

## China, India and the United States: Wary trio?

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## ABSTRACT\*

Policy choices made by a country help decipher continuities and discontinuities in foreign policy making. The choices made in foreign policy making reveal the imprint of domestic political agendas and institutional arrangements that manage foreign policy. This research essay examines China, India and United States as being three countries exhibiting their global outreach in starkly different ways. The essay attempts to knit the wavering complementarities amongst the three countries, matched by an undercurrent of arriving at a compact on various issues. With bilateral relations being the effectus primatum tenens (effect of primacy holding), it is apt to examine these three countries and the multiple spill overs their respective bilateral have on various issues. Economics, politics, security, and global concerns going beyond the bilateral are coalescing into an amorphous construct in the making deserving attention. The theoretical framework of constructivism provides a theoretical underpinning to this working paper.

### Introduction

China, India and the United States are nations proud of their histories and contributions to ‘globalism’ where national interests effortlessly blend into creating an aura of goodwill to all. In the case of China and India, their civilizational continuity and expressions have created an image where international relations as a field of interest and studied interpretations repeatedly characterise these countries as ‘spheres’ of interest. The usage of the noun ‘sphere’ encompasses the range, domain, scope, realm and interest emanating from their influence globally. The aspect of influence straddles political, economic, security, culture and other heuristic aspects, situating interrogative postulates on the speculative aspects of the relations the three countries share or otherwise. This working paper attempts to determine the integrative and non-integrative facets of the relations between the three countries. To social scientists and area study scholars, examining three countries poses challenges, as the conventional basis of studying and interpreting ‘bilaterals’, gets complicated by adding trilateral dynamics.

Interpreting the three countries and their *modus vivendi* (mode of living / way of life) involves the study of research material covering almost a vast scope of epistemic enquiry. To systematize the preliminary findings, the paper adopts the theoretical framework of ‘Constructivism’ to analyse, construct and deconstruct the integrative and non-integrative aspects of the relations amongst the three countries.

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## **Theoretical frame – Constructivism and the ‘trilateral’**

A conundrum facing scholars and analysts studying area studies is the challenge posed by empirical–theoretical problems, conflicting with political theory and practice. Globalization as the new template in international relations has been accompanied by newer problems that pose more questions and few answers. In contemporary politics – domestic, regional and international – themes highlighting cooperation and conflict assume a centrality, depending upon the ‘values’ identified and extrapolated by the polity at the helm in a sovereign state.

In the mid- to late 1980s, questions began to be raised about the theories and scientific methods of International Relations (IR) and the extent to which they were implicated in the production of international power. Assumptions determining the study of IR emerged during the Cold War when Realism was the dominant approach to lend and create a framework enquiring into aspects – variables and determinants – keeping the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) a hair trigger away from global conflagration. With the end of the Cold War, IR theoreticians were left wondering, why the field of IR had failed to identify lacunae, leading to the implosion of the USSR and emergence of new states in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. These questions led to the evolving nature of re-interpreting IR from a framework posting social construction as the bedrock of relations between countries. This fresh approach was dubbed ‘constructivism’ and goes beyond the restrictions of realism and neo-realism where ‘power’ was the *leitmotif* of nation-state interactions and arrangements.

Constructivism is of the view that:

*The typologies with which the material world is shaped by human action and the multiple interfaces that evolve from a vibrant normative and epistemic elucidations determine the centrality of social actors.*

Constructivists believe that, “human capacity for reflection or learning has its greatest impact on the manner in which individuals and social actors attach meaning to the material world and cognitively frame the world they know, experience and understand.”<sup>1</sup> International Relations, to Constructivists, consist

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Adler, *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 92.

primarily of social facts, which are facts only by human agreement.<sup>2</sup> In a radical departure from the overwhelming fixation towards power and its attributes, the social triumphs over the material.

A social structure leaves more space for agency, that is, for the individual or state to influence their environment, as well as to be influenced by it. The title of Alexander Wendt's famous article, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It',<sup>3</sup> captures this idea. To Constructivists, enmity and egos are passé. The constitutive aspects of norms and a shared understanding make for creating an agency and structure to any relationship between nations.<sup>4</sup> By accepting a positivist epistemology, constructivists gained theoretical acceptance to a new theoretical line of reasoning beginning with the writings of Nicholas Onuf.<sup>5</sup> There are three arguments motivating the adoption of constructivism as a theoretical frame to situate the as yet, inchoate trilateral, of China, India and the United States.

