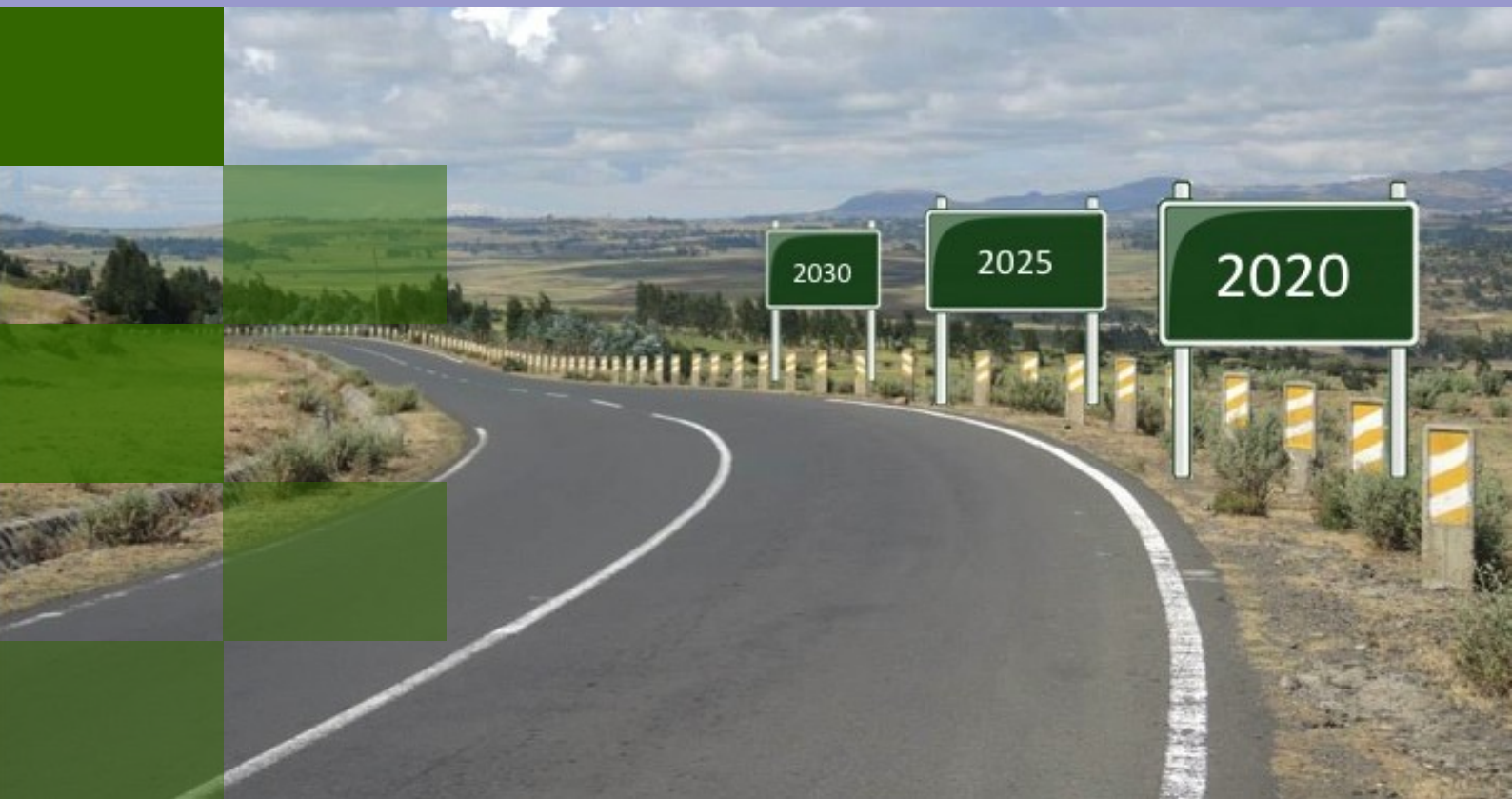


Trends. Threats. Projections

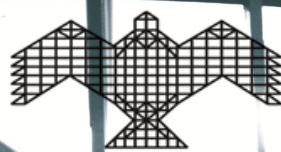
The New Symphony

Emerging Indo-US Security Entente

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Change, more often than not, is driven by circumstances rather than scholastic deliberation. As President Obama once put it, perhaps as an unintended barb to the legions of geo-political seers that stalk Massachusetts Avenue, Washington DC, “Change doesn’t come from Washington but comes to Washington.” So it was with Prime Minister Modi’s three-day state visit to the USA (6th June to 8th June 2016). Not only did the visit lay the foundation to several strategic goals mutual to both sides, but was also punctuated by symbolism that provides a basis for the future. When Modi suggested stepping out of the “shadows of hesitations of the past” he could not have stated in more unequivocal terms that India’s strategic orientation was now one that not only respected the status quo, but also would contribute towards ensuring that attempts to upset it would not go unchallenged. At the same time laying a floral wreath at Arlington Cemetery to the Tomb of the Unknowns (a first for an Indian PM), on the face of it, was a tribute to that one unquestioning instrument of state power who historically has laid down his all for a national cause. Underlying the salute was recognition of the role played by the military in binding and stabilizing an uncertain security milieu.

Two salients of his visit are particularly significant. Seemingly disparate, they share a geo-political outcome that aggregates to stability in world order. The first is measures to bring about strategic equilibrium in the Indo-Pacific and the second, India’s admission into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) as a step in support of stability in global nuclear politics and commerce.

Mahan in *The Influence of Sea power upon History* underscored several prescient perspectives relating to the Global Commons. His treatise submitted that competition for materials and markets is intrinsic to an ever trussed global system. Inferring that the nature of commerce on the one hand deters conflicts, while on the other engenders friction; the oceanic routes and ports of access had to be assured. And then he went on to advocate that the Commons require to be warranted against hegemony, disruption and rapacious exploitation. These perspectives today ring a reality whose significance has not entirely been lost on the Prime Minister.

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Typically the Global Commons describe international and supranational resource domains. It includes the earth’s shared resources, such as the oceans, the atmosphere, outer space and the Polar Regions. Cyberspace also meets current discernment. It is hardly coincident that it is in these very domains that China has shown aggressive intent. PM Modi’s understanding of contemporary dynamics in the Commons and the need to balance out China’s objectives of hegemonic control through strategic security partnerships is adroit. The current distressed state of the Commons is marked by the impact that globalization has had: strains of multi-polarity, anarchy of expectations and increasing tensions between demands for economic integration and stresses of fractured political divisions are all symptoms.

