

The Geopolitical Chessboard: Unpacking the Consequences of India-US Strategic Convergence for South Asia's Strategic Alignment



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Abstract: *South Asia is the least interconnected area in the world as a result of regional politics between Pakistan and India. The two nuclear rivals' bickering has a detrimental effect on the peace, security, and development of the area. Major Powers have made use of these fault lines to further their geopolitical goals. The US pushes India to offer regional net security because it sees itself as an important regional power. India views China and Pakistan as impediments to its hegemonic aspirations. Its strategic endeavors have brought it closer to the US, with many economic, political, and strategic repercussions for the balance of power in South Asia, especially for Pakistan. India is attempting to tip the strategic scales in its favor in the area. It presents Pakistan with important obstacles to overcome as well as possibilities. This study intends to examine the effects of the US-India strategic alliance on the regional strategic environment, particularly Pakistan. It looks at unconventional strategies Pakistan may use to seize opportunities.*

Keywords: Pakistan, China, Quad, South Asia, Strategic Convergence, Strategic Balance

Introduction

States are becoming interconnected based on shared interests as a result of the evolving character of international politics. In both domestic and foreign politics, the US and India are presented as natural allies. Due to a number of systemic causes as well as the dynamics of their respective national and strategic objectives, relations between the two nations have seen ups and downs. The existing alliance between the US and India is driven by shared economic, political, and strategic objectives. India had a non-alignment policy throughout the Cold War, although when it suited India, it continued to be aligned with the US and the Soviet Union. However, the assumptions covered by the structural realism paradigm led to a strategic convergence between the US and India in the

years after 9/11. The two nations' 2005 nuclear agreement laid the groundwork for a more substantial collaboration. India joined the Quad after being urged by the US to actively take part in its Indo-Pacific strategy as a supplier of network security. The present spectrum of bilateral ties includes US efforts to limit China as well as collaboration in the military, defense, nuclear, cyber, and space sectors.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute study lists India as one of the top importers of weapons, accounting for 11% of all weapons purchases worldwide. These armament systems are sourced mostly from the US and Russia. In the Indian Ocean, the US and India carry out military drills and maritime patrols. The US's physical presence in Asia is declining, but its diplomatic presence is not. India is

necessary for the US to achieve its Indo-Pacific strategy and to oppose China. The power dynamics in South Asia are being upset by this strategic collaboration between the two nations. The other important South Asian nation that views the US-India convergence as a danger to its security is Pakistan (Singh, 2022). The US-made military systems that India purchases become significant for China and raise security problems for Pakistan. China and Pakistan make excellent business partners. Nevertheless, the changing power dynamics in South Asia in favour of India make it more resemble a strategic partnership as both nations conduct joint military drills and Pakistan purchases military equipment from China. To oppose the strategic convergence between the US and India, Pakistan might implement several economic and strategic initiatives.

In this regard, the strategic partnership between the United States and India affects both global politics and South Asia's strategic security. This study examines US-Indian strategic cooperation and its effects on the strategic balance in South Asia under the theoretical guise of structural realism. How will it affect the region's strategic future? In keeping with the qualitative approach, the study offers a thorough theoretical grasp of the power dynamics in South Asia as well as the significance of the US and China in influencing regional dynamics. Additionally, it looks at how Pakistan is affected by US-India strategic cooperation and what measures Pakistan might take to handle these shifting regional security dynamics.

The strategic convergence between the US and India and its consequences for the strategic equilibrium in South Asia are examined in this paper using a realist perspective. Realists take the world as it is and make predictions about how nations will act within the international community based on unbiased presumptions. Realists contend that the absence of any controlling authority makes the international system anarchic. States are compelled to look for their own survival in a chaotic international framework.

Defensive and offensive realism assumptions are pertinent in light of the importance of the

US-India strategic relationship and its effects on the strategic balance of South Asia. Punitive realism underpins India's objectives in forming an alliance with the US. India views itself as the area's leading supplier of internet security, and in order to further its influence, it is forming alliances with governments beyond the region. In contrast, the US wants to work with India for defensive reasons and to counterbalance China.

