



RISING ASIA
JOURNAL



RISING ASIA
FOUNDATION

ALOK KUMAR
Rajiv Gandhi University

Parrondo's Paradox And Game Theory in the U.S.-India "Entente"

Keywords: Parrondo's Paradox, Sino-India War, Global War on Terror, South China Sea dispute, Galwan Valley clashes

ABSTRACT

This article explores the U.S.-India engagement by employing Parrondo's Paradox, a game theory describing a combination of losing strategies that could be turned into a winning one. The U.S.-India relationship has been characterized as the defining partnership of the twenty-first century, manifest in a raft of agreements on economic, military and strategic issues. The article argues that if both countries had not dealt with common strategic issues together as allies, they may have faced serious security threats. One example is of India's lone fight against terrorism, which could not achieve much success since the 1980s, but when the United States launched its global war on terror after the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. homeland, it resulted in a decline in terrorist incidents in India. Demonstrably, if both countries had fought global terrorism separately, or without cooperation, it would have been unfeasible to defeat it, but when they put up a united front, they won. In other theaters of conflict where both countries have worked together as global partners, they have reaped positive outcomes—such as in the Sino-India War of 1962, the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and in the Galwan Valley conflict.

In the tumultuous diplomatic history of the last twenty years, a footnote has become the headline. India and United States have steadily elevated their relationship from the steerage of diplomacy to its high table, eventually taking India tantalizingly close to becoming a close U.S. ally,

RISING ASIA JOURNAL.

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1 (WINTER/SPRING) JANUARY TO APRIL 2021.

© RISING ASIA FOUNDATION 2021.

known formally as Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA). Such a parity with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization signifies a designation under U.S. law that provides foreign partners with certain benefits in the areas of defense trade and security cooperation, but it does not tie down the United States to any security commitments to the designated country.¹

It was a move nothing short of a revolution in the creation of a new Asian Order, when in July 2019, the U.S. Senate passed a bill to amend the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to advance India's position to promote counter-terrorism, counter-response and maritime security. The bill is expected to be signed by the U.S. president upon approval of both the U.S. Congress, i.e. the Senate and the House of Representatives.² Within 180 days of its enactment, the U.S. Secretary of Defense must also submit a report to Congress on the U.S.-India defense engagement.³ If the amendment is approved, India would be elevated to the status of a NATO ally that can purchase weapons and be involved in joint defense research and development activities.⁴

At any rate, Indo-U.S. relations are backgrounded on their vexed historical experiences, continuities/discontinuities, and fractures/sutures. There is decidedly a commonality of democratic political systems, and shared concerns over geopolitical realities and ideological equations, as well as social interactions and cultural exchanges. Both countries share common policy proclamations to promote democracy, press freedom, personal liberty, and respect for multilateral international organizations. Ironically,

¹ "Major Non-NATO Ally Status, Fact Sheet, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, January 30, 2020, U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/major-non-nato-ally-status/>.

² "US Senate passes legislative provision to give India NATO ally-like status," *Business Today*, July 3, 2019.

³ "India Gets Status Equal to Any NATO Member; Who Benefits More—U.S. or India?," *Eur Asian Times*, July 5, 2019.

⁴ Chidanand Rajghatta, "US Senate Okays Non-NATO Ally Status for India," *Times of India*, July 3, 2019.



despite the similarities, the relationship could not gain much traction during the Cold War when they were on opposite sides of the ideological divide and frequently exchanged barbs, but it changed fundamentally after the 9/11 attacks when they began to convert ideological similarities into a series of mutually beneficial arrangements, manifest in the signing of various agreements and establishment of mechanisms or groups to coordinate their strategic interests.⁵

Arguably, 2005 was a historic year when the two countries signed a “new framework for the U.S.-India defense relationship” to promote defense cooperation, including joint production of weapons and a Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative.⁶ Further, in 2008, due to U.S. efforts, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) gave some exemptions to India that permitted it to engage in nuclear trade with other countries, signaling an extraordinary shift in policy that had remained unfavorable to India since the last three decades.⁷ From 2008 to 2015, both countries solidified their defense and security engagement, and the United States recognized India as a Major Defense Partner in 2016.⁸

U.S.-India calculations were substantially altered after China emerged as a major player in world politics. There is a realization dawning on policymakers in Washington and New Delhi that they should leverage their shared perception of Beijing as a threat to their interests because it would be difficult for either power alone to defeat China—diplomatically, strategically, economically, and even militarily—but if both countries were

⁵ Ibid, 105-106.

⁶ “New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship,” Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, June 28, 2005; also see, “U.S. -India: Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative,” Fact Sheet, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, October 15, 2008, U.S. Department of State, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/fs/2008/109567.htm>.

⁷ “Communication dated September 10, 2008 received from the Permanent Mission of Germany to the Agency regarding a “Statement on Civil Nuclear Cooperation with India,” September 19, 2008, International Atomic Energy Agency.

⁸ “Joint Statement: The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century,” The White House, June 7, 2016.

to operate as allies, and if they fought together then they could easily overcome China.⁹ The research scholars at the Hudson Institute, Aparna Pande, and former Pakistan Ambassador, Hussain Haqqani, suggest that "India and the U.S. must develop a plan to counter efforts China will likely make to strengthen its position in the Indian Ocean by deepening ties with Pakistan and Sri Lanka."¹⁰ They recommend that India and the United States should work jointly to help South Asian countries to prevent the growing influence of China and Chinese Belt and Road Initiative.¹¹

This study examines the theory of Parrondo's Paradox in the context of U.S.-India engagement based on data gathered from primary sources (reports of governments and speeches of leaders and experts) and secondary sources, and it is divided into two sections: a theoretical discussion of Parrondo's Paradox, and an examination of the U.S.-India engagement in the context of the Paradox.

The Theory of Parrondo's Paradox

The Spanish physicist, Juan Manuel Rodríguez Parrondo (born on January 9, 1964) is credited with the invention of Parrondo's Paradox in 1996. It is a paradox within game theory which demonstrates how a losing strategy could be turned into a winning one.¹² It describes a situation where individually losing strategies can combine in order to win, and it offers a paradigm for the survival of the weakest and nonlinear forces.¹³

⁹ Hussain Haqqani and Aparna Pandey, "Crisis from Kolkata to Kabul: COVID-19's Impact on South Asia," Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C., May 2020.

¹⁰ Ibid, 29.

¹¹ Ibid, 29-30.

¹² Derek Abbott, "Developments in Parrondo's Paradox," in *Applications of the Non-linear Dynamics*, ed. Vishrath In, et. al. (Heidelberg: Springer, 2009).

¹³ Derek Abbott, "Asymmetry and Disorder: A Decade of Parrondo's Paradox," *Fluctuation and Noise Letters* 9 (2010): 129-156.



