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WORLD

Indo-US relations under Biden: Continuity and change

November 8, 2020, 5:57 PM IST / SD Pradhan in Chanakya Code, World, TOI

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SD Pradhan

S D Pradhan has served as chairman of India's Joint Intelligence Committee. He has also been the country's deputy national security adviser. He was chairman of the Task Force ... MORE

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The Indo-US relations since the beginning of the 21st Century have moved from strength to strength regardless of which party was in power in Washington or in New Delhi. Despite some differences, both the countries have substantial common interests, which have brought them closer. While broadly the relations between the two countries continue to be close, the change in the President and his team may result in the changed approach on certain issues.

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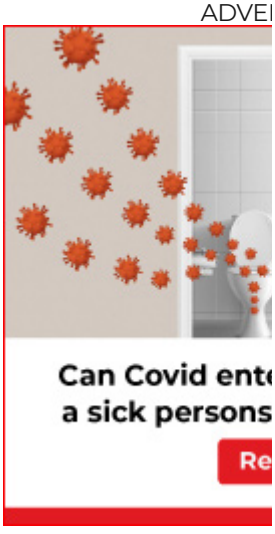

The foundation of the Indo-US strategic relations was laid by President Clinton when he visited India in March 2000 after the US had strongly reacted over India's nuclear tests. The policy of close relations was followed by President Bush, who signed the Indo-US civil nuclear deal paving the path for closer cooperation in the nuclear field. Under Obama, the relations further improved, particularly under Modi since 2014. Under Obama defence dialogue was started and he considered that India was the lynchpin of his 'Asia Rebalancing Strategy'. Under Trump the defence dialogue was upgraded to 2 plus 2 and he considered that India was pivotal for the rule-based Indo-Pacific.

Biden in an article had indicated that he would support close relations with India. "The U.S. and India will stand together against terrorism in all its forms and work together to promote a region of peace and stability where neither China nor any other country threatens its neighbours. This is significant as he indicated his support to the concept of rule-based Indo-Pacific and opposed the Chinese bullying tactics as also terrorism. Therefore, on these issues, US support would continue. Quad and its expansion would be supported as bipartisan support is available in the US Congress.

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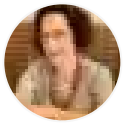
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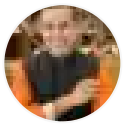
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While rhetoric against China and Pakistan would be absent, the pressure on them would be there on the violation of human rights. These are the worst abusers in the world. US would continue to press China on the suppression of Tibetans and Muslims in Xinjiang. Pakistan would be pressurised on the issue of treatment of people from Baluchistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Sindh.

On terrorism, Biden would follow the Trumps policy. Biden in his election promises had indicated that there can be no tolerance for terrorism-cross-border or otherwise. While Pakistan was not named, US could press Pakistan for stopping the support to terrorist outfits. While some experts point out that since

Pakistan had bestowed “Hilal-e-Pakistan” on Joe Biden in 2008, he is likely to be friendlier with the Pak govt, this is really not tenable. It may be remembered that he was the Vice President when US had killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

Joe Biden had supported the Indo-US civil nuclear deal as a Senator. The coordination in this field could grow further. The supply of hi-tech equipment which India desires along with the technology would not see any obstacle. There is a possibility of restoration of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) benefits to India. India had also retaliated

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with raising of tariffs on steel and aluminium. The resolution of the issue could help in improving trade between the two countries.

One of the issues bothering India is India-China standoff at the LAC. While strident statements against China would not be there under Biden, the reduction of tension between US and China is expected, which in turn may have beneficial impact on the standoff as China perceives this as a part of Indo-US strategy in Asia and Indo-Pacific. With improved relations between Washington and Beijing, this factor may not influence the rigidity of China and may honour the agreement to withdraw. However, China has domestic compulsions to remain adamant.

The US withdrawal from the from the six-nation nuclear deal and the imposition of oil sanctions on Iran negatively impacted India's energy security, as well as the country's strategic connectivity project of Chabahar port. Biden had described the Trump's policy on Iran as a 'dangerous failure' and had vowed to reverse it. This could help India to revive its oil trade and resume its activities connected with the port. However, this would also depend upon the attitude of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Israel.

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There would be changes in the US approach as well particularly on the human rights and Kashmir issues. Both Biden and Harris have suggested that their administration would do more than Trump to hold India to account over its actions in Kashmir. Harris has been more outspoken on the issue of Kashmir. “We have to remind Kashmiris that they are not alone in the world,” she said in October 2019. Similar statements she had made several times. Whether this team would apply more pressure than Obama or not would be known after sometime. India, therefore, needs to keep itself prepared for such pressures from US.

On the whole, there would be continuation of the same US policy towards India, except on Kashmir. The shrill and strident rhetoric would not be there for China and Pakistan but support to India on its core interests would be available. The Indo-US trade issues are likely to be resolved for mutual benefit. While the new US administration would focus on Kashmir, it is unlikely to make any dent in the developing closer relations. Besides, the Indian PM has a remarkable capability to establish rapport with key foreign personalities to protect national interests and it is hoped that with Biden also he would do so and would be able to place the Indian point of view clearly and convincingly before him.

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(1) Unlike Donald Trump, the American Democrats are more inclined to interference in other country's internal affairs, even when there is no hostility in relations ... !! ... They ... READ MORE

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