*First*, social structures are defined, in part, by shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge.<sup>6</sup> What makes ideas (and structure/s) "social," is their intersubjective quality. In other words, sociality (as opposed to "materiality" of realism and neo-realism, and the centrality of immense physical capabilities), is countered by constructivism articulating shared knowledge. *Second*, "social structures include material resources like gold and tanks."<sup>7</sup> Constructivists argue that material resources acquire relevance for collective action through embedded nature of shared knowledge in which they are embedded. Constructivism is cognizant with changes and shifts in material power affecting social relations between nations. *Third*, social structures exist in practices. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an illustration of the constructivist view where the challenge is more than just pure security. The climate and evidence of its changing respects no sovereignty or material progress.

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<sup>2</sup> Steve Smith, "International theory and European integration" in Morten Kelstrup and Michael C. Williams (eds.) *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration – Power, Security and Community*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) p.38.

<sup>3</sup> See Alexander Wendt, Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, *International Organization* (Cambridge), Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring, 1992), pp. 391-425.

<sup>4</sup> Emanuel Adler, *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.90.

<sup>5</sup> KM Fierke, "Constructivism" in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theories - Discipline and Diversity* Third Edition, Oxford: OUP, 2013 pp. 187-20.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security* (Harvard), Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer, 1995), p.73.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Wendt, *ibidem* p.73.

Simply put, what is real are social structures depending on shared knowledge for objectivity, setting aside the dominance of ‘power’ and ‘interests’ negating or relegating other aspects to a secondary level. Do the countries that are the focus in this paper, have the social structures to determine and map global influence with minimal rancor as a necessary feature? The next section is a brief overview of China-United States relations two centuries ago. Beginning with their bilateral history is an attempt at constructing a social endeavor with economic variables.

### **China and the United States: Some historical issues**

Less than a decade after the 1776 revolution leading to the creation of the United States, the merchants of Boston in December 1783, sent “Harriet”, a 55-ton sloop<sup>8</sup>, carrying a cargo of ginseng to China. On learning of this ‘economic adventurism,’ the British East India Company purchased the cargo at double price.<sup>9</sup> This was to prevent the emergence of a rival in commercial terms who could evolve into becoming a rival dislodging the “empire where the sun never sets.” Revealing a spirit of resilience, efforts to trade with China continued with the “Empress of China” leaving New York in February 1784, arriving in Macao and Canton in August 1784, becoming the first instance of bilateral trade between the two countries. Success of the “Empress of China” commercial endeavour, and profits made, led to a ‘China fever’ with products from China like tea, silks, spices, cotton fabrics and porcelain finding a market in United States.

With the successes in trade, it was only several decades later that religion followed. In 1830, the first missionaries from the United States came to China. Perhaps, the first book on China written by an American was Samuel Wells Williams’ *Middle Kingdom* (New York: Wiley and Putnam) in 1848. Prior to even the missionaries, was *The Canton Register* published by William B. Wood. Fascination for China, and things Chinese continued with Wood publishing *The Chinese Courier and Canton Gazette* in 1831 to promote knowledge on China to westerners based then in Canton (Guangzhou), a trading port. If interest in the United States on China was increasing, it was the turn of Chinese students to want to know more about the country becoming known as the ‘land of the free.’ Yung Wing, Wong Sheng and Wong Fung were the first group of Chinese students in the United States to study at the Monson Academy, Massachusetts in 1847 with Yung Wing graduating from Yale in 1854.

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<sup>8</sup> A sloop is a sailing boat with a single mast ahead of the main mast and a second mast behind the main mast.

<sup>9</sup> Ta Jen Liu, *A History of Sino-American Diplomatic Relations, 1840-1974, Chinese Culture Series 2-2*, (Taipei: China Culture Academy, 1978. p.12.