The attraction of Parrondo's games is that they demonstrated, for the first time, the effect of 'losing to win,' using simple coin tossing games. There were, of course, other related games that had existed prior to Parrondo's formulae, but Parrondo achieved a breakthrough discovery by showing the effects in the form of game theory.¹⁴ Scholars have wondered whether Parrondo's proposition of 'losing to win' was even new or revolutionary because it is rather common in a game of chess, where players sacrifice a pawn or even a knight in pursuit of a larger killing.



U.S. and Indian Army troops seen participating in joint exercises in the Rajasthan desert in May 2012. Photo by the courtesy of India TV.

The scholar, Derek Abbott, draws attention to the speculation that the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, deliberately turned a blind eye to the German bombing raid of the city of Coventry on November 14, 1940. The implication was that Churchill did nothing to prevent the bombing so that he could disguise the fact that the British had decoded the German Enigma code, in order to save more 'important' cities than Coventry. This

¹⁴ Ibid, 6.

episode is probably apocryphal, but it still establishes the policy of sustaining a loss in order to win.¹⁵

While we are familiar with the duel, there is the more obscure truel—involving three combatants in a shootout. In a truel, the last man standing is the winner.¹⁶ Abbott discusses a sequential truel where the truelers shoot in turns, with the weakest Player A having the first shot, then Player B, and so on. What would be the best strategy for the weakest player, for instance Player A, who is supposed to start the game? Should he attempt to eliminate the strongest out of Player B and Player C? The answer surprisingly is neither, Abbott argues. The best strategy for the survival of Player A is, in fact, to waste his bullet and shoot into the air. By sacrificing his turn, he leaves a greater chance for the more powerful players to fight it out between themselves. This game of the 'survival of the weakest' depends on making the weakest Player make the first move.

The truel case can be extended to a democracy where there are two dominant parties, and a profusion of smaller ones, like the Republicans and Democrats, and minuscule parties that can become influential determinants of an election. A third party, for instance, becomes significant when it takes more votes away from the party that is politically closest to it, than the diametrically opposite party. It results in the diametrically opposite party winning. It is, therefore, far more strategic to either stand back and let the two major parties fight it out (truel-like), or to collude and join with the politically closest party. One example of this effect was in the U.S. presidential election of 2000, when George W. Bush won by a small margin (a

¹⁵ Abbott, "Developments in Parrondo's Paradox," 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.



margin so narrow that it was considered statistical noise)—but as much as 3.90 percent of the vote went to a minor party led by Ralph Nader. The outcome raised the question that had Nader not run, then Al Gore would have risen above the noise level.

The political truel can be extended to the question, why in wars are there usually only two major adversaries: the ‘enemy’ and the ‘allies,’ and occasionally a third weaker country. In the equation, if one of the three is smaller, it is smarter to play the truel by backing down and letting the larger two enemies destroy each other.

A state can benefit from its diplomatic interaction with another state by using the phenomenon of “costly signaling” from evolutionary biology, which denotes a complex interplay of both losing and winning strategies.¹⁷ When an animal advertises its fitness in procuring a mate, it indulges in costly signaling. Abbott explains that in order to ensure that a signal is ‘honest’ it must come at a cost to the animal—otherwise it would be too easy to send out fake signals. A storied example is the colorful plumage of the male peacock, which has a genetic awareness that the larger his feathers, the more attractive he becomes to his entourage of females. Yet, the feathers come at cost both because they make the male easier to spot by a predator, and the feathers become an encumbrance when it tries to escape from the predator. The display of feathers is an honest signal because it advertises that the male is fit enough to survive despite them. But in order to ‘win’ and find the perfect mate, the male plays the losing strategy of becoming vulnerable to predators.

The paradox also sheds light on voting behavior and social interaction. For example, the U.S. President Bill Clinton, who at first

¹⁷ Ibid, 5-6.

denied having a sexual affair with Monica S. Lewinsky (Game A) saw his popularity rise when he admitted that he had lied (Game B.) The scandal created a beneficial outcome for Clinton.¹⁸

The above instances of sacrificing, avoiding a fight, and costly signaling are just some of the ways in which countries may behave. Parrondo's Paradox is also seen in a coin tossing game. In an experiment, for instance, the players of two games, A and B, are mediated by the toss of a coin. When each of them played separately, they ended up losing their wealth or energy. The paradox appeared when they played together randomly or in periodic sequences, where the combination of two losing players, or games, created a winning game.¹⁹ The paradox is demonstrated by two games played with coins weighted on one side so that they do not fall by chance to heads or tails. In Game A, a player tosses a single loaded coin and bets on each throw. The probability of winning is less than half. In Game B, there are two coins and the rules are more complicated. The player tosses either Coin 1, loaded to lose almost all the time, or Coin 2 loaded to win more than half the time. He plays Coin 1 if his money is a multiple of a particular whole number, like three. If his money cannot be divided evenly by that number, he plays Coin 2. In this setup, the second coin will be played more often than the first.

A productive application of the Paradox is its use in managing stock market investments. A physicist at Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New York, Dr. Sergei Maslov, believes that

¹⁸ Sandra Blakeslee, "Paradox in Game Theory: Losing Strategy That Wins," *New York Times*, January 25, 2000.

¹⁹ Abhijit Kar Gupta and Sourabh Banerjee, "Parrondo's Paradox: New Results and New Ideas," 1-7. <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1602/1602.04783.pdf>.



Parrondo's Paradox could help find the best strategies for managing investments. For example, if an investor shares their capital between two losing stock portfolios simultaneously, their capital will increase rather than decrease, and thus, they can turn 'two minuses' into a plus.²⁰ The Paradox is also used in gambling. Abbott argues that when someone plays either Game A or Game B 100 times, all the money taken to the gambling table is lost. But when the games are alternated, with playing A twice and B twice for 100 times, the money is not lost, and it accumulates into big winnings. It is even more remarkable that when Game A and B are played randomly, with no order in the alternating sequence, the winnings also keep on rising. While this model has been used in various disciplines, I have employed it to understand the U.S.-India engagement. The concept has been used to understand many biological phenomena and biological systems, physical chemistry, engineering, economics, ecology, population dynamics, and specific problems of social dynamics.²¹

This article demonstrates that the superimposition of Parrondo's Paradox on the historical events of the U.S.-India engagement helps to endorse that the paradox—and the real-time historical events—maintains an equilibrium in the four cases being studied below. The paradox adheres to the logic of game theory which has proved its practical value to both historians and international relations scholars.

²⁰ Blakeslee, "Paradox in Game Theory."

²¹ Joel Weijia Lai and Kang Hao Cheong, "Parrondo's Paradox from Classical to Quantum: A Review," *Nonlinear Dynamics* 100 (2020): 849–861.