Nations are persistently confronted by the need to reconcile internal pressures with intrusive external impulses at a time when the efficacy of military power to bring on positive political outcomes is in question. While most nations have sought resolution and correctives within the framework of the

existing international order, China emerges as an irony that has angled for and conspired to re-write the rule book. In this context the PM's statement to Congress that it was only strong Indo-US ties that could anchor security in the Indo-Pacific Region left little to speculate what direction relations were taking and the extent of mutuality that was perceived in the Logistic Support Agreement being fleshed out. Not only is India preparing for strategic collaboration with the US, but is buttressing its posture in the Indo-Pacific through multilateral cooperation with ASEAN. All this must be seen as its intent to institutionalise its presence in the waters of the Indo-Pacific.

Critics, maintain that scripting an international security relationship with the US flies in the face of autonomy in global affairs. In response one only has to note the transformed conditions of world order of the day which is far removed from that which existed between the post-World War II era to the end of the Cold War. Uncertainties of events and their multi-faceted impact reflect the new substance of increased global interdependence in every field of endeavour. Whether these fields are in the economic, political or security domains, corollary imperatives are interlinked at the national, regional and international levels.

Reports on the run-up to the plenary session of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) held at Seoul on 24 June 2016 suggest that the US and Russia along with 36 other member countries (total 48) have expressed support for India's admission to the Group largely as a result of three considerations: India's clean track record of non-proliferation; American, Russian along with majority support; and the lure of commercial gain. But China is resisting admission on the basis of a curious principle – that before any decision is taken about India's membership, the NSG needs to agree on equitable and non-discriminatory criteria for membership of those countries that are nuclear weapon states (for "those countries" read Pakistan), but are not signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). China argues that if any exception to the conditions for admission is to be made, then it should apply equally to both India and Pakistan. As a counter argument, accession to the NPT is not a criterion for membership — France was not a member of the NPT until 1992 though it was a founder member of the NSG in 1975.