Diplomatic relations between the countries were established in 1786 with a consul for Canton appointed by the United States. In 1844, the first Sino-American Treaty was signed in Wanghia - also Treaty of Wangxia - in the then Portugal-controlled Macau, since the insular Qing dynasty was unwilling to recognize a foreign power. The Treaty of Wangxia - a Treaty of Peace, Amity, and Commerce, with tariff of duties - was a diplomatic agreement signed between the Qing dynasty of China and the United States, on July 3, 1844, in the Kun Lam temple located in northern Macau. The agreement was ratified by President John Tyler on January 17, 1845 after passage by the US Congress. This agreement remained in existence formally until the 1943 'Sino-American Treaty for the Relinquishment of Extraterritorial Rights in China.'<sup>10</sup>

The Treaty of Wangxia was reflective of public opinion in the United States against the trade in opium reflecting the domination of trade in those days by countries with colonies and markets where economic development was very rudimentary and mostly involving subsistence farming and out-dated skills that were an anachronism, requiring correction by a country that rid itself of colonial influence and advanced its credentials as a welcome and benign entity supportive of overthrowing colonialism everywhere. An indication of soft power, even before it was termed as such, was the role played by the Church in encouraging education in China. Tsinghua (Qinghua) University was created after the Theodore Roosevelt administration reduced the amount owed by the Qing after the Boxer Uprising. The US at that time felt that the war reparations were in excess and this excess was to be channelled into education. This university is now known for filing more patents than Harvard university. Another instance is the Yenching University, which was primarily established by the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States in 1890. These ideals, stemming from civil initiatives, morphed over time, into becoming the spirit behind the United Nations a century later.

The influence of the United States in educational and religious terms found a socially fertile China in the first two decades of the last century owing to the slow political implosion of the Qing and a rapid descent into ideological politics. This came to the forefront after the success of the 1917 Soviet revolution painting political canvas with the colour red representing progress, modernisation and equality. To Chinese, especially intellectuals and traders, the United States was a distant land representing new processes of political and economic dynamism after overthrowing feudalism and colonialism – ills plaguing China at that time. The term for the United States in China is 美国 (mei guo / beautiful country). This term also

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<sup>10</sup> Ta Jen Liu, *Ibidem* pp. 20-21.  
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stemmed from the United States projecting an image of being welcome to all fleeing oppression. The new country was also attracting non-Americans as the growing economy was dependent on immigrants to sustain its agriculture and manufacturing sectors.

The Cold War decades witnessed the politico-strategic dominating bilateral relations between the United States and China. The frictions in the ‘socialist camp’ were utilised by hard realists exemplified by Henry Kissinger to make overtures to Beijing. This aspect witnessed the Nixon visit to China to meet an ailing Mao Zedong and kickstart a bilateral economic relationship that close to five decades has benefitted both. Current, sanctions and trade limitations in the bilateral are to be juxtaposed with many factors, primarily domestic in the United States. The next section moves to situate the China-United States bilateral in the reform period in China since the 1970s.

### **China and United States – The years since the ‘Open Door’ policy**

*“A country’s national self-image reflects not only its basic political values and ideals but also its responses to how others perceive it.”*<sup>11</sup>

On 27 February 1972, the Shanghai Communique was signed between the US and China. The two sides agreed on the “one China principle” in which Taiwan was “China’s internal affair in which no other country [had] the right to interfere.”<sup>12</sup> On 1 January 1979, a Joint Communique on Establishing Diplomatic Relations was signed with the US recognizing the People’s Republic of China as being the sole legitimate government of all China.<sup>13</sup>

The US has a policy towards China mediated by several actors. These are:

- ✓ The President and his advisors giving the White House the ‘yea’ or ‘nay’ on China.

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<sup>11</sup> Lucien W. Pye, Ch. 9, “China’s Self-Image as Projected in World Affairs” in Gerrit W. Wong and Bih-Jaw Lin, *Sino-American Relations at a Time of Change* (CSIS-Washington and IIR-Taipei, 1994), p. 157.

<sup>12</sup> *Shanghai Communique*, Paragraph 11, 28 February 1972.

<sup>13</sup> See Joint Communique *On The Establishment Of Diplomatic Relations Between The United States Of America And The People’s Republic Of China*, January 1, 1979. Accessible at: <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/u-s-prc-joint-communique-1979/> (Retrieved on 20 May 2019).

- ✓ Policy makers in the State department and Defense comprising diplomats, policy makers and implementers.
- ✓ Activist legislators on bi-partisan basis in Congress, united when it comes to China.
- ✓ Special interest groups reflecting civil society debates and on China related issues.
- ✓ The mass media and public opinion.