The U.S. – India Relationship Through Parrondo's Paradox

The current closeness in the U.S. – India relationship is discernible in their economic, military, and strategic engagement that was made possible after both countries made an effort to forget the ups and downs of the Cold War. It was a period marked by diplomatic rupture, but the relationship evolved over a period of time. The U.S. – India diplomatic engagement started when the President, George Washington, just three years after his election, appointed Benjamin Joy as consul in Calcutta, the capital of British India, in November 1792.²² Over the next one-and-a-half century when India remained a part of the British Empire, U.S. economic and political ties were insignificant, but U.S. missionaries had invested funds in building hospitals, schools and other charitable activities across India.²³

When Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in 1933, Indian liberals hoped that India would get some support from the United States for their independence movement. FDR supported India's independence movement in various official meetings with Britain.²⁴ Under sustained American pressure and persuasion, the British government did carry out some democratic reforms in 1935. The Congress Party formed a government in eight out of eleven provinces after the 1937 election. During the Second World War the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, opposed independence for India but his party lost the election in 1945, and Clement Richard Attlee

²² "To Thomas Jefferson From Benjamin Joy," 20 January 1793, Founders Online, National Archives of the United States, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-25-02-0083>.

²³ Dunnis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1993), 3.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 4.



became the prime minister, whose Labour Party favored India's independence.²⁵

After India gained independence in August 1947, a new chapter in the U.S.-India engagement officially began, but Indian policymakers faced challenges as to how they should behave in the international system because, at that time, the world was cleaved into two blocks, communist and capitalist, and by joining any group, India's larger goals could have been harmed. It, therefore, decided not to join any group and initiated an independent policy in foreign affairs and helped create the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 on a global scale.²⁶ Guided by its national liberation and non-aligned agenda, India was the first country in the world to recognize the Communist government of China and promoted the slogan of Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai,²⁷ and New Delhi also forged close relations with the Soviet Union.

The United States was displeased with the growing Indo-Soviet alliance that had achieved various milestones due to consistent Soviet diplomatic and military assistance to India, such as (1) support for India's claims over the Jammu and Kashmir region and Goa ; (2) supply of large scale economic and military assistance by 1960; (3) delivery of Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21 jet fighters in 1962, and full technology transfer and legal rights to co-produce the aircraft in India in 1963; (4) influential role in ending the war between India and Pakistan in 1965; and (5) strong support during the Indo-Pak War that started in March 1971 in which the United

²⁵ Ibid, 5-48.

²⁶ Ibid, 30-58.

²⁷ Ibid, 121-122.

States openly backed Pakistan and warned India not to support the people of East Pakistan that faced genocide from West Pakistan.²⁸ Despite U.S. threats, the Soviet Union assisted India by signing the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971, formalizing a strong military, economic, diplomatic and strategic relationship during the Cold War.²⁹ The United States countered the alliance by tightening military ties with Pakistan and providing advanced military weapons and economic aid.³⁰

U.S. policymakers were critical of India's leading role in the NAM, its recognition of the Communist government of China, and its close relations with Soviet Union during the Cold War, which located New Delhi within the Soviet-led camp. Washington officials were puzzled that although India was a democratic country but ironically it was allied to Moscow, it supported national liberation struggles, and it publicly opposed the United States' bombardment of Vietnam during the Second Indochina War.³¹ U.S. leaders worried that India's pro-NAM and pro-Soviet political agenda might harm U.S. interests.³² They sent a clear signal to India of U.S. disapproval of its policies, while at the same time they built good relations with

²⁸ Javed Ahmad Mir, "India-USSR Relations in Cold War Era: A Study of Various Issues," *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 3, no. 5 (2017): 1382-384; Dinakar Peri, "India to Gift Mig-21 fighter jets to Russia," *The Hindu*, September 29, 2018; and S.D. Pradhan, "The Indo-Pak War 1965 and the Tashkent Agreement: Role of External Powers," *Times of India*, October 24, 2015.

²⁹ Kux, *India and the United States*, 302-307.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 106-110.

³¹ Alok Kumar, "Indo-US Security Cooperation After 9/11 attacks: An Assessment of the Policies and Programmes," (MPhil dissertation, Central University of Gujarat, 2014).

³² James Ciment, *Encyclopaedia of Conflict Since World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 117.



Pakistan.³³ At the time, Pakistan perceived a national security threat from India, and Islamabad sought a strong security partner that would provide military assistance. A convergence of interests between Pakistan and the United States led to Pakistan becoming a U.S. military ally. India was critical of U.S. military assistance to Pakistan, setting the stage of deterioration of U.S.-India relations during the Cold War.³⁴

At any rate, India and the United States, grappled with several inconsistencies during the entire Cold War but after 9/11 the nature of their relationship changed fundamentally. Both countries sought to achieve their goals in the arena of global politics through mutual cooperation. To explicate these trends, the article investigates five aspects: (1) the Sino-India War; (2) the Global War on terror; (3) the South China Sea dispute; (4) the Galwan Valley dispute, and (5) China's tactics and strategy towards India.

The Sino-India War

In October 1962, China launched a sudden war against India over their disputed border, choosing an opportune moment when the U.S. President, John F. Kennedy, was preoccupied with coercive diplomacy with the Soviet Union over the Cuban Missile Crisis, and would find it difficult to provide U.S. assistance to India.³⁵ At this stage, India was expecting military assistance from its close friend, the Soviet Union, but Moscow denied providing any kind of military

³³ Kumar, "Indo-US Security Cooperation After 9/11 attacks."

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Steven Hoffman, *India and China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 101-104.

support. Under great pressure from Kennedy to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba, Moscow preferred playing a neutral role: not to provide military support to India or China.³⁶ Moscow went so far as to stop the MiG-21 deliveries for the time being and advised New Delhi to accept a Chinese proposal for further talks on the border issues.³⁷ The Soviet stance disappointed the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Blocked by the Soviet Union, India's last resort was to turn to the United States and the western allies for military aid. Keeping the wartime emergency in view, Nehru wrote a letter to Kennedy, requesting military support.³⁸ On the question of providing assistance to India, Kennedy sought the advice of his security advisors, most of whom agreed that the United States should deliver security assistance to India without any hesitation. When Kennedy tasked the U.S. Ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith, to look into the Sino-India conflict, the latter convinced the United States to send immediate military help to India, otherwise communist China could inflict great damage to India.³⁹ The Kennedy administration took the attack on India very seriously, and immediately sent small

³⁶ Manish Telikicherla Chary, *India: Nation on the Move* (Bloomington: iUniverse Inc. Press, 2009), 278.

³⁷ Arun Mohanty, "Reassessing the Soviet stand on the Indo-China conflict," *Russia Beyond*, October 25, 2012.

³⁸ "Indian Prime Minister Nehru's Letter to JFK on the Sino-Indian War," History In Pieces Dot Com, <https://historyinpieces.com/documents/documents/nehru-letter-jfk-sino-indian-war-2/>.

