

Strategic and Political Trends in India and the European Union: Confronting Common Challenges

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India and the European Union have a considerable stake in the future security and the economic and diplomatic configuration of the international space. With rapid changes ensuing in the international level on multiple fronts, India and the European Union have an interest in directing the way in which emerging trends are shaped. They are both considered major players in global politics as they have significant clout in the diplomatic high-table of international decision-making and agenda setting. They continue to face daunting internal challenges which also impact their decisions at the international level. Migration, ISIS, and Brexit are some of the current challenges which the European Union grapples with, while India is faced with the Naxal movement and secessionist tendencies, among other regional and international issues. In the context of major structural level shifts occurring at the international level, regional level challenges and domestic upheavals, this essay attempts to explore the position of India and the European Union amidst these major strategic mega-trends emerging at the structural level, the major emerging political trends in both, and the common challenges they are facing.

The European Union and India are two pertinent actors in international relations, with a stake in the emergent systemic order. The political transition in the USA, the exit of Britain from the European Union, the return of the dominance of a single party at the centre and federal levels in India, the chasms between China and the USA, and the refugee crisis in Europe are but some of the significant events unfurling at the systemic, regional, and unit levels, with the potential to significantly alter the direction of the world order as well as impact various multilateral and bilateral relations and institutions. This essay explores the common challenges faced by India and the European

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Union in the backdrop of the mega-strategic trends emerging at the systemic level and the internal political trends visible in these two international actors. It is argued that, despite being dissimilar political and economic entities, India and the European Union are both impacted in very similar ways by the emerging strategic trends at the systemic level. In addition to the systemic level, mega trends, the emergent political trends in the European Union and India also show remarkable congruence. It is also argued that the challenges which India and the European Union face, both at the systemic and unit levels, have commonalities rendering cooperation between the two both possible and necessary not only for accommodating and managing these problems but also for shoring up and cementing ties between them.

Mega-Strategic Trends at the Systemic Level

There are several mega-strategic trends manifesting on today's international scene. These trends, in which both state and non-state actors are involved, will significantly alter international dynamics in the coming years. The most significant of these meta-strategic or mega-strategic trends are the relative decline of America, the Euro zone economic crisis, and expanding Chinese global influence. Additionally, there is much talk about an emerging 'Cold Confrontation' between the USA and China in the Asia-Pacific region, and then on to other theatres in the world. Recently, there have also been many political upheavals, regime changes — believed to be externally induced — and nineteenth and twentieth century style annexations raging in East-Europe. These have been taken to imply the beginning of a regional Cold War in Europe. There is also another trend wherein the persistent global recession since 2008 has thrown pertinent questions for 'Emerging Economies', including India.

The debate on the great American decline remains open-ended (Nye, 2004). It is problematic to sound the death knell on a power like the USA which has been the foremost international actor predominant in every avenue, including, soft power, since 1945. On any given indicator, whether military, science and technology, or the economy, the USA remains relatively ahead of any other state actor or international organization, lending it the image of a global hegemon. However, of late, the decline of the US is being shored up (Brooks & Wohlforth 2007). This decline, albeit gradual, but with the potential of spiralling out of control, is attributed to the severe domestic political polarization in the USA which was evident in the bitter political fight on debt ceiling which led to major diplomatic embarrassment with the government

shutting down, and then cancelling, President Obama's trip to Asia. The reduced defence budget of the USA was taken to be yet another indicator of the relative but certain decline in the great power status of the USA. The muddled and messy manner of US leadership and its haphazard management of the Arab Spring events were perceived as further evidence of declining US prowess on the world stage. Moreover, the mishandling of the Syrian situation, and its less than credible responses to Russia's highhandedness in Crimea and the Chinese Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), were taken to be yet other markers of the dwindling leadership role of the USA. These issues, along with some other recent misadventures of the US government, have led to growing distrust in its allies and strategic partners, which can be perceived as yet another sign of it incrementally losing the mantle of being a global hegemon. The election of Donald Trump, a political novice, as President in 2016 has added another element of uncertainty to the role and decisions which the USA would take in the future.

