 2008. This deal was signed between Dr. Manmohan Singh and George W. Bush which separated the military and civil nuclear facilities. Civil nuclear facilities are placed under the control of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and US also agreed to work with India towards full civil nuclear cooperation. This agreement includes nuclear trade, transfer of nuclear material, nuclear equipment, component and related technologies also the collaboration in nuclear fuel cycle activities.

India has shortage of Uranium required for running its nuclear reactors. After Civil nuclear agreement, India become the one and only country which has not signed NPT still it is receiving nuclear fuel for its reactors. It signed various agreement with countries like France, Australia, Japan, Canada, Russia and Kazakhstan so that India can import Uranium to run its nuclear plants efficiently.

Conclusion

No doubt the relation between India and US is strategically very important but their bilateral relations were not the same. Their relations continuously faced the ups and downs with the time. Sometime the relations between two are at good note whereas at the other time they are at very low pace. From time to time many issues and challenges were faced by Indo-US relations. From the above discussion various issues and challenges that came in the way of bilateral relations were India's nearness to Soviet Union, closeness of Pakistan with US, war between India and China, India's nuclear test i.e. Pokhran-I and Pokhran-II etc. It is very significant to study issues and challenges raised in the bilateral relations so that the friendly relations between two states will continuous in future and misunderstanding will be collectively cleared.

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