



FIFTH INDIA-US STRATEGIC DIALOGUE: A RENEWED FOCUS ON THE RELATIONSHIP

*Dr. Stuti Banerjee
Research Fellow
Indian Council of World Affairs*

The just concluded India –US Strategic Dialogue has generated considerable debate. The event was the first interaction between the United States administration and the new government in India under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. What has generated curiosity is the direction the relationship will take keeping in mind the past rapport between the United States and the then Chief Minister Modi.

Before his visit for the dialogue, Secretary of State John Kerry in a speech to the American Progressive Societyⁱ spoke about the future of India -United States relationship. He stated that, “...the most important relationships for the United States,(which)... will most affect the direction of the 21st century (is)... the U.S.-India relationship.... and particularly trying to deepen our ties with India in terms of our strategic imperatives....The United States and India can and should be indispensable partners for the 21st century, and that is, I assure you, the way we approach the Modi government and the way we view this particular time”ⁱⁱ If the speech of Secretary of State laid the grounds for his visit to India, the dialogue is seen as a precursor to the Prime Minister’s meeting with President Obama in Washington D.C. (September 2014).

The dialogue held in New Delhi has been termed as a ‘transformative moment’, ‘a renewed look at the relationship, or ‘reinvigorating the relationship’. Yet, there are critics too that state that it has not made progress at all. There is no doubt that the relationship between the two democracies has not developed as expected since the watershed moment of the civil nuclear deal.

The arrest of an Indian diplomat created further rift last year. For the United States, the strategic dialogue has provided it with the opportunity to bridge these gaps and renew its ties with India.

The joint statement, by Minister of External Affairs Ms Sushma Swaraj and Secretary of State John Kerry,ⁱⁱⁱ hints at some broad issues that showcase the understanding of the two countries on various issues of bilateral importance. It also involves reaching an understanding at various multilateral forums. “The two sides recognized that the decisive mandate provided by the Indian people to their new Government provided a unique opportunity to re-energize this relationship.”^{iv} There are some of the key takeaways from the dialogue process as highlighted in the joint statement and the statement of the Secretary of State.

The first is the emphasis laid on terrorism. The two sides have acknowledged the need to “...intensify efforts to combat terrorism, proliferation of WMDs, nuclear terrorism, cross-border crime, and address the misuse of the internet for terrorist purposes, in compliance with respective laws.” By including both cyber terrorism and nuclear terrorism, the two countries have broadened the scope of cooperation. For India the threat emanates from terrorist organisations based in Pakistan, who have repeatedly made inflammatory remarks against India. For the United States, the destruction of the Al Qaeda network is important. Both countries would be seeking to compel Pakistan to intensify its efforts to dismantle terrorist infrastructure within its boundaries and stop all support to them.

The United States reiterated its support for India’s bid for a permanent seat in a reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC). However, the path to this reform has not been brought to light and questions are being raised on its ability to deliver on this commitment. It would also seem that India and the United States have differed on a few issues in the United Nations, highlighting the lack of common understanding needed to reform the UNSC.

An issue that has been gained importance in the dialogue over the years is concern over climate change. This year also considerable stress was laid on the subject. It was in continuation of this that the matter, the United States discussed the Civil Nuclear Agreement. With the demand for clean energy growing and the demand for electrification in India increasing, India has to exploit all its energy options. For India nuclear energy is a viable option to achieve its goal of electrification and economic growth, for the United States it is an opportunity to create jobs and increase its

economic ties with India. The two States have reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the agreement and called on the NPCIL and US companies to expedite the necessary work to conclude pricing and contractual details. The talks also made progress on the bi-lateral dialogue on nuclear safety, security and regulatory process as well as establishing India's Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP) project.

The dialogue also highlighted that a "...truly strategic partnership between India and the United States would lead to significant contributions in regional, peace, security and stability and prosperity."^v The United States has expressed a desire for India to be more deeply engaged in Afghanistan, especially with the withdrawal of American troops. Beyond the immediate neighbourhood India is expanding its horizons to work with other countries such as Japan and South Korea. This is in keeping with India's goal to expand its engagement within the region. The emphasis of the current government is economic development and benefit to all its citizens. The United States, mindful of this goal, would like to increase its economic engagement with India. It supports the building of an 'Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor that can help bridge South and Southeast Asia'^{vi}. This would also the United States to connect to all the major markets of Asia.

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Apart from the highlighted areas, a number of other matters such as education, space security and infrastructural development programmes among others were also discussed. The defence cooperation segment would be further conferred upon when Secretary of Defence Hagel visits India from 07-09 August 2014.

The aim of the dialogue is to broaden and deepen the cooperation between the two nations. The just concluded dialogue has been able to lay the ground for congenial atmosphere in which the relationship can continue forward. It has signalled that President Obama and his administration are ready to engage with the new government in India unconditionally and without reservations. India has also projected that it would not allow the past setbacks to dictate

its future decision making. The dialogue has achieved its aim of renewing connectivity within the relationship.

**Dr. Stuti Banerjee is a Research Fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.*

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) or Indian Council of World Affairs)

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ⁱ The speech is available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/07/229870.htm>

ⁱⁱ John Kerry, US Department of State, "Remarks at the Center for American Progress' India: 2020 Program", Accessed on 05 August 2014, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/07/229870.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ The Joint Statement is available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/23799/Joint+Statement+on+the+Fifth+IndiaUS+Strategic+Dialogue> and <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/07/230046.htm>

^{iv} Ministry of External Affairs, "Joint Statement on the Fifth India-U.S. Strategic Dialogue", Accessed on 05 August 2014, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/23799/Joint+Statement+on+the+Fifth+IndiaUS+Strategic+Dialogue>

^v Ibid

^{vi} US Department of State, "U.S.-India Trade and Economic Cooperation", Accessed on 05 August 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/07/230048.htm>