

The US is betting on a Failed Indian Horse

US President Joe Biden hailed US-India ties, while rolling out the pomp and pageantry for visiting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 22, 2023. President Biden defined the ties “as one of the defining relationships of the 21st century,” in addition, he said that the friendship between the two countries would be “instrumental in enhancing the strength of the whole world.”

The US since the 1990s has invested a lot in propping up India so that it can act as a bulwark to China in Asia or help in containing the Chinese rise in the East. This US bet is evident from the gifts showered on India over the last few decades, with Washington raising its relationship with India to the level of strategic partnership and even providing civilian nuclear technology as well as a plethora of arsenal to buttress and modernise the Indian army. Despite, this bet, it is quite evident that India is a failed horse, it is unable and unwilling to play the role the US has determined for it for several considerations, which I will discuss now.

1. India is a massive country, with a population of over 1 billion people, borders with seven countries, domestic unrest across its 28 states, approximately 40 insurgent outfits are active in the Northeast of India; Manipur has the most active insurgent outfits. Considering these factors, India is in no shape to be betted on, its domestic front is beset with problems impacting its ability to assert itself regionally, never mind against a rising power such as China.

2. The domestic considerations mentioned necessitate massive outlays from the Indian state to subdue or mitigate, this ultimately means its net wealth is not at the level needed to spend on extraterritorial quests, ambitions or dictates. It does not have the loose cash to expend on military-build up to flex its muscles against China or counter its moves in the region. In addition, India’s army is inadequate in comparison to the Chinese, with its suffering from deficiencies in all spectrums. For example, India’s Air Force is in a poor state: under-strength, lacking modernisation, and under-funded. Aircraft such as the MiG-21 are still airborne, even though they should have been decommissioned, and are easy prey for contemporary fighter craft.

3. Pakistan is a major headache for India particularly in the context of the conflict over Kashmir. India can’t turn its head and focus on China, knowing that Pakistan is waiting in the wings to retake Kashmir. This is a major headache for India’s planners and the US knowing this dilemma has worked to force a peace-settlement between the two rival neighbours, so that the Kashmir issue is settled. In addition, the US has looked to weaken Pakistan vis a vis India so that it poses no threat to New Delhi, with it refusing or hesitating in meeting Pakistan’s military demands or planning to take control over its nukes, with an end aim of shrinking the size of the Pakistan army and focusing it on internal threats as we saw post 9/11, with Pakistan’s forces engaged in fighting a guerrilla warfare against insurgents, incidentally with elements of the TTP funded and trained by RAW, India’s intelligence agency.

4. India’s army is overstretched, with it deployed across its various borders, with a large chunk consumed in Kashmir. These deployments have depleted the Indian army, with little to deploy for other strategic ends such as countering China. In

addition, it is deployed in restive states particularly in the Seven Sisters of India, the seven relatively unexplored and isolated India states- Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh. These states have witnessed the highest level of military deployment since Indian independence, given the existence of insurgent outfits demanding autonomy from New Delhi.

5. India knows it borders China, and past wars and border conflicts have had draining consequences on the Indian economy, army, and state. India given its rising domestic challenges needs economic partnerships with China considering Beijing's economic acceleration and growth in Asian markets. Hence, Indian planners have no real interest in expending efforts in countering or acting as a bulwark to China in the region. There are some in India's strategic circles who see the need to counter China as they see the competition as a zero-sum game, but despite the possible validity of this position, based on the mentioned considerations India is in no position to compete against China. India is punching above its weight even though it has taken over China over the last two years in economic growth, the latter is not an accurate indicator of economic strength and sophistication of an economy and state.

6. Indian foreign policy elite and strategic thinkers are not up for the job, they don't have a tendency of putting all their eggs in one basket and traditionally have adopted a cautious approach to foreign relations. The Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in his book, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*, offers insight into how the Indian mindset imagines the country's international posture. Jaishankar repeatedly mentions that Indian grand strategy in an uncertain world requires "advancing (its) national interests by identifying and exploiting opportunities created by global contradictions," so as "to extract as much gains from as many ties as possible." Importantly he mentions, "this is a time for us to engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbors in, extend the neighborhood, and expand traditional constituencies of support." India is interesting in extracting benefits from the US as much as extracting benefits from others via transactional relationships, it does not have the appetite or political will to be the main US bulwark against China in Asia.

To conclude, the US is betting on a failed Indian horse, despite its efforts to feed and strengthen it more, this is all doomed to failure considering the considerations mentioned. The US foreign policy thinkers are beginning to see this and are now posing different options to the US administration such as forming more alliances, partnerships, military build up and even consuming China in further regional disputes. There is a possibility that the Taiwan issue would be inflamed to limit China's assertiveness in the Pacific, which is a major US security concern. The US as a superpower and lead of the unipolar world order, is continuously looking to deal with threats on the geopolitical chessboard, in this case China, however, unfortunately the Ummah is missing the Khilafah that will redefine the existing chessboard for the sake of Islam and the interests of the Ummah, as it did in the past since the birth of the first Islamic state in Medina under the leadership of Prophet Mohammed (saw).

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