On the second rule condition — a good non-proliferation record; India has a better history than some of the NSG members. Particularly China, given membership in 2004, has debatably the most dubious proliferation record whether it is their dealings with Pakistan or North Korea. For that matter, equating the Indian and Pakistani applications for membership, as China has done, is disingenuous. Pakistan, while gloating that it has "successfully" blocked India's bid to gain membership of the NSG, has not made a case worth examining. The United States in the meantime has apparently divulged some pretty damning information that entities of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission have continued to be in violation of UN sanctions as they supply restricted items and equipment with a direct bearing on the production of nuclear weapons to North Korea.

China has been in the know of this information all along and may have been party to this fresh case of clandestine proliferation. So now the question that begs to be asked is, with what credibility does China obstruct India's entry?! India has never had a state sponsored AQ Khan nuclear black-market network extending from Libya to North Korea nor sold nuclear technology to third parties nor been a persistent proliferator of nuclear technology. For China to have overlooked all this including the fact that, as Modi put it to the US Congress, all global terrorism is "incubated" in India's neighbourhood (meaning Pakistan); must speak of China's own voracity within the group.

What are the stakes involved? For India, the logical sequel to the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement of 2008 and the concomitant NSG waiver followed by entry into the Missile Technology Control Regime is membership of

For India, the logical sequel to the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement and the concomitant NSG waiver followed by entry into the MTCR is membership of the NSG; this will not only give total legitimacy to India's nuclear aspirations but also, by entering the larger nuclear establishment, it will substantially contribute towards global nuclear stability.

the NSG; for this will not only give total legitimacy to India's nuclear aspirations but also, by entering the larger nuclear establishment, it will substantially contribute towards global nuclear stability. It also provides regulated and unimpeded access to technology. However, has China's stonewalling worked? Given the circumstances that China finds itself in, clearly, not for long. Also, New Delhi has thrown the gauntlet to China in a manner that most states are hesitant to in recent times; its flanking bid to gain entry to the NSG despite China, is suggesting new terms for global nuclear politics. The good news is that she carries the weight of more than 38 members in support including all major players. The initiation of an informal consultative process chaired by the outgoing chairperson of the NSG (who was actively involved in promoting India's case) to continue examination of India's basis for admission and the US continued advancement of the case are indicative of things to come.

India did not gain entry into the NSG during the June plenary. However, the robust thrust on the issue underscores a critical refrain: that the long-held perceptions of Indian foreign policy being ineffectual, non-aligned, placatory and unable to shape geo-political events are a thing of the past. That India will gain entry into the NSG, with the support it has garnered, is a foregone conclusion if not now, most certainly in the immediate future. If there are delays, it is solely due to China's obstinacy, which is double edged, for it exposes to the world that China has no intention of accommodating Indian aspirations in favour of promoting 'questionable' interests and remains indifferent to the idea of mutuality. In this context, one must not so easily forget the lessons of the lead-in to the Sino-Indian war of 1962.

The Indian plea in 1960 to arrive at a border agreement amicably based on all that India had done to gain China's communist government legitimacy despite invasion of Tibet and Korea, fell on (Prime Minister Chou En-lai's) deaf ears. If there is one lesson to be learned from China's machinations, it is that the Politburo respects power and has scant respect for history or for any rule book that is not self-serving. Events in the South China Sea, making chattels of sea lines of communication and points of ingress of trade, brooking no competition where access to resources is concerned are all a continuum of its unrelenting march to strategic control; and this march cannot but look askance at the emerging challenge of India's endeavours.

For India's foreign policy establishment, this must be seen as a fortuitous setting to find itself in provided it continuously questions China for its autocratic ways, its territorial thirst, its nuclear proliferatory dealings with Pakistan and North Korea, its disregard for the hazards of global terror and critically the legitimacy of its leadership. It is only then that India can proactively be a factor in global outcomes. Moves to stage a lateral entry into the NSG, securing Indo-US partnership in the interest of bringing about a strategic equilibrium in the Indo-Pacific and gaining membership to the MTCR are all symptomatic that India's foreign policy and posture have come of age.

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Observing recent events the prolific poet and realist, Walt Whitman, would agree that "now that the orchestra have sufficiently tuned their instruments and the baton has given the signal to play" Modi's addendum that it "was best that a new symphony be played" is most appropriate.

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Views expressed are author's own.