³⁹ Charles W. Bevard, Jr., "Galbraith Discusses Sino-Indian War," *The Harvard Crimson*, December 9, 1963.



arms, ammunition and other equipment, and publicly supported India's claims in its northern areas.⁴⁰



President John F. Kennedy (sitting in rocking chair) meets with the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. Special Assistant to the President Dave Powers and an unidentified photographer stand in the background in the Oval Office of the White House, Washington, D.C. Photo by Abbie Rowe, White House Photographs, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

Galbraith carefully monitored the actions of communist China and reported back to Kennedy. At his suggestion, the U.S. Air Force, based in the Philippines, was alerted to come to India's help, and U.S. C-130 Hercules aircraft were used to air-lift arms and ammunition supplies. In a timely warning signal, Kennedy decided to send the USS Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier to the Bay of Bengal to

⁴⁰ S. Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Transformation of U.S.-India Relations: An Explanation for the Rapprochement and Prospects for the Future," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 4 (2007): 642-656

support India.⁴¹ An important U.S. ally, Britain, also supported India and immediately dispatched shipments of rifles, ammunition, spare parts and winter clothing by Britannica aircraft.⁴²

A U.S. military mission headed by the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Averell Harriman, visited India on November 22-30, 1962 and reported to the U.S. government that the Chinese attack had come as a shock to Indians and that China was real threat for them, instead of Pakistan. Britain also decided to send a mission, led by the Commonwealth Secretary, Duncan Sandys, and the Chief of Imperial General Staff, Sir Richard Hull. The involvement of two great powers in the war, led China to unilaterally declare a ceasefire and give an assurance that its forces would go back to the 1959 Line of Control by December 1.⁴³

At this juncture, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) received information that China intended to attack India once again. Subsequently, in May 1963, Kennedy held a meeting with his security advisors and discussed future plans on the question of what to do with China. During the discussion, the security advisors agreed that if China attacked India again, the United States should use nuclear weapons.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Anil Athale, "The Untold Story: How Kennedy came to India's aid in 1962," *Rediff.com*, December 4, 2012. Also see, David Brewster, "India-China Conflict: A Move from the Himalayas to the High Seas?" *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, July 10, 2020.

⁴² David R. Devereux, "The Sino-Indian War of 1962 in Anglo American Relations," *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, no. 1 (2009): 71-87.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 71-87.

⁴⁴ Anand Giridharadas, "JFK faced India-China dilemma," *New York Times*, August 26, 2005.



At a National Security Council meeting on May 9, when Kennedy began discussing an urgent U.S. plan to offer a security guarantee to India, the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, revisited the Chinese issue, stating:⁴⁵

Mr. President, I think General [Maxwell] Taylor is implying that before any substantial commitment to defend India against China is given, we should recognize that in order to carry out that commitment against any substantial Chinese attack we would have to use nuclear weapons. . . . Any large Chinese Communist attack on any part of that area would require the use of nuclear weapons by the U.S., and this is to be preferred over the introduction of large numbers of U.S. soldiers.

U.S. officials were now offering the same rationale favoring the use of nuclear weapons as they had done prior to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945: that dropping a nuclear bomb was preferable as it would save the lives of thousands of American troops. These policies demonstrate U.S. support for India during and after the Sino-India War, a conflict that gave an opportunity to Washington to engage and improve relations with India, as the historian David R. Devereux explains.

⁴⁵ National Security Council Meeting, May 9, 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. [“Newly Released Tape Shows Nuclear Weapons Considered as Alternative to Ground War in Combating Chinese Aggression,” <https://www.jfklibrary.org/about-us/news-and-press/press-releases/newly-released-tape-shows-nuclear-weapons-considered-as-alternative-to-ground-war-in-combating-chine.>]

Kennedy and Galbraith wanted to provide military aid to India at a high level, but the British government urged them "to go slow."⁴⁶ On May 14, Kennedy called on the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, to reconsider his government's dismissal of a U.S. recommendation that Anglo-American air forces conduct joint operations with the Indian Air Force. In a letter to Macmillan, Kennedy wrote: "Indian support is so essential to a satisfactory non-nuclear balance of power in Asia that we don't want to risk unduly any Indian backsliding from their determination to counter the Chinese Communist threat."⁴⁷ Kennedy differed substantially with the British stance: he had already sent substantial quantities of weapons to India, and had provided U.S. assurances of political support.

Nine months after the war, the Anglo-Americans signed an agreement with India on July 20, 1963 to conduct trilateral Anglo-U.S.-Indian air force exercises named "Shiksha," or "training," to improve Indian defence capacity and familiarize U.S. and British forces with the Indian subcontinent. The deal fell short of a commitment to defend India in the event of further Chinese attack primarily because the British government stipulated that their squadrons would participate in joint maneuvers on the condition that London and Washington would undertake to merely "consult" with New Delhi were India subjected to renewed Chinese aggression.⁴⁸ Under the final agreement, the concerned parties

⁴⁶ Paul M. McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945-1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 237.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*



agreed that (1) a U.S. Air Force Super Sabre squadron and two mobile radar units would be deployed by the United States in India for periodic joint training for the Indian Air Force; (2) a second U.S. Sabre squadron would be based at Palam Air Base near Delhi; (3) Australia would provide the radar controllers and two Canberra aircraft to serve as mock Chinese targets; (4) a British Javelin squadron would be based at Kalaikunda Air Base near Calcutta. The Sabres and Javelins fighters flew sorties along with Indian Gnats and Hunters, starting at the beginning of November 1963.⁴⁹

After these developments, China realized that because two major world powers were in support of India, it needed to normalize the situation and it tried to build a cordial relationship with them. It can, therefore, be argued that if India did not get timely U.S. support, as well as the broader Anglo-American assurances, it would have been very difficult to stop the expansionist policy of China at that time.

Yet, a paradox of the U.S.-India relationship is that from 1942 to 1962, for ideological and strategic reasons, the United States and India did not give as much importance to their bilateral relationship as they should have.⁵⁰ But this calculus changed when China attacked India: the U.S. government believed that if it did not support India at this time (Game A was underway), China could take possession of India's North East region which would give a morale boost to China and then it could spread communism across South Asia.⁵¹ Further,

⁴⁹ Devereux, "The Sino-Indian War of 1962 in Anglo American Relations," 86.

⁵⁰ S.C. Saha, "United States-India: Relations 1947-1962: Stresses and Strains over Communist China," *India Quarterly* 44, no.1/2 (1988), 83-99.

⁵¹ Devereux, "The Sino-Indian War of 1962 in Anglo American Relations."

the U.S. government believed that if it did not offer immediate support to India, the interests of both countries would be harmed: and so, the U.S. government decided that it should change its strategy and support India. As Washington began to provide military aid to India, (Game B was being played), China realized that its interests might be harmed, leading it to suddenly declare a ceasefire.⁵² It can, thus, be argued that if both countries, India and the United States had played separately in this war, it would have harmed the interests of both countries. The wartime diplomacy was akin to a game of "costly signaling" in which India sought a powerful partner, the United States. By advertising the strength of its alliance, India sent China a "risk-free" signal because China could no longer retaliate as India now had a strong ally. The United States maintained its Asian supremacy as well: by entering the conflict on India's side, and by signaling China of the possible use of overwhelming U.S. force, it curbed Beijing's expansionist tendency.