Yet another mega-trend affecting all nations of the world was the Euro zone Crisis (Lapavitsas, 2010). It affected the European Union in a way that has been extremely regressive for the regional grouping (Hall, 2012). For one, the euro zone crisis indefinitely postponed the goal of European integration, which was a development that was detrimental to regional groupings which were otherwise being seen as promising alternatives in the political arrangement of the world in the near future. In addition, it made common defence and security policy more difficult for the European Union, which was yet another blow to a long term project of several of the units of the regional grouping. In its wake, the euro zone crisis also created suspicion among the worse-affected countries about the motivations of the relatively bigger countries, thereby tainting the link between the units of the grouping in a severe way. It also, and most significantly, adversely affected global commerce (Jackson, 2009).

Although the US financial meltdown and the Euro zone crisis deeply affected the economies of Europe, the entire world economy was also adversely affected. The so-called emerging economies — China, Brazil, India, Turkey, South Africa — all witnessed reduced growth rates. Talk of the redistribution of global decision making power, the reform of voting rights in the IMF, etc., became things of the past. So was the enthusiasm over UN reform. However, the role of the G-20 and the Western need of emerging markets for economic revival became obvious during this crisis.

The other major structural level change that is evident is the rise of China as a formidable player in international politics. This has rattled several of the old guards, leading China to emphasise its 'peaceful rise' thesis (Buzan, 2010;

Kristof, 1993). The rise of new powers has to be followed by certain adjustments and compromises in the hierarchy of nations or else there is a great probability of heightened conflict between the rising or revisionist power/s and the existing great power/s or the status-quoist powers (Eliss & Koca 2010; Foot 2006; Geller, 1992; Hoge, 2004). China's rise is being touted as a tangible phenomenon as China has emerged as the largest manufacturer in the world, the largest exporter, and the largest consumer of luxury goods in the world, among other credits in its kitty. China's indispensability in the world is also due to its role as the foremost trade partner of the USA and the European Union.

A rising China and a declining USA are jostling for the same space in the realm of international politics (Layne, 2008, 2009; Legro, 2007; Zakaria, 2009; Zhiquan, 2001). It has been stated that a 'cold conflict' is brewing between these two actors (Gertz, 2004). The features of this 'cold conflict' are different from those of the conflict between Soviet Union and the USA during the Cold War (Berstein and Munro, 1998). The 'cold conflict' is playing out in the Asian littoral, and is taking the form of the Chinese assertion of its claims on territory in the South and East China seas, the development of area denial, and anti-access capabilities by the Chinese. US responses to these signs of Chinese assertion of its sovereignty have been evident in the consequent flexing of muscles beyond its recognized territorial, aerial and naval space. The growing animosity between the USA and China has been evident in current global politics, with these two actors standing at an impasse on many issues. They have also, on several occasions, been perilously close to conflict in the South China Sea, making their acrimony a contentious issue and extremely worrisome for both India and the European Union, and for the world at large.

Another trend which is significant for the world at large is the possibility of a regional war in Europe. In the recent past, there have been political upheavals in South and East Europe which includes the Russian annexation of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Crimea (Kakachia, 2010). Moreover, there is a rising competition between several countries for access to the Arctic. These developments provide examples of the return of the Cold War, with Russia on one side and the West (led by the US) on the other. Western responses to Russian heavy-handedness have included the suspension of Russia from the G-8, the refusal to attend meetings in Russia, sanctions against individuals of Russia, and keeping Russia out of NATO meetings. The growing uneasiness in US-Russia relations is palpable, and bodes ill for the world at large (Mankoff, 2009). The unwillingness to compromise on issues which both the USA and Russia consider sacrosanct has prevented them from devising solutions to

the many-standoffs which have now come to strain their bilateral relations. An American legislator used the term Cold War 2 to label and identify the nature of present US-Russian relations in the light of these developments in the Russian neighbourhood (Levgold, 2014).

Political Trends in India and the European Union

India and the European Union are both political entities which continue to evolve. Certain trends are visible in the political sphere of both actors. One of the major incidents which occurred with regard to the European Union was the exit vote of Britain from the regional grouping.

The exit of Britain from the European Union is an event, admittedly still not a trend, which will have ramifications for Europe and the rest of the world. In a referendum held on 23 June 2016, the UK decided to leave the European Union. 51.9 percent voted to leave the European Union while 48.1 percent chose to remain with it. 71.8 percent of the voting population voted in the referendum, which amounted to more than 30 million people. The exit of Britain brings new challenges for the European Union, India, and for the world. The disintegration of the European Union could lead to a breakdown of cooperation among the countries of Europe which does not bode well for solving issues related to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, migration, as well as implementing significant international agreements with regard to Climate Change.