Strategic cooperation has replaced strategic differences

In the East-West nuclear conflict of the Cold War, strategic balance evolved. Three principles are examined in the strategic balance. The establishment of a non-proliferation system to preserve the status quo: first, nuclear deterrence among the participants; second, deterrence management via a number of bilateral, trilateral, or other security alliances (Thakur, Shetty, Sidhu, & Disarmament, 2022).

India began pursuing power to portray itself as a big force as soon as it gained independence from British colonialism; the Nehruvian program aspired to make India a great power that would take part in world affairs. India's integrity was secured by the Cold War's non-alignment policy. The USSR provided India with both military and political assistance. Because of Pakistan, India's ties with the US have remained tense. Because of Kissinger's remark that "America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests," ties between the US and India began to improve after the Cold War. India's economy began to internationalize and adopt the capitalist economic model after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in contrast to its previous socialist leanings. It needed a security ally since Russia could no longer effectively support India as it had in the past. As the US and India found their way to strategic collaboration, 9/11 enhanced their relationship even more.

Examining the goals of both nations' larger national interests is crucial to understanding the nature of India-US relations. The idea that India offers internet security in South Asia is supported by the US. Offensive realism observes that nations want to increase their influence in the area and overseas, and India is no exception.

India is grappling with issues in the region similar to how China is attempting to dominate the area. It is developing strategic ties with the US in order to achieve this goal.

However, if the US's stance is examined, it only backs India in its efforts to restrain China. In the 1990s, the US began to see China as a possible future danger. According to John Mearsheimer, a worldwide hegemon has never existed. Being a regional hegemon and preventing other regional powers from becoming dominant is the most a state can hope to do. He continues by saying that in the existing international system, only the US has served as the regional hegemon. It can only maintain its hegemony by thwarting the emergence of other local hegemonies. It must encourage the emergence of opposing forces in order to achieve this goal and restrain the expansion of potential dominating forces in the area. The US is backing India against a growing China because the US National Security Strategy 2017, predicts that China might pose a danger to American interests.

Numerous defense and strategic agreements, ranging from nuclear cooperation to military training, have been struck between the US and India. India was seen by the Bush administration as a key opening for American interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The Next Step in Strategic Partnership initiative, which Bush launched in 2004, opened the door for collaboration on the nuclear and space programs (M. J. S. S. Khan, 2017) . Through the effort, the US and India went from being buyers and sellers to being strategic partners.

The US and India have also inked security agreements in addition to these bilateral military accords. For the sharing of military information, they include the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), signed in 2002, and the Logistics Sharing Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), signed in by virtue of the 2016 Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), both nations are permitted to repair and replenish at each other's military locations and to share information during exercises and operations . In addition to these three accords, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Pact, another

important security pact, was inked in 2020 is the deadline for the two nations to share geospatial data.

A tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean rim and killed almost 230,000 people caused QUAD to develop. The ravaged Asia-Pacific area will get humanitarian and social help from the US, India, Japan, and Australia. In 2007, informal meetings between these four nations turned into a formal security collaboration. Due to their ties to China, the QUAD members were initially hesitant to actively engage at a high level. Australia has more unique economic interests than China, with \$200 billion in two-way trade (Liu & He, 2023). This is why it insisted that joining QUAD was not a move against China. International observers did not, however, interfere with the facts. Late in 2017, when all four nations agreed to make further efforts to protect the Asia-Pacific region from transnational threats, Quad 2.0 was born. Any violence in the area will be retaliated against with force. The narrative, such as preserving peace and stability in the South China Sea and defending partners in the area from aggression, plainly illustrates that the objective of these remarks is China, even if the official declarations of member nations do not seem to be against China.

Along with the US, India makes a sufficient contribution to QUAD. No other nation, outside the US, can match China's GDP, military expenditures, or naval presence in the area. China may be challenged by the might of the alliance formed when four nations united behind one cause. The GDP and military budget of the Quad nations are compared to China in the graph below.

Figure 1: QUAD in relation to China's GDP



(Source: www.heritage.org)

India, which aspires to dominate the area, has a GDP far lower than China. Therefore, QUAD is essential to India-US strategic cooperation in achieving the shared objectives of slowing China's growth. The Quad Nations' military expenditure as compared to China, on the other hand, shows a similar pattern.