The Global War on Terror

The 9/11 attack harbingered an organic transformation of the U.S.-India strategic partnership. After it, the United States realized that terrorism was a serious security threat that could only be combated through global cooperation. Washington initiated a policymaking process under which India was considered a significant country that was, in turn, already a victim of terrorism and needed military and

⁵² Ibid, 81-82.



security assistance from the United States as well as other countries.⁵³

The threat of global terrorism not only cleared the ground for cooperation between the two countries, but it caused Washington to remove certain curbs on India.⁵⁴ Just eleven days after the 9/11 attacks, on September 22, 2001, the United States lifted all the restrictions that it had imposed on India after its 1998 nuclear tests.⁵⁵

The United States now launched a ‘Global War on Terror’ targeting Islamic fundamentalism and radical Islamism, and India announced all possible support to Washington in the fight.⁵⁶ Subsequently, the two countries held various meetings and conferences to combat global terrorism.⁵⁷ India offered its airfields, military bases and intelligence support to American military forces, marking a significant policy shift in India’s strategic posture towards the United States because even during the Cold War India had denied Soviet forces access to Indian military bases, despite its close relationship with Moscow.⁵⁸ A counterterrorism strategy emerged as a significant platform for strategic engagement between Washington and Delhi. As India was a long-time victim of terrorism

⁵³ Amit Gupta, “The U.S.-India Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?”, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College.

⁵⁴ C. Raja Mohan, “Indo-U.S. Dialogue on Pakistan?” *The Hindu*, April 10, 2003. Quoted in Amit Gupta, “The U.S.-India Relationship.”

⁵⁵ James Chiriyankandath, “Realigning India: Indian Foreign Policy after the Cold War,” *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 93, no. 374 (2004): 199-211.

⁵⁶ Francesco Cavatorta, “The War on Terrorism—Perspectives from Radical Islamic Groups,” *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 16 (2005): 35-50.

⁵⁷ Ashok Sharma, “Counterterrorism Cooperation in the Context of the Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership: An Appraisal,” *India Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (2012): 315-330.

⁵⁸ Brahma Chellaney, “Fighting Terrorism in Southern Asia: The Lessons of History,” *International Security* 26, no. 3 (2001-2002): 94-116.

emanating from the Afghanistan-Pakistan belt, it did not hesitate to support the United States in the war against transnational terrorism.⁵⁹ Yet, India would not send troops to the Middle East as it did not wish to spoil its relations with Muslim countries.

Pakistan's role as the main anti-terrorism ally of the United States, for which it received large-scale U.S. military and financial assistance, generated fear in Indian policymakers that the terrorist incidents of the 1980s decade might happen again. The United States had provided Pakistan with substantial military and financial support to defeat Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s, but when the war ended, it had an impact on the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) which faced the problem of insurgency. India was worried that the U.S. war on terrorism in Afghanistan would push Afghan terrorists to enter India to conduct their jihad, but it would not happen.⁶⁰ Indian policymakers understood that the U.S. war on terror would benefit India in two ways: (1) it would break the infrastructure and network of terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan; and (2) it would split a strong network operated by Pakistan in Afghanistan that tried to mobilize people in Afghanistan's political system who were anti-India or who had anti-Indian sentiments.⁶¹ The Indian analysis was fruitfully vindicated because the U.S. war on terror did eventually destroy a strong network of terrorist organizations spreading from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Ever since the war against terrorism started, there was a steady decrease in terrorist activities in India.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 100.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 101.

⁶¹ Ibid, 101-102.



The data provides evidence of steadily decreasing terrorist activities in India since 2002, confirming that the war of terrorism has had a positive impact on India. There are many criticisms of this war, but then it cannot be denied that it has had a beneficial effect on India.

Fatalities in Terrorist Attacks in India from 2001 to 2014*

| Year | Civilian/ Common People | Security Forces Personnel | Terrorists | Total |
|---------------|--|--|-------------------|--------------|
| 2000- 2002 | 4670 | 2132 | 7985 | 14787 |
| 2003- 2005 | 3285 | 1291 | 5027 | 9603 |
| 2006- 2008 | 3161 | 1167 | 3676 | 8004 |
| 2009- 2011 | 1909 | 996 | 2302 | 5207 |
| 2012- 14** | 823 | 446 | 1132 | 2401 |

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal.

Note: * Data till 2004, does not include fatalities due to left-wing extremism.

** Data till October 12, 2014.

Yet a paradox within Indo-U.S. cooperation against terrorism is that prior to the 9/11 attacks, the United States did not take the issue of terrorism seriously enough despite the terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 and the killing of many U.S. journalists and civilians in various parts of the

world.⁶² At the time, Washington's fight against terrorism was conducted only in political speeches, meetings and international conferences. Hence, playing Game A, it did not launch any specific initiative, policy, or strategy to fight it.⁶³ But after the 9/11 attacks, U.S. policymakers realized that terrorism was, indeed, a serious threat to world peace and security. To counter it, the United States launched its 'Global War on Terror.'⁶⁴ India, now playing Game B, joined the U.S. war against terrorism which eventually destroyed the infrastructure and networks of terrorism on a large scale in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The war had an impact on India as well, as terrorist incidents in India decreased, as shown above.⁶⁵ It can be argued that if the United States and India had not fought—together—against terrorism since 2001, they could not have curbed its growing influence. While India did bear a heavy cost in lives lost to terror attacks at home, India did not participate in the war abroad, leaving it to the United States and the Western allies to do the actual fighting.

India played it smart by backing down in this truel and it let the two enemies—the United States and the terror groups—fight it out. The fact is that the United States did not launch its war on terror to specifically help India; it waged war to safeguard its own national security interests in the American homeland. If India was a coincidental—not intended—beneficiary of U.S. policy, India's

⁶² Kumar, "Indo-US Security Cooperation After 9/11 attacks." Also see, Andrea Mitchell and Haley Talbot, "Two far-way bombings 20 years ago set off the modern era of terror," NBC News, August 7, 2018.

⁶³ Kumar, "Indo-US Security Cooperation After 9/11 attacks."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*



policy of avoiding a fight in a truel is consistent with its own foreign policy goals.

The South China Sea Dispute

China's sweeping claims to both the waters and islands of the South China Sea antagonized the other claimants such as Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague rejected China's claim that it had historically exercised exclusive control over the sea.⁶⁶ As an estimated US\$ 3.37 trillion of the world's trade passes through the South China Sea, many countries, including India and the United States, want the ocean to remain international waters and to preserve the freedom of navigation so that they can conduct trade without any hurdle.

