



U.S. Factor in Sino-Indian Relations

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The US-India-China pivot has been of importance in the modern history of the two Asian giants and seems to be moving towards global prominence, in political, as well as, economic terms. Currently, economics is taking the lead with the Indian government hoping to fulfill its 'social agendas' through the 'Make-in-India' initiative complemented by the Chinese dollar reserves seeking out fresh investment ventures and American Corporate machinery looking for fresh pastures for profits. The economic objectives seem to be reaching a crescendo in that sense. This however, is not a vindication of the importance of the other facets of the interactive process between the three nations. Analyzing just the economic aspects would be a simplification of the interactions that have been undertaken and will be so in the near future. Karl Polanyi had theorized that society and market do not exist in isolated chambers. Rather, history, politics, geography, culture, religion and economics shape and change society through an interactive and perplexing over-determined system. The impact of this new age *trimurti* on the Indian society provides a case in point. President Xi Jinping's 'swing' at forging economic relations, people's obsession with 'the Beast' and the backlash to Obama's accusatory note against the intolerant Indian seem to provide us a peephole into the over-determined system Polanyi had brilliantly re-birthed in his book 'The Great Transformation.' Hence, a holistic analysis is stipulated, where the society as a whole needs to be analyzed. The question still remains as to how do we achieve such a feat? A possible way to begin would be to understand the historical and current scenario of the political landscape that surrounds the economic incentives that has put the US-India-China relationship in the front-burner. In this context, the presentation seems to provide a quick but rather refreshing analysis of the political backlog, context and way forward that inundate the 'triangular relationship.'

In his presentation, Rup Narayan Das talks about three axis of this triangular relationship. Firstly, the persistent security dilemma in Sino-Indian relations, secondly, US desire to mentor India and lastly, India's preference to maintain its strategic autonomy. Historical underpinnings complicate the relationship often by twisting and changing the equations

and terms of interactions. Das talked about the importance of Korean War in this context, with 'non-aligned' India acting as interlocutor between US and China. With the latter, India had had a 'consistent' relationship and moreover, Nehruvian ideology was the reigning toast of the town. The 1962 war however, marked a turning point in Sino-Indian relations and the humiliation handed to the Indians became a sore in the Non-Aligned Movement. As a result, the need for security/defense cooperation with the West came to be hotly debated in the Indian parliament. The presentation analysed the transition of India's stature in US-India-China relationship through the deteriorating moral condition of the leadership in India. As such, India no longer maintained its role as the interlocutor in US-China relations. This was also a period of increased US-India interactions as the Soviet Union distanced itself from India. Kissinger's Shanghai visit in 1971 and Nixon's 'ping-pong diplomacy' resulted in Sino-US rapprochement and a simultaneous worsening of Sino-India relations following India's involvement in Bangladesh freedom movement and the Indo-Pak War of 1973.

China's reform and opening up and visit by Indian leaders to China – K R Narayanan in 1976, A B Vajpayee in 1979 and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988 – helped in improving Sino-Indian relations marginally. The 1990s was the age of espousal market conditionalities for the Indian economy based on the successful experience of China's 'open-door policy'. All of this occurred at a time when the US was trying to force India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The 'climax of the relationship' (Sino-Indian) was reached in 2005 with the Indo-China border dispute moving progressively ahead and the US being considered as the 'natural ally' of India.

2005 however, again saw a downside in Sino-Indian relations owing to a few technical issues – stapled visa issue, Chinese government u-turn with regards the 2005 agreement and Chinese objections against Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan to Arunachal Pradesh. Further, the South China Sea issue emerged in the triangular relationship, which is a clear vindication of the customary belief that the problem persists because of oil 'only.' India's change of stance from wanting a UN backed resolution of the South China Sea dispute during the Asian Resolution Forum in 2010 to issuing of a joint statement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Barrack Obama has further complicated the matter when the talk is often about 'containment' rather than 'engagement.'

Discussion

A number of pertinent issues were discussed pertaining to colonialism and its impact on Sino-Indian relationship; evolving Sino-US relations, China's proposal of a Sino-centric global economy and its impact on India within the arrangement; the efficacy of a policy of 'containment' in an age of globalized economies; and pertinently the question of Pakistan within this 'triangular relationship'. These questions are quite important and need further analysis, but the importance of Pakistan within the Sino-Indian relationship cannot be understated. All this has to be however, understood within the construct of the society where the economy plays an important role too. How does the economic incentives mould the political system and vice-versa is the next step to better understand

the US-India-China relationship, as industrial parks and military contracts gain precedence? For, even though the political climate might be easing within this triangular relationship, one has to understand the economic implications and incentives which might prove to be a factor in inducing a more affable and conducive political relationship.

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About the Speaker

Dr Rup Narayan Das is a Delhi based China scholar. He was a senior fellow with the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA). Currently, he is Director in the Research and Information Division of the Lok Sabha Secretariat. His articles and book reviews have appeared, among others, in *China Report*, *China Brief*, James Town Foundation, Washington, *International Studies*, *Strategic Analyses*, *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, *Journal of Defence Studies*, etc.

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