Figure 2: Quad vs. China's Defense Spending



(Source: www.heritage.org)

The US spends the most money on the military, and China follows suit. However, by bolstering their military capabilities in the area against a developing China, India and the US gain from strategic convergence. It demonstrates how important Quad is to India and the US' strategic partnership. Prime Ministers Anthony Albanese of Australia, Fumio Kishida of Japan, Narendra Modi of India, and President Joe Biden of the US all shared a common goal at the recent QUAD summit in Japan: to rid the region of Chinese aggression and to work together during times of difficulty (Dobell, 2022).

The US is interested in making the Asia-Pacific accessible by establishing connections both within and outside the region, regional prosperity, Asia-Pacific security, and enhancing the regional states' capacities to counter transnational threats, according to the official White House document on the Indo-Pacific strategy. The future of each of our countries—indeed, the future of the whole world—depends on the Indo-Pacific region being free and open and prospering in the years to come, Biden stated at the Quad Leaders' Summit 2021. The study outright refers to the PRC as a possible danger to regional peace that has to be countered, with the US and its allies taking the lead in this effort.

Strategic Balance in South Asia: Implications

The two countries that have the most to gain

from regional stability in South Asia are Pakistan and India. Only Pakistan is immediately impacted by the strategic partnership between India and the US in South Asia. The explanation for this is that all other South Asian nations see India as a source of internet security due to their economic, geopolitical, or social ties to it (Dobell, 2022). Only Pakistan has contested India's desire to be the dominant nation. Both countries are the only ones with nuclear weapons in the area. The second aspect of the theoretical comprehension of defensive realism is where the rivalry between India and Pakistan is understood.

a) Growing power asymmetries between Pakistan and India

The argument contends that since the states are left to fend for themselves, there will always be a power struggle among them. The rival state feels power-deprived in the face of any power-maximizer due to the security conundrum. India's desire to increase its might is seen as a danger to Pakistan. Pakistan boosts its authority to combat this challenge rather than maintain the status quo (Paul, 2006). Therefore, the region will continue to engage in realism and realpolitik as a result of the growing power disparity between Pakistan and India, which is the first consequence of US-India strategic collaboration.

b) An India of Privilege

India is now a state acting in accordance with its interests with impunity, thanks to US assistance. Prime instances of Indian antagonism in South Asia include the so-called surgical strikes within Pakistan, the stalemate with China, and human rights abuses in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). India has been engaging in an onslaught against its own religious and ethnic minorities in addition to exploiting the area of foreign policy. The nation is repressing religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, under the BJP leadership. However, the West hasn't done much to protest government abuses of people's human rights (Marshall, 1997). Without success, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has repeatedly

urged the State Department to list India as a nation of special concern. The West has long been outspoken in its opposition to Islamic radicalism, but because of its own economic and geopolitical interests, it has been silent on India.

c) India's belligerent nuclear posture

In terms of nuclear policies and proliferation, India is acting more aggressively. India undoubtedly threatens Pakistan and China with its nuclear posture with the help of the US (Tellis, 2001). Not only have incidents of nuclear theft been documented under the BJP leadership, but government representatives have also spoken about how they feel about the projected end to the no-first-use policy. Manohar Parrikar, a former Indian defense minister, questioned India's commitment to the no-first-use policy in 2016. Analysts have seen that India is growing more aggressive in its nuclear stance, and he said, "Why should I bind myself? I should say I am a responsible nuclear power and will not use it irresponsibly." At a workshop in Islamabad in September 2022, Antoine Levesque, a Research Fellow for South Asia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), noted that while India advertises its "no-first-use policy," in reality the doctrine has been quite ambiguous. As a consequence, there's still a chance that things may go nuclear. A demonstration of India's careless, unprofessional, and ambiguous command and control system, which might have ignited an active war, is an incident like the BrahMos fired from India deep into Pakistan's territory, which India claimed to be unintentional. India must answer to the world for such misadventures.

d) Pakistan: Trapped by International Restrictions

India wants to have an advantage over Pakistan in international politics because of its ties to the US. Zahid Latif Mirza, a former secretary of Pakistan's Ministry of Defense Production, said that anytime Pakistan attempted to purchase defensive equipment from Russia, it was repeatedly warned that doing so would result in penalties under the Countering America's Adversaries via Penalties Act (CAATSA) (Hussain & Sultan, 2008). India, however, has

asked for a CAATSA exemption from these measures. The Pentagon has authorized India to use the missile defense system to defend itself against Pakistan and China, according to *The Hindu*, one of the most respected publications in India.