These actors have not always been in synchrony, and appear at times to be having differences. That is bound to happen in any democracy of long standing. In China, when the civil war between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was at its peak in the mid 1940s, George Catlett Marshall, known more for his Marshall Plan in the post-World War II years, was sent as a mediator by President Harry Truman to encourage the two belligerents to form a coalition. He was rebuffed.<sup>14</sup> Economics plays a central role in the United States foreign policy and this has been evident since John Hay's time as Secretary of State from 1898 to 1905, during the Presidencies of William Mc Kinley and Theodore Roosevelt. He is known to have enunciated "Open Door" principles for global trade with China, arguing for free and open markets providing opportunities to traders from all countries.<sup>15</sup>

Even prior to the current spat between the US and China there was a strand of hostility regarding China's economic success and beginnings of an investment agenda involving loans to the under-developed countries, many of them resource rich. Hence, Chinese foreign investment schemes have been called a "Chinese Marshall Plan."<sup>16</sup> China policy had played an important role in the US since the years of the Cold War. Democrats and Republicans have in the past coalesced on issues like non-proliferation and human rights. These days, the sanctions imposed on China by president Donald Trump has quiet acceptance from the Democrats who feel China's trade surplus with the US has eroded competitiveness and innovation, aspects that marked the economy since the end of the second world war.

To the US, China is not as single political issue (communism/ socialism) but congeries of various issues

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<sup>14</sup> Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan – Dawn of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), p.56.

<sup>15</sup> Benn Steil, *ibidem*, p.88.

<sup>16</sup> Benn Steil, *ibidem*, p. 374.



(trade/human rights/environment/copyrights/nuclear proliferation/arms trade to sanctioned countries/Taiwan/Korean peninsula/Iran/ South China Sea to mention a few). The US has an approach where problems are identified, with a considered view to solve the issue/s. China, in contrast identifies problems as being ‘manageable.’<sup>17</sup> The current trade war between the two countries has been sequestered into a bilateral issue with talks and sanctions dominating headlines without any resolution in sight. The two countries assess one another as ‘spoilers’ with the US being at the forefront in slapping sanctions on China for manifold reasons (increase in bilateral trade deficit for a couple of decades/protectionism practiced by China/manipulation of foreign exchange rates to benefit Chinese exporters/violation of intellectual property rights etc.). To China, the US is behaving in a manner reflecting an insecurity stemming from an economy that has perhaps seen better days.

Cooperation and issues promoting or retarding a commingling of interests, depend on the ‘values’ articulated by the respective political elites at the helm of a political culture. The ‘Open Door’ policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping was a process of introducing market reforms under the leadership of the Communist Party-State – leading to “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” The success of economic reforms in China was in many ways possible owing to the ‘encouragement’ provided by western powers especially the United States. The confidence shown by the United States in China’s vision of creating an economy where market logic will be welcomed, led to the ‘rapprochement’, heralded by the week-long Richard Nixon visit (February 21 – 28, 1972). For the United States’ government, China was a strategic partner owing to the Cold War and tensions with the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and for the American corporate sector, China had enormous potential as a market with more than 600 million consumers at that time.

By setting aside close to two and a half decades of ‘diplomatic freeze,’ China was acknowledged as the lesser evil during the Cold War. The intensity of the China-United States bilateral has evolved from a methodology of cold war necessity in the 1970s and 1980s to a necessity determined by globalisation and its myriad attributes, primarily determined these days by technology flows. From a bilateral trade of around USD 2 billion in 1979, when the ‘Open Door Policy’ became a template in China for economic development, by 2017, the two countries had trade totalling USD 636 billion. Enshrining the bilateral was the strength of the US dollar with China holding US Treasury securities to the tune of USD 1.2 trillion. The

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<sup>17</sup> See Mark Pratt, Ch.2, “The Future of Sino-American Policy: The Issues” in Gerrit W. Wong and Bih- Jaw Lin, *Sino-American Relations at a Time of Change* (CSIS-Washington and IIR-Taipei, 1994).  
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United States also prevailed upon the global order when it lobbied for China's joining the World Trade Organisation in 2001 and granting the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in December that year. In the four decades of intense bilateral trade China has emerged as the global producer of manufactured goods / electronic goods / electrical machinery / textiles / clothing / footwear / agricultural products / chemicals / high end medical gadgets and multifarious aspects explicating the intense supply chains prevalent in international trade.

### **Situating Sino-Indian Relations**

This section details the China-India bilateral by identifying and isolating variables. I begin this section by arguing that there are perhaps, no set frameworks to examine Sino-Indian relations in their entirety. One can surmise that this 'vacuum' exists as contemporary IR theory is very narrowly focused on "power" and its myriad attributes.<sup>18</sup> Space for ideas, beliefs and values do not exist since the altar of 'realism' (imagined and otherwise) constricts other approaches and negates attempts to examine issues from other perspectives. Sino-Indian relations and the discourses surrounding their bilateral relations are more often than not reflective of a predetermined postulation that is stubborn to newer approaches and fresh perspectives.