For India, the South China Sea region assumes great importance because it serves as a passageway for more than 55 percent of its trade in the Asia-Pacific region.⁶⁷ India believes that all the claimant states should resolve the dispute through peaceful dialogue and refrain from carrying out activities that threaten peace and stability. For more than one-and-a-half decades, India has been deploying its navy in the South China Sea, conducting bilateral exercises and the making port calls to friendly states.⁶⁸ In an effort to curb Chinese dominance in the region, India has conducted bilateral

⁶⁶ Nandini Jawli, "South China Sea and India's Geopolitical Interests," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 29, no. 1/2 (2016): 85-100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 89.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 90.

naval exercises with the United States as well as Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.⁶⁹

China has objected to India's growing military activities in the South China Sea. On July 22, 2011, the Chinese Navy objected when INS Airavat was passing through the South China Sea on a friendly visit to Vietnam.⁷⁰ After around three months, in October 2011, the Indian company, ONGC Videsh Limited, and Petro Vietnam signed an agreement to explore oil in Vietnam. China objected to the agreement, saying that foreign countries were not allowed to exploit oil and natural gas in the South China Sea. But India responded that it was acting in accordance with its agreement with the government of Vietnam.⁷¹

China has also protested the presence of United States in the South China Sea. On January 11, 2017, the U.S. Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, declared: "We're going to have to send China a clear signal that, first, the island-building stops and, second, your access to those islands also is not going to be allowed."⁷² Tillerson warned that Chinese activity in the South China Sea was "extremely worrisome" and it would be threat to the entire global economy if Beijing were able to dictate access to the waterway.⁷³ In response, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying, stated on January 24,

⁶⁹ Ibid, 91.

⁷⁰ Indrani Bagchi, "China Harasses Indian Naval ship on South China Sea," *Times of India*, September 2, 2011.

⁷¹ Jawli, "South China Sea and India's Geopolitical Interests," 91-93.

⁷² Michael Forsythe, "Rex Tillerson's South China Sea Remarks Foreshadow Possible Foreign Policy Crisis", *New York Times*, January 12, 2017.

⁷³ David Brunnstrom and Matt Spetalnick, "Tillerson says China should be barred from South China Sea islands," Reuters, January 12, 2017.



2017, that the “U.S. is not party in the dispute while suggesting that China should be left to settle the South China Sea dispute with countries involved in the region.”⁷⁴ It is clear that China does not want Washington to interfere in the South China Sea dispute because U.S. involvement would harm Chinese interests.⁷⁵

The United States kept up the pressure on China. In July 2020, the Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, stated that Chinese claims across the South China Sea were completely unlawful and unacceptable. It marked a symbolic policy shift in the U.S. official position, which was based on the judgment of the International Arbitration Tribunal (2016) in favor of the Philippines against Chinese historical claims in the South China Sea. The policy shift was also in favor of external players like India, Australia and others.⁷⁶ Supporting Pompeo’s statement, an Indian foreign ministry spokesperson affirmed that the “South China Sea was a part of the global commons and India has an abiding interest in peace and stability in the region.”⁷⁷

The United States and India have a convergence of interests in the South China Sea to help preserve the freedom of navigation and to counter China’s string of pearls strategy in the Indian Ocean.⁷⁸ The United States’ Quadrennial Defence Review in 2010 acknowledged that India’s rise as military power would help U.S.

⁷⁴ Saibal Dasgupta, “3rd U.S.-China Clash on South China Sea since Donald Trump takeover,” *Times of India*, January 25, 2017.

⁷⁵ Jawli, “India’s Geopolitical Interests,” 96.

⁷⁶ Premesha Saha, “Are Asian Allies backing the United States’ New Position on South China Sea?” Observer Research Foundation, July 22, 2020.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Roche, “India has abiding stability of disputed region of South China Sea,” *Live Mint*, July 16, 2020.

⁷⁸ Jawli, “India’s Geopolitical Interests,” 93.

interests in the region.⁷⁹ At the U.S.-India Maritime Security Dialogue of 2016, the United States stated that all regional allies must unite and protest against Chinese construction on seven Spratly Islands.⁸⁰ One Indian commentator recommended that economic and diplomatic pressure should be exerted upon China to fast track the conclusion of a Code of Conduct (COC) and on terms acceptable to the smaller Southeast Asian nations.⁸¹ The COC is a legally binding document that would define how concerned countries act in the South China Sea.⁸² In July 2019, China and Southeast Asian nations organized a meeting in Bangkok in which they completed a first reading of a draft COC, but unfortunately it has not been signed as yet.⁸³ A former Indian Navy officer, Abhijit Singh, recommends that because Indian naval coalition building alone would not deter Chinese military presence in the Indian Ocean, India should sign agreements with other countries with cost-benefit analysis.⁸⁴

The issue of the South China Sea has evolved into a common platform for both India and the United States, which has seen both sides cooperating at various levels to prevent Chinese domination. For example, in 2007, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) was launched by the United States India, Japan and Australia. Its objectives were to hold occasional summits and military exercises,

⁷⁹ Ibid, 94.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 94.

⁸¹ Saha, "Are Asian allies backing the United States."

⁸² S.D. Pradhan, "China and Code and Conduct for South China Sea," *Times of India*, June 11, 2020.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Abhijit Singh, "Make the right call on Malabar going Quad," Observer Research Foundation, July 22, 2020.



and to exchange information.⁸⁵ The Quad emphasizes their shared economic, security and strategic interests such as freedom of navigation, democratic values and stability and openness in the region. The Quad is not a formal military alliance like NATO, but it has the potential to counter Chinese influence.⁸⁶ China has understood the dynamics of the alliance and it has issued formal diplomatic protests to its members during its formation. At the same time, as China seeks to curb India's growing power and ambition to become a regional superpower, it deepened its engagement with Pakistan which has virtually become a Chinese client state, according to many independent observers.⁸⁷

The increasing tension between China and the United States in the South China Sea as well as over contentious trade issues has initiated a debate over the emergence of a so-called "New Cold War," which some analysts have dismissed as an inaccurate formulation. The U.S.-China competition is really about a contested leadership of a new global/Asian order, in which China is emerging as a challenger to the United States. Stephen Waltz, a professor of International Affairs at Harvard University, argues that the two powers are engaged in a long-term competition over "incompatible strategic visions" including China's desire to dominate Asia.⁸⁸ China is attempting to push U.S. naval and air forces out of the Western

⁸⁵ James Griffiths, "A border dispute with China may push India closer to some of Beijing's top rivals," *CNN News*, June 18, 2020.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ "Reset ties with China," *The Hindustan Times*, June 17, 2020.

⁸⁸ "US-China Cold War: The two World War powers are entering dangerous territory, warn experts," *Economic Times*, July 20, 2020.

Pacific (the South and East China seas), while the U.S. forces are determined to stay.