e) Political interference by India in the FATF against Pakistan

During a virtual conference with BJP leaders in 2021, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar said that Pakistan's inclusion on the FATF grey list is the result of joint US-Indian efforts. Pakistan has been taking extraordinary measures to address the observations by the international body, but Indian propaganda and its relations with the US have caused systemic discrimination against Pakistan, he claimed. "We have been successful in pressurizing Pakistan, and the fact that Pakistan's behaviors have changed is because of the pressure put on it by India through various measures" (Appadurai, 2006).

f) Pakistan Seeking China's Cooperation

Pakistan has pushed for deeper ties with China as the power balance has shifted to India's advantage, further provoking unfavorable changes in Indian policy. China and Pakistan are close allies, and CPEC is simply one manifestation of this friendship. China helps Pakistan enhance its naval capabilities with its economic growth. India views the CPEC as terrible strategic planning against itself rather than a potential opportunity. China is seen by Pakistan as a trustworthy ally in the fight against potential Indian strategic challenges (Surahio, Gu, Mahesar, & Soomro, 2022).

g) Smaller States' Role in the Region

In addition to these factual ramifications, there are a few potential effects of the strategic alliance between the US and India. The US-India alliance and the China-Pakistan alliance present problems for the smaller South Asian nation. If properly managed, one possible effect may be the smaller states' worth rising (Frankel, 2011). China and Pakistan are threatened by India's pretensions to be a supplier of internet security. If not Pakistan, China would attempt to increase its own influence in these nations while reducing

India's in order to encourage them to make more autonomous foreign policy decisions with regard to India.

Direction for Pakistan

In his classic, "Theory of International Politics," Kenneth Waltz reveals the relevance of balance in global politics. There are two types of balancing: internal and external. While external balancing is used to form coalitions in response to a potential threat from a state or a hegemon, internal balancing is used to promote national capabilities. In order to represent itself more successfully in international politics, a nation must first emphasize domestic balance. Pakistan must thus concentrate on internal balance as well.

The Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) was developed to measure the U.S. Six factors are provided by David Singer for the Correlates of War Project in 1963 when gauging the might of any state. These six factors are: military personnel; energy consumption; production of iron and steel; military spending; overall population; and urban population (Geller & Singer, 1998). The last four concern the latent power of the economic progress of the nation. The state's internal equilibrium is improved by this latent power. Pakistan should thus concentrate on strengthening its dormant capacity to maintain internal balance and advance its interests abroad.

a) Adhere to a Stable Geoeconomic Policy

Pakistan's National Security Policy shows a shift from geostrategic to geoeconomic considerations, and the nation has recognized the importance of non-traditional security factors. Setting the blue economy as a top priority is one of these important non-traditional security elements. Although there have been many debates on the issue in academia and at the policy-making level, not much work has actually been done. Pakistan began to prevent sea blindness with the start of CPEC (Qureshi, 2015). Despite the fact that the topic turned into a security concern, it was politicized rather than secured. Since the CPEC project's second phase has begun, Pakistan should concentrate more on pursuing chances for economic gain at sea.

b) EU: A Chance Outside of China

China is Pakistan's ideal partner and has contributed to the socioeconomic growth of the nation, but Pakistan must seek outside China for more extensive chances. The administration ought to expand commercial relations with the EU. A cooperation agreement that regulates the two organizations' economic trade connections was signed by Pakistan and the EU in 2004 (Pomfret, 2005). Additionally, the 5-year engagement plan between the EU and Pakistan was launched in 2012. The EU is now Pakistan's second-largest trading partner. "From €6.9 billion in 2013, bilateral trade between the EU and Pakistan increased by 78% to €12.2 billion in 2021."