Ontologically, a deconstruction of Sino-Indian relations to its essentials is a project that awaits its day. Categories that go into this bilateral relationship are more than what is academically discussed and written. For instance, six decades ago when the two countries had 'arrived' on the global stage as new entities shaking off colonialism and civil war they had more in common with each other – large population, abysmal social indicators, shattered economic infrastructure, weak governance structures and the need for external aid to stimulate domestic economic production. Today, the only similarity the two countries share - apart from large populations - is the focus on their domestic needs of development. Even this 'commonality' is not without its departures. By every other measurable indicator and variable China and India have less in common with each other in 2011 than in 1949.

I supplement my above arguments by listing out a few variables for both the countries and these are to be juxtaposed with their six-decade old bilateral relationship as the constant. These listed variables are neither exclusive nor comprehensive but are to be seen as contributing to the making of 'categories' that could be

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<sup>18</sup> The classic texts on 'realism' and 'neo-realism' by Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY, Norton, 2001); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987) are illustrations of this approach.

used to frame an ontological approach to study Sino-Indian relations.

*Politically*, China has transited from individual totalitarianism to collective authoritarianism. This shift in political temperament has coincided with China's reform program and is to be seen as a pragmatic choice made by the Communist Party of China (CPC) to retain its relevance and legitimacy. As a political system, India began its newly independent journey with experienced individuals who strived to build institutions. These ideals got blurred when in the realm of foreign policy decision making in its early decades, India made choices that reflected 'individualism' over 'institutionalism.' As a system, democracy has entrenched itself over the decades and the country has been governed by coalitions that offer alternating periods of crises and stability.

*Economically*, China has moved from a centralized command economy model to one where entrepreneurship – by the state and the individual - is valued. India has effected a transition – arguably, still underway - from Nehruvian socialism and a 'mixed economy' to that of a largely free market where regulatory mechanisms function as 'referees.' It has to be added though that individual entrepreneurship in India was never formally constrained by the state.

*Development* wise, China has forged far ahead of India in every possible manner – manufacturing, infotech, start-ups, life expectancy, education, primary health care, access to amenities etc. and India faces the ignominy of being one of the 'underperformers' stalling the noble aims of the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

In *Ideological* terms,<sup>19</sup> China has abandoned the doctrinaire postures it had adopted in the first few decades of its existence and adopted a more or less agnostic approach designed to derive benefits, both domestic and external. In the realm of foreign policy however, this agnostic temperament morphs into the arbitrating of power and influence. India has made the transition where it underplays its past foreign policy shibboleth – 'Non-alignment' – but is cautious to not be labelled as a 'camp follower' in the prevailing order largely described as 'liberal institutionalism.' 'Autonomy' in decision-making is India's new framework of

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<sup>19</sup> See Chih Yu-Shih, *The Spirit of Chinese Foreign Policy – A Psychocultural view* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990); Tang Jiaxuan, *Heavy Storm and Gentle Breeze – A Memoir of China's Diplomacy*, First edition (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2011).

practicing foreign policy.<sup>20</sup>

*Globally*, China is one of the pillars of the international structures of governance and has the necessary heft and voice to have its interests accommodated. India on the other hand is an aspirant to those very forums where heft counts, yet falls short primarily owing to its own lack of economic standing and a perceived lack of clarity as to what it wants.

*Psychologically*, China behaves as an ‘actor’ well-conditioned to the ways of the international system and assiduously prepares itself to be part of constructive solutions and leads the way in creating new institutional structures – One Belt One Road, Maritime Silk Road Initiative, New Development Bank, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation - to ensure stability and spread its influence. India, by contrast, follows an approach where it seeks to maximize its influence at global forums and its views are generally taken seriously. Nonetheless, in its bilateral relations with China, the catharsis of `1962 forms a rubric motivating and dominating its policy makers.