China appears to have carefully studied the U.S. playbook. The United States first established its global hegemony by controlling the Caribbean, which enabled it to strategically manage the Western hemisphere through the two World Wars and the Cold War. For the United States, world power began with the Caribbean, and for China, it begins with the South China Sea.⁸⁹ China, therefore, has warned India not to develop close defence engagement with the United States and to avoid interfering in China-U.S. confrontations. It has also warned that becoming a friend of United States during the "New Cold War could be harmful for Indian economic interests in the region."⁹⁰ China has cautioned India that it needs to be careful about getting involved in the U.S.-China rivalry, and to view China-India relations with a rational outlook.⁹¹ Some experts have warned that India's intervention in the New Cold War between China and the United States may harm India's larger interests. Tara Kartha argues that "a careful analysis of Trump's policies on China reveals that the primary driver is self-interest. And India could not count on it."⁹² India's intervention in the South China Sea carries inevitable risks but a carefully calibrated Indian foreign policy would project India on a larger regional stage as a major Asian power. India should,

⁸⁹ Robert D. Kalpan, "A New Cold War has Begun," *Foreign Policy*, January 7, 2019.

⁹⁰ Sajid Farid Shapoo, "The China-India Standoff and the Myth of a New Cold War," *The Diplomat*, June 13, 2020.

⁹¹ "Advisable for India not to engage in U.S.-India Confrontation," *Global Times*, May 31, 2020.

⁹² Tara Kartha, "India has to Plan for a Hot War where Friends are Few. U.S.-China Cold War would not help it," *The Print*, July 29, 2020.



therefore, engage with the United States to prevent the spread of Chinese influence in the South China Sea.

Yet the paradox of their cooperation is that although the United States, playing Game A, had taken a moderate stance on China's claim to the South China Sea before 2015, when in 2016 the Permanent Court in The Hague rejected China's claims, Washington, now playing Game B, changed its strategy and began opposing the Chinese position.⁹³ India benefited from the revised American position, first, because it validated India's own stance and, secondly, it turned China's dominance of the South China Sea into a shared U.S.-India interest.⁹⁴ But given the aggressiveness of the expansion of Chinese dominance in the region, it seems that no country alone, be it India or the United States, can stop China's relentless drive to hegemony. If, however, India and the United States worked together, they might be able to prevent Chinese expansion and protect the freedom of navigation in the region. Here again, regional powers such as India—and Vietnam to some extent—are confronting China militarily, and even making "sacrifices" in shedding the blood of its soldiers, so that they could attain a larger goal of extracting the military support of the United States in an unequal battle against a much more powerful adversary.

⁹³ John Ruwich, "U.S. Rejects Beijing's Maritime Claims in South China Sea," National Public Radio, July 13, 2020; and Saha, "Are Asian allies backing the United States."

⁹⁴ Ulises Granados, "India's Approaches to the South China Sea: Priorities and Balances," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 5, no.1 (2018): 122-137.

The Galwan Valley Dispute

In a sudden outburst of ferocious hand-to-hand combat, twenty Indian and an undisclosed number of Chinese troops were killed in clashes in the Galwan Valley of Ladakh on June 16, 2020.⁹⁵ The valley holds strategic importance for both countries, but for India it is extremely significant because it serves as an important road link to Daulat Beg Oldie, an airfield close to the Line of Actual Control.⁹⁶ The valley was one of the biggest sparks of the India-China War of 1962.

India's opposition to Chinese intervention led to conflict in 1962 and again in 2020. After the killing of Indian soldiers in the June 2020 clashes, many countries, including the United States condemned the incident. After just a day of the start of the Galwan Valley conflict, the U.S. Department of State spokesperson, Morgan Ortagus, said that "we are closely monitoring the situation between Indian and Chinese forces along the Line of Control."⁹⁷ On June 25, Pompeo warned that "the actions of the ruling Chinese Communist Party meant there were threats to India, threats to Vietnam, threats to Malaysia, Indonesia and the South China Sea challenge. We are going to make sure the U.S. military is postured appropriately to meet the challenges." Pompeo declared that the "the Chinese threat to India and Southeast Asian nations is one of the reasons the U.S. is reducing its troop presence in Europe and deploying them to other

⁹⁵ Dinakar Peri, "Indian Army says 20 soldiers killed in clash with Chinese troops in the Galwan area," *The Hindu*, June 16, 2020.

⁹⁶ "In 1962 war, Galwan Valley was a flashpoint. Why is China now claiming sovereignty over it," *The Week*, June 17, 2020.

⁹⁷ "Closely monitoring India-China situation, says U.S.," *Economic Times*, June 17, 2020.



places.”⁹⁸ These two indicators of U.S. troop redeployments in South and Southeast Asia are aimed at curbing Chinese domineering.⁹⁹

There is no doubt that the U.S. naval presence in the Indian Ocean sends a message of great clarity to China that it must de-escalate the conflict and not persist in its ill-advised desire to dominate the region. Meanwhile, the Chinese foreign ministry issued a statement on July 6, 2020 declaring that Beijing was trying to resolve the border dispute with India through dialogue and negotiations. Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, stated that “for both China and India, achieving development and revitalization is the top priority where we share long-term strategic interests. Both sides should adhere to the strategic assessment that instead of posing threats, the two countries provide each other with development opportunities.”¹⁰⁰ The Chinese statement indicates that China has moderated its position on the dispute. Yet, China is the dominant power in the South China Sea and to prevent its expansionism, India and the United States have realized that they must stay united because preventing Chinese escalation alone is not possible.

Just one month into the conflict, the United States and India conducted cooperative naval exercises on July 21–22. In the bilateral drills, the United States deployed the world’s largest aircraft carrier, USS Nimitz (CVN 68), Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers USS Ralph Johnson (DDG 114) and USS Sterett (DDG 104), and

⁹⁸ “U.S. Navy conducts exercises in South China Sea for open Indo-Pacific region amid India-China dispute,” *India Today*, July 4, 2020.

⁹⁹ “India-China Peace Talks- Read The ‘Official Statements’ of Indian & Chinese Govt on Disengagement,” *Eur Asian Times*, July 7, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Princeton (CG 59), all of which participated with the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean Region.¹⁰¹ On July 6, 2020, the White House Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows, stated that two U.S. Navy aircraft carriers had been deployed in the South China Sea to overcome the dominance of the China.¹⁰²

But the paradox of the Galwan Valley dispute is that since the 1980s, when the U.S.-China bilateral relationship was productive in many ways, the United States stayed silent on the long-festering India-China border dispute. The gains, however, of the U.S.-China relationship were one-sided as China benefited more than the United States. For instance, China not only became the second-largest trading partner of the United States in 2006 but is also became the largest holder of U.S. debt in September 2008 and surpassed Japan to emerge as the second-largest economy in the world in 2010.¹⁰³ For its part, the United States lost 3.7 million jobs during 2001 to 2018 due, in part, to a growing trade deficit with China.¹⁰⁴

From 2001 to 2018, Washington, playing Game A, avoided making any serious comment on the India-China border issue. However, following the India-China conflict in the Galwan Valley in

¹⁰¹ Tamal Nandi, "World's largest aircraft carrier, Indian warships conduct naval exercise together," *Live Mint*, July 21, 2020.

¹⁰² "US Military to stand with India in conflict with China indicate WHO office," *The Hindu*, July 7, 2020.

