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[Home](#) > US Imperatives to Respect India's Strategic Sensitivities-2019

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## US Imperatives to Respect India's Strategic Sensitivities-2019

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The United States policy establishment long used for decades to view South Asia with Cold War mindsets which predicated according strategic equivalence to Pakistan with India despite India's asymmetrical predominance finds the United States in 2019 inadequate in realistic appraisal of strategic imperatives for respecting India's strategic sensitivities.

India being treated with 'Strategic Equivalence' with Pakistan is an era long past having been overtaken by India's geopolitical in ascendance and its strategic weight in global military calculus having been magnified. Past US Administrations recognising this reality endowed India with the appellation of an 'Emerging Power'.

Contextually, India needs to be accorded by India the respect and the respect of its strategic sensitivities not only in South Asia and the Indo Pacific but also in global context. To a great measure this was being done by past US Administrations, and initially by current US President Trump.

Regrettably, however in July 2019, US President Trump in a much ill-advised and misperceived utterances of presidential meditation on Kashmir made at the White House meeting with Pakistan PM Imran Khan and Pakistan Army Chief General Bajwa seems to have endangered the laboriously evolved US-India Strategic Partnership over two decades under two different political dispensations both in United States and India.

The above could have been dismissed in India as one of the impulsive 'Trumpisms' utterances but in the weeks that followed, President Trump repeating this uninvited assertion three times, and this has rung alarm bells in India. Contextually, India would not be wrong in

assuming that these repeated assertions of Kashmir mediation were not merely rhetorical but a calculated move by President Trump to prevail over Pakistan to facilitate US Forces easy exit from Afghanistan.

That may be so, and a transactional deal related to Afghanistan between United States and Pakistan, and that is not India's concern, even though India has been side-lined in the Afghan peace dialogue despite its legitimate security interests in Afghanistan.

But what is being resented by India and widely in Indian public opinion circles is that at all levels of US policy Establishment circles it has been maintained right from President Bush Sr days in the 1990s that Kashmir is a bilateral issue to be sorted out by India and Pakistan amongst themselves, then why a careless or callous remark in 2019 of Kashmir mediation by US President?

Implicitly maintained by the United States for a quarter of century there is no change warranted in 2019 with prevailing geopolitical realities. It would be fair to assume therefore that this cardinal principle of 'No United States Mediation on Kashmir' paved the way for a successful evolution of the US-India Strategic Partnership in the substance and weight that it has assumed by 2019

The United States should faithfully adhere to the above stated cardinal principle on Kashmir and the State Department would be well advised to keep US Presidents appropriately briefed in years to come. Reflected by me in my writings is that India and all Indians view United States utterances and those of any other Major Power, on Kashmir contrary to the bilateral context as "Politically Blasphemous," and against India's Strategic sensitivities.

Having written the above, news is just coming in that at the G-7 Meet ongoing in France, President Trump and Indian PM Narendra Modi met on the side-lines for a bilateral discussion. Significantly, what has emerged in what seems damage-control efforts by President Trump are two assertions on Kashmir. Firstly, that the United States views the Kashmir issue as a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan and that it needs to be resolved between the two nations. Secondly, and more significantly, that the Kashmir situation is firmly under the control of the Modi Government.

While it may be music for Indian ears as a vindication of its long maintained principled stand on Kashmir and dismally disappointing for Pakistan, that should not detract from pressing imperatives for the United States to respect India's strategic sensitivities in the months and years to come as a frustrated Pakistan on the Kashmir issue muddies the security environment both in Kashmir Valley and in Indian Heartland by intensification of terrorist strikes and suicide bombings.

Pakistan's resultant strategies of military adventurism based on terrorism strategies and nuclear brinkmanship on frustrations of not making desired headway on Kashmir has inherently built-in dangers of spiralling into an all-out major armed conflict between India and Pakistan.

The above threatening scenario in which Pakistan surely will not gain any military advantages but may suffer considerable losses will

invariably bring China's intervention in Pakistan's favour. Simply, because China's strategic investments in terms of the \$64 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Gwadar Naval Base at its terminal end on the North Arabian littoral would be endangered besides denting China's image as Pakistan's current countervailing Power against India.

In the likelihood of the above scenario and attendant side-scenarios emerging threatening Indo Pacific security and stability, the imperatives of United States respect for India's strategic sensitivities would forcefully emerge to be grappled by the United States. So also coming to the forefront would be the value and weight of the two decades-old US-India Strategic Partnership.

At stake in the above major armed conflict scenario would be the value and weight of the US-India Strategic Partnership with a major call on the United States. The two crucial questions that emerge from the above are whether the United States would again repeat 'mediation offers' to bail out Pakistan from its self-inflicted abyss along with China OR the United States would firmly stand by India against the combined onslaughts of the China-Pakistan Axis whose ramifications impact United States security also?

Meanwhile, with the United States and China engaged in an intensifying Cold War in Indo Pacific which encompasses China and the China-Pakistan Axis with manifold complex challenges both in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean Region, can the United States afford to indulge in transactional military dealings with Pakistan, with China lurking and casting its shadows on US-Pakistan dealings over Afghanistan or anywhere else? Can the United States afford to let Pakistan's blackmailing demands on United States over Afghanistan outweigh the long term gains that accrue from a vibrant and trustworthy US-India Strategic Partnership?

The answer lies in the US Establishment developing the long range perspectives on South Asia and Indo Pacific Region essentially required of a Superpower divorced from tactical political expediencies. It is the latter which has stymied United States in Afghanistan by giving primacy to Pakistan Army demands on Afghanistan than the end-game of ensuring a self-reliant and stable Afghanistan.

Concluding, it needs to be stressed that the predominant geopolitical narrative in 2019 has propelled India on an ascendant trajectory comprehensively encompassing the political, economic and military domains. The foregoing gets amplified with the Modi Government in power in New Delhi imbued with a nationalistic fervour and a commitment to uphold India sovereignty and National Honour with the 'Will to Use Power' of the Indian State against all threats---external and internal. The US policy establishment needs to factor-in this strategic reality.

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[Pakistan](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

[Kashmir](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

**Category:**

Papers [4]

**Countries:**

United States [5]

Pakistan [6]

India [7]

Afganistan [8]

**Topics:**

Strategic Affairs & Security [9]

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[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/200>

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