*Epistemologically*, Sino-Indian relations need to define or ascribe ‘values’ – to themselves, each other and the rest - and this kind of an approach is most suitable while examining specific issues – such as their respective political systems. Challenging as it is to locate Asia’s two largest countries within a theoretical framework, this paper attempts to base itself by adopting the Constructivist approach, interpreting Sino-Indian relations by delineating ‘categories’ in the narrative on the two countries. Social constructivist methodologies also require ‘discourse’ to be empirically dissected within its social context.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the above-discussed variables display a tendency to morph into intervening variables. As is evident, there is no absolute and all-encompassing theoretical approach for a dynamic social science discipline like international relations. Hence, supplementing this approach, the important correlates influencing the discourse on Sino-Indian relations are ‘historical dimensions’, ‘socio-political contexts’, ‘ideological bases’, ‘power relations,’ ‘domestic politics,’ and ‘economic performance.’ These are in evidence as a constantly running sub-script in the analysis of India-China relations.

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<sup>20</sup> C. Raja Mohan, “India: Between “Strategic Autonomy” and “Geopolitical Opportunity”, *Asia Policy* (NBAR Seattle: Washington) No.15, January 2013, pp.21-25.

<sup>21</sup> “[a] discourse captures a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world).” Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Philips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage, 2002), p.1.

## **India and the United States**

For India, unarguably, its bilateral relations with the United States are the most important component of its foreign policy. Irrespective of who is in the White House, a Republican or Democrat, for India, institutional relations with the State Department, Department of Defense at the Pentagon and the Department of Commerce are paramount.

With a Republican President, Donald Trump at the White House, bilateral relations between the two countries are stronger, thanks to the personal connect between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Donald Trump. There are layers to the bilateral, with the US wanting access to India's market to sell among other things, it's expensive medical equipment with riders attached – proprietary software, no transfer of technology, no duplication or replication of medical equipment - that lends some discomfort to the commercial ties. Otherwise, trade is a significant determinant with bilateral trade in 2018 being USD 87.5 billion. Indian foreign policy towards the US could be termed 'economic diplomacy' accompanied by a strong defence calculus where the Pentagon is an advocate of stronger institutional relations with India where defence materiel play a role in deepening the bilateral.<sup>22</sup>

An intensive defence relationship has its commercial calculations with the US wanting India to not rely excessively on defence materiel from Russia. The military-industrial complex in the US appears to be satisfied with the state of affairs, and is playing the role of facilitator of ties while assuaging the concerns of other departments, wary of India's 'stand-alone' approach. 'Defence diplomacy' with India goes hand in hand with 'economic diplomacy.' The presence of a large workforce with the requisite skills, could act as incentive to the US defence industry, to base some of its production of arms and ammunition in India. As a norm player, India will find providing space to defence manufacturers of the US in India translating into the country being welcomed into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), a 48 member group, that seeks to prevent the proliferation of nuclear and fissile materiel. India's relations with all members of the NSG are cordial, with the exception of two – China and Turkey. These two countries can create hurdles in India's entry into the NSG.

Complications in the bilateral arise when it comes to Russia. Indian foreign policy has tried to impress upon the US that their advanced defence products are expensive and that Russia and India have agreements

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<sup>22</sup> See *U.S. Relations With India – Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet*, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State (Washington), June 21, 2019.

of bilateral exchange of information regarding technology while the US cocoons its arms exports by arguing that corporate secrets cannot be arbitrated when it is a buy and sell transaction. A challenge Indian diplomacy faced was when the US wanted to enforce Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) for signing an agreement with Russia to buy S-400 Triumf air defence missile system. Our diplomacy with the United States is currently going through a phase where a 'personal' connect at the highest levels has not translated into deeper institutional links owing to the past when India was a firm adherent to NAM. This adherence however was with embedded inconsistencies as arms sales from erstwhile Soviet Union kept our armed forces in fine fettle and the links continue.

At a time when Washington has walked out of international agreements and arrangements like the Paris Agreement (signed 2015 and opting out in 2017) and as a consequence the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as also the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017, a question uppermost is whether the US is an 'irrational actor'? The US pulling out of international covenants came as a shock and welcome development to Beijing, as it sees a vacuum that needs to be filled by a 'responsible' and 'law abiding' nation! To India, these developments are with portents of how the world order is changing fast and how can it leverage an advantageous position for itself. Our foreign policy cannot replicate China's 'dollar / renminbi' diplomacy and extend loans on extremely soft terms to create the infrastructure that a growing Chinese economy needs to utilise in the coming decades to emerge as the world's largest economy with the commensurate clout in strategic terms.