¹⁰³ Thomas Lum and Dick K. Nanto, "China's Trade with the United States and the World," Congressional Research Service, Federation of American Scientists, January 4, 2007; Keith Bradsher, "China Losing Taste for Debt From the U.S." *New York Times*, January 7, 2009; and Kamal Ahmad, "Jim O' Neill: China could overtake US economy by 2027," *The Telegraph*, November 19, 2011

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Soergel, "California, Texas Among Biggest Losers of Jobs From Growing China Trade Deficit", *US News*, January 30, 2020.



June 2020, the United States condemned the incident and made various remarks in favor of India, as Washington played Game B, and even sent a U.S. aircraft carrier group to conduct joint military exercises with Indian forces, messaging China of an emerging alliance.

China's Tactics and Strategy

The sharp and hostile focus of Chinese policymakers on Taiwan, Hong Kong, the South China Sea, India, and the United States has deliberately opened multiple diplomatic fronts. The scholar Yun Sun argues that China has sought to carefully avoid a two-front military confrontation with America in the east and India in the west.¹⁰⁵ The director of the China program and co-director of the East Asia program at the Stimson Center, Yun, further argues that Beijing's tactical objective in clashing with India in Ladakh is to stand up for its interests and territorial claims which, for China, is worth the cost. The "costs" that China may have to pay are irreparable damage to China's reputation among the Indian military, the diplomatic corps, and the Indian people, on the one hand, and the clash would drive New Delhi into a closer partnership with Washington, on the other. In Yun's understanding, Beijing views India as "strategically unreliable" and it has no interest in conceding to India's attempt to advance its position on territorial disputes in order to trade for concessions because the concessions would appear to have been extracted due to India's strength, and would only lead to even more aggressive Indian behavior in the future.

¹⁰⁵ Yun Sun, "China's Strategic Assessment of India," *War on the Rocks*, March 25, 2020.

The arrival of a harsh and frosty winter in Ladakh does not alter China's strategic goal, which is to restore some form of normalcy in its relations with India in order to prevent the occurrence of a two-front war with the United States and India. China is worried that should a shooting war start, it would automatically bring in the United States and the western allies on the side of India. The challenge confronting Beijing is how it should deal with New Delhi's demands—to resolve the border issue and to give United Nations-designation for anti-India militant groups in Pakistan as terrorists—because in the first demand Indian and Chinese perceptions radically differ over where the borderline actually lies, and the second demand may be irreversible.

With Chinese rigidity on Indian demands, it would be next to impossible for China to get India to concede to its demands—of Indian neutrality—which Beijing badly needs in order to break the Indo-U.S. alliance. China's deepest worry is the Indo-U.S. alliance that is shaping a new Asian order based on a rules-based system and freedom of navigation, as opposed to Chinese unilateral hegemony. At the heart of Chinese fears is the release of the U.S. "Indo-Pacific Strategy" just three months after the Indo-China standoff at Doklam that positions India as a leading Asian power with security responsibilities of policing the entire Indo-Pacific together with the United States and its treaty allies. The new status that the United States gave India sent shivers of nervousness through the Beijing foreign policy establishment, and the only possible route left for China to take was to seek reconciliation with India. China has not stopped trying to prevent the formation of a Indo-U.S. alliance. Yun explains that India has periodically assured China about New Delhi's



strategic autonomy, and as a result China has raised Sino-Indian relations to an unprecedented level, resulting in a rather abrupt positive shift after the Doklam crisis.¹⁰⁶



Indo-U.S. military exercises near the China border in September 2016.

China's greatest fear over the multi-faceted Indo-U.S. alliance is the prospect of (1) confronting the U.S. Navy on the ocean and the Indian military on its southern border; (2) in a warlike scenario Indo-U.S. defense cooperation becomes a real threat; (3) Indo-U.S. cooperation may damage the security and stability of China's western borderland; (4) their cooperation undermines China's strategic influence in South Asia; (5) it hinders China's power projection capability in the Indian Ocean; (6) it may threaten China's energy shipping from the Middle East; (7) the U.S. endorsement of India's Asian leadership status diminishes China's

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

own rise as an Asian hegemon, and, (8) it encourages Japan, Australia and other countries to seek closer ties with New Delhi.¹⁰⁷

Chinese knee-jerk act of giving a higher status to India was forced upon Beijing by the U.S. elevating India as a preeminent Asian power. If there had been no U.S. policy swing towards India, China may have been much more adventurous, even reckless, in its handling of the Ladakh crisis. It may be too late now for China to have any influence on separating Washington and New Delhi, and the relationship may solidify further if China continues provocative acts in South, Southeast and East Asia.

Beijing policymakers appear to have misunderstood India's strategic culture. Many of them believe that the country still remains wedded to the policy of non-alignment. They have understated or underestimated India's shifting policy culture, which now emphasizes alliances with any regional or global power that upholds a rules-based global order. Beijing policy establishment also sees a contradiction in India's close relationship with Russia, which is a U.S. adversary, forgetting that the United States accepts India's strategic autonomy.

On the one hand, the Indo-China crisis diplomacy has been a game of "costly signaling," with India seeking a powerful partner, the United States. By displaying the Indo-U.S. alliance, India has sent China a "risk-free" signal because China, with aggressive intentions towards India, could no longer retaliate as it now had a strong ally. On the other hand, both the United States and India have also sent

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.



“risk-free” signals that have arguably unsettled China’s Asian strategy and may even upset its plans to become the Asian hegemon.

Conclusion

An analysis of the U.S.-India engagement within the matrix of Parrondo’s Paradox has helped to confirm that the paradox, and the unfolding of historical events, has a demonstrable symmetry in the four cases under study. The paradox follows a game theory logic, an internal pattern, that recommends its usefulness in historical and international relations analysis. It demonstrates how losing strategies could be turned into a winning one. It is useful for understanding the dynamics of U.S.-India engagement, particularly in the four cases that I have selected for this study. As the United States and India made significant changes in their strategies, in the four cases under review, they were in a position to defeat or prevent the growing influence of China. If they had not changed their strategies, it would have hurt the long-term interests of both countries.

Note on the Author

Alok Kumar is Guest Faculty at the Department of National Security Studies, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh. He graduated from the University of Lucknow and was awarded an MPhil and PhD in International Relations, Centre for Studies in International Politics and Governance, School of International Studies, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. The title of his MPhil dissertation is “Indo-U.S. Security Cooperation After 9/11 attack: An Assessment of the Policies and Programmes.” His PhD dissertation

is titled "Indo-U.S. Security Cooperation in the Defence Sector with Special Reference to Transfer of Technology." The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) awarded a Doctoral Fellowship to him in 2018. He has published research papers, articles in journals, and chapters in edited books. He has presented papers at national and international conference and seminars. His areas of interest are Foreign Policy, National Security, Technology and National Security, Arms Trade, Transfer of Defence Technology and Global Security.