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## **India's Saliency in the Global Strategic Calculus -2016**

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Geopolitical constellations in mid-2016 have positioned India in an unmistakable saliency in the global strategic calculus which revolves around the power-play of the United States, Russia and China's Superpower pretensions.

There is currently a predictable 'status quo' in the United States-Russia-China Triangle in that the United States continues to maintain its predominance as the established Superpower of the last seven decades; Russia as the erstwhile Bipolar Superpower now much diminished in power equations in relation to the United States; and lastly China tempted to gamble for Superpower status emboldened by its economic and military rise.

China has laid claim to be the main challenger of United States with a diminished Russia in tow in a strategic duality as a China-Russia Strategic Nexus. Perceptionally, it would appear that China-Russia Nexus would have a heavier strategic weight in confronting the United States longstanding predominance. But this is more illusionary rather than a strategic reality as Russia still retains considerable strategic might virtually dominating the Eurasian Heartland. Russia and China are no longer ideological allies and the only glue that holds them together is their common perceptions that the United States poses a considerable military threat to their national security and their global aspirations.

With the centre of global strategic and economic gravity having shifted to Indo Pacific Asia, India as an Emerged Power and the full capitalisation of its power-potential strengths still to be added, acquires a significant salience in the existing power-play between United States, Russia and China.

In terms of brief exposition of India's strategic preferences the record in mid-2016 is that after nearly five decades of strategic estrangement with the United States, India and the United States in the last two years have added noticeable robustness to the value of the US-India Strategic Partnership. Russia having moved closer to China in the post-Cold War era diluted India's much valued Strategic Partnership with Russia. China was and continues in mid-2016 to be India's main military threat perception, and a strongly potent one, with the baggage of the 1962 China's military invasion of India over boundary disputes which erupted with China's military occupation of Tibet in 1950.

Additionally, China to checkmate India's emergence as a powerful global and Asian power has resorted to the military strengthening of the China-Pakistan Axis, using the Pakistan Army Generals as proxy forces to keep India tied down to the Indian Subcontinent and not venturing further afield. Russia today also has recently moved closer to Pakistan in tow with China, seemingly more out of compulsions than strategic preference.

Strictly in terms of Asian strategic and military dynamics, India in mid-2016 emerges as the main challenger to China's ambition to emerge as Asia's undisputed powerful nation, with some alluding China's ambition to establish an Asian hegemony. This arises from India's subcontinental geographical spread, a population base comparable to China, its military power second only to China and a resurgent economy which is globally predicted to outstrip China's in coming decades

The global strategic calculus in mid-2016 is playing itself out with Russia, China and Pakistan as autocratic militarised nations confronting the United States, Japan and Australia and other US Allies in the Asia Pacific. It is here therein where India's salience in the global strategic calculus stands out in striking contours.

India's salience today in the global strategic calculus is a nett product of its geostrategic significance as a Subcontinental Power in the Indian Ocean with a powerful Navy plus the contemporary geopolitical dynamics operating in Indo Pacific Asia which leave no other choices for the United States but to recognise India's strategic salience and co-opt India as United States much preferred strategic partner, not an ally.

India today is in the unique position of surfacing as a swing State and with the recent Modi Doctrine of making its strategic preferences in favour of the United States unambiguously in mid-2016 has enabled India to undoubtedly emerge as the game-changer in the global strategic calculus.

The global balance of power changes wherein the United States today has the strategic support of Asia's leading two contending powers of

India and Japan as it readies to meet the China-challenge to American supremacy. Notably, both India and Japan have a historical record of conflict with China and both these nations enjoy a bilateral Special Strategic Partnership which amounts to the robustness of their respective and overall strategic partnership with the United States.

In terms of perspectives for the remainder of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century what is likely to unfold is a greater strengthening and robustness in the strategic linkages of India with the United States and Japan.

China is unlikely to deviate from the strategic path that it has set for itself in terms of adversarial relationships with the United States, India and Japan. Russia could be weaned away from China by resetting its present policy towards Russia dominated by Cold War fixations.

Concluding, it needs to be highlighted that irrespective of any changes in the existing geopolitical dynamics, India can be predicted to retain its salience in the global strategic calculus, initially as a powerful 'Swing State' with strategic preferences for the United States and in the decades to come as fully emerged independent Global Power in its own right. In the latter case too, if the United States plays its cards right and not relapse into China Hedging strategies and tilt towards Pakistan in politically expedient compulsions, the United States would find that India would be more comfortable to coordinate and synchronise its strategic policies with America, simply, because the strategic convergences between United States and India would outweigh any inducements that China and Russia could offer to 'swing' India to their side.

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