The crucial detail is that Pakistan was given a generalized scheme of 2014 preferences. The plan stipulates that Pakistan must continue to ratify the 27 international treaties addressing environmental preservation, decent government, and human rights Pakistan will get duty-free export privileges to the EU in exchange. According to the report for 2018–19, the EU has expressed satisfaction with the initiatives and laws made to protect human rights but has also expressed concern regarding media freedom, the registration of NGOs, cases of missing persons and illegal kidnapping, as well as the failure to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. For the sake of improved commercial ties with the EU and greater social stability, Pakistan must thus pay attention to these trends.

c) Assisting ASEAN

Another economic possibility for Pakistan's political and economic well-being is ASEAN. In 1993, ASEAN granted Pakistan sectoral status. Dialogue Partner (SDP) in banking and finance, education and culture, industry, trade, and infrastructure development Pakistan launched its "Vision East Asia" initiative in 2003 to improve ties with ASEAN, ASEAN+3, and maritime nations (M. M. A. J. N. J. Khan, 2023). However, Pakistan was stuck addressing security challenges due to its concentration on them and the strategic environment at its borders rather than concentrating on economic growth.

Pakistan's ties with ASEAN may be successful when its strategy transitions from geo-strategic to geo-economic considerations. Compared to India's \$200 billion in commerce, Pakistan's trade with ASEAN is \$6.3 billion.

d) Improve bilateral ties with Central Asia

The government does not have a transport infrastructure strategy for commercial links with Central Asia. Both governments must collaborate to create a comprehensive commerce and logistics system. Transporters should be subsidized and rewarded in Pakistan for providing goods and services between different businesses. In order for CARs to relocate to other South and East Asian nations, Pakistan must make Gwadar port and other economic amenities accessible to them. The transit commerce and interdependence between the two parties will be improved.

The absence of financial channels, high-level connections, connectivity, and language limitations is a major hindrance to bilateral commercial cooperation between Pakistan and the CARs. To help improve trade and economic connections, separate agreements with each CAR to run Pakistani central bank offices would be very beneficial. In order to facilitate commerce in CARs, the Commerce Development Authority of Pakistan must also recruit linguists to educate exporters in English, Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbek, and Russian (Allworth, 1994). Additionally, the establishment of a Pakistan-Central Asia Chamber of Trade and Commerce would provide a formal framework for advancing business connections with the region.

The completion of CASA 1000 projects, such as the Mazar Shareef-Kabul-Peshawar rail network that was agreed upon in 2021 but was hampered by insecurity in Afghanistan, would be necessary to address the connectivity problems. Together, Pakistan and Uzbekistan are collaborating to launch the project. Additionally, working with CARs to solve the humanitarian issue in Afghanistan will increase their position and influence in the area. To complete the Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement, Pakistan may also work with China, Kyrgyzstan,

Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.

e) Make the untying of the knot with the Gulf stronger.

Pakistan's connections with the Gulf nations may also provide a fantastic chance to address the growing Indian influence across the whole Asian area (Dash, 1996). Pakistan's foreign policy with these nations is based on ideological grounds. Ideology in international relations only supports larger interests. Pakistan must thus develop negotiating positions in order to maintain its relevance in regional politics under the protection of these ideological allies. Pakistan should give striking a free trade agreement with Gulf nations top priority as the rest of the globe moves towards economic reforms. Both parties have acknowledged the importance of an FTA in fostering economic cooperation.

Conclusion

India already has significant economic and political sway in East Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and Europe. Pakistan's progress was sluggish due to security concerns. To control the nation's importance in the evolving international order, policy measures are needed. Pakistan must be encouraged to expand its thinking by the strategic alliance between India and the US. India has benefited from the collaboration by being more assertive and zealously pursuing its national interests. Pakistan must adhere to internal and external balance under realistic defensive policy alternatives. The foundation of a strong and unified country is political stability and national cohesiveness. By allying with regional and extra-regional nations, a Pakistan with internal stability may increase its latent might. For economic prosperity, Pakistan must turn to Russia, Europe, ASEAN, the Gulf States, and Central Asian republics. These organizations will ultimately increase Pakistan's economic capacity in order to fight India's expanding influence as a result of its strategic alliance with the US.

Finally, Pakistan needs to initiate commercial links and bilateral negotiations with India. The other is not a typical state for any of the two nations. Building economic relationships with

the other state entails more than simply business dealings, according to Ambassador Aizaz Chaudhary, but also a shift in overall policy. If India declines Pakistan's invitation to strengthen bilateral ties, Pakistan will gain by enhancing its reputation as a nation that values peace both locally and globally. Pakistan must set boundaries for its foreign policy. Beyond these boundaries, no state should be permitted to meddle. Pakistan must look out for its own interests while pursuing peace and stability with its closest neighbors and in world affairs.

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