## **Analysis**

For constructivists, decisions of political leaders, ie, the foreign policy of China, India and United States, are known for their stolid policy framing and making process. In the case of the United States, the State Department is at the fulcrum, with Department of Defense, Department of the Treasury and the Central Intelligence Agency playing very important roles with the final word coming from the President. In China, foreign policy is coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), with substantial inputs from the Ministry of Commerce (MoFCOM). The role of intelligence agencies is to be expected, but without much fanfare. The case of India is unique. The Ministry of External Affairs presides over a foreign policy that has minimal interface with other ministries, especially the Ministries of Defence and Home. This exclusivity has at times led to a quarantining of issues, leading to delayed decisions.

China's national interests are characterised by a very realistic strand in the pursuit of those interests, but in  
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their official proclamations they are also interpreted as being flexible.<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that wavering is what matters in Chinese foreign policy, but, rather the apposite. The world is naturally multipolar.<sup>24</sup> History is evidence enough. The unilateralism promoted by the United States rides over the multilateralism espoused by its foreign policy practitioners and theoretical experts. Optimists in the US assess China as going through a process of economic modernisation exemplified by the development of an economy determined by market forces. Unlike democratic polities the market forces in China follow dictates issued by the state. The optimists also opine that the political leadership in China, though autocratic, is not immune or sequestered from the economic transformation over past four decades with societal changes necessitating political adaptability.<sup>25</sup>

China's quest for economic modernisation has been accompanied by a decisive orientation that seeks to transform the geopolitics of the world. Joining global processes of stewardship, especially economic, is to create a causal pattern where apart from multilateral processes, strong institutional bilateral arrangements are preferred by Beijing. The China-US bilateral is an illustration of a relationship around five decades old after the Nixon visit in a post second world war setting. The historical variables mentioned earlier assist in creating a template still being constructed. In an age where technology is driving the economy of most countries, it is a natural corollary to witness a wider audience having opinions on issues sequestered earlier by ossified bureaucracies. In the case of China, online opinions are at that phase where foreign policy makers are not pretending they do not consider wider public opinion. The recent incidents in Hong Kong were 'manufactured' in China as being a 'western plot' with online forums adopting a strident tone in encouraging the authorities in Beijing to take a hard stance against 'splittists.'

## **Conclusion**

China, India and the United States are actors with heft in the international system. The heft these countries possess stems from economic strength, capabilities and the adoption of strategic policies that enhance domestic economic strength further. In this aspect, India needs to generate more gravitas by convincing the

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<sup>23</sup> Yufan Hao and Lin Su, "Influence of Societal factors: A Case of China's American Policy Making" in Yufan Hao and Lin Su (eds.) *China's Foreign Policy Making: Societal Force and Chinese American Policy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel C. Lynch, *Rising China and Asian Democratization – Socialization to "Global Culture" in the Political Transformations of Thailand, China and Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> Ramon H. Myers, Michel C. Oksenberg and David Shambaugh (eds.) *Making China Policy – Lessons from the Bush and Clinton Administrations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p.2.  
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domestic political spectrum to look at foreign policy as a national strategy going beyond calculations that are only up to the next elections – state or national. When domestic politics begins to identify with issues that have domestic and international similarities, the domain of foreign policy expands to include more voices with perspectives that may differ yet conclude by enriching democracy and its associated variables and determinants.

Constructing a layered perspective on our foreign policy with China and United States is a complex task. The optimism lies in attempting to graft the ‘social’ in constructivism with the ‘rational.’



## About the Author

### About the Author

Raviprasad Narayanan has been with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) since October 2015. His teaching and research interests focus on China, its foreign policy, economic reforms and pedagogies explaining China. International Relations and theories explaining state behaviour motivate his research and publications.

At JNU, he has been teaching three courses - *Research Methods in International Relations* – a primer to understand methods of/for writing dissertations and conducting research, relevant to a research university like JNU; *Strategies of Economic Development in China* explaining the deep history and processes that have led to China becoming the global destination for investment and internal economic transformation now expanding outwards – in economic and strategic terms, and the course titled, *The State in Modern China* detailing the modern nation state putting on a veneer over a civilizational state with the Communist Party of China (CPC) presiding over every segment of politics, economy and society.

He was earlier Associate Research Fellow / Associate Professor with the Institute of International Relations (IIR), National Chengchi University (NCCU), Taipei, Taiwan from 2009 to 2015. Before IIR/NCCU, he was with the Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi from 2003 to 2009.

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