The exit of Great Britain from the European Union also needs to be considered with regard to its impact on the regional grouping and the rest of the world. It adds a new and uncharted dimension to the regional grouping. Although the exact impact of the exit of Britain would bring to the European Union is still unknown, it may trigger centrifugal forces, and lead to its imminent disintegration; it may even lead to an ever stronger integration as a purely continental grouping. A possible unravelling of the European Union could have a ripple impact on the rest of the regional groupings which would adversely impact trade, security, and cultural bonds which are being sought to be advanced by India by way of regional groupings and regional level integration in South Asia and South East Asia. It could also detrimentally impact regional groupings like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for the Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and Bangladesh, and the China-India Myanmar Economic Grouping, consequently denting its much-touted Act East Policy.

Secessionist tendencies continue to persist in India's north-east region as well as in Jammu and Kashmir. Other centrifugal forces also exist in the form of the persisting Naxal presence in various states in India. The Indian State has met both challenges with resounding force but which has not led to fruitful solutions to either problem. The Indian State, unlike the European Union, does not allow for a Brexit style option for its States or its people who may want out of the Indian Union. Both the European Union and India to some extent, thus, continue to face centrifugal forces which add a perplexing tenuousness to their political and social fabric.

The similar political situations which are characteristic of India and the European Union have seen certain upheavals in the recent past, especially those dealing with the federal structure of both entities. India is unitary in spirit and federal in structure. However, the unitary spirit of India is under constant challenge by separatist forces, interferences from countries across the border, and increasingly by coalition politics due to the rise of regional parties (Khan, 2003). Another visible trend that is manifest on the Indian political canvas is that of the federalization of Indian foreign policy which raises questions about centre-state relations in the country (Sridharan, 2003; Pattanaik, 2014). The increasing activism of constituent units of India in the foreign policy realm — evident in the growing culture of Chief Ministers actively lobbying to attract foreign investors into their respective states — is leading to the rise of sub-national diplomacy in India, which can lead to tectonic shifts in the way in which centre-state relations are arranged (Bagchi, 2003).

The European Union, on the other hand, seems to be a project for making Europe into a large federation. However, the integration of Europe and a federal structure for the Continent is facing challenges, since the efforts towards strengthening Brussels — the European Parliament, Council, and the Commission — have run into trouble due to the ongoing Euro zone crisis. The Euro zone crisis has enabled the Euro-sceptics and the Federalists to gain influence in key member states, and have been instrumental in enabling them to forward their agenda of preventing a possible emergence of the continent-wide federation in Europe. Discord between European Union's member states has been detrimental to the continent-wide federation as is evident by the clash between the expectations of the PIGS countries and the reluctance of Germany to help beyond a point in arresting the reversing of the Euro zone crisis.

Both the European Union and India held elections in May 2014. The Centre Right political parties won the elections in the European Union, and the Centre Right Bharatiya Janata Party formed the coalition government in India. Euro sceptics now have more representation in the European Parliament and

they will certainly obstruct the European Union project of a federation. The exit of Great Britain, given the fact that it is an unprecedented move, will further add to the complications in the mechanics and the future of the European Union with regard to social, economic, and foreign policies. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, seems intent on strengthening the Centre; but he is also interested in federalizing foreign policy by promoting the active participation of state governments with regard to external policies, especially with regard to those constituent units which share borders with foreign countries. Such intentions could provide a new dimension to India's foreign policies which could lead to the development of newer political trends in the country.

Common Challenges for India and the European Union

Although India and the European Union occupy areas in two different continents, due to the forces of globalisation, there are convergences and similarities in the challenges which both face, rendering it possible for them to cooperate closely in overcoming these challenges and finding ways to convert them into opportunities.

Both the European Union and India are each facing challenges from a particular country in their specific neighbourhood. In this context, the European Union is faced with a 'Russia challenge' — a country which, in the recent past, has begun flexing its military muscle with flagrant disregard for international norms. India is confronted with a 'China challenge', whose nature of resurgence and rise has become a source of deep perplexity for the Indian government. Russian assertiveness in the former Soviet Union territory has become a concern for the European Union, given its proximity to this region, and Russia's uncompromising stand on its self-declared 'strategic space' (Allison, 2008). Russia's complete lack of regard for the sovereignty of those nations which were a part of the former Soviet Union is disconcerting for the international community at large as its actions could lead to major violence between nations in the near future if it continues its annexation policy in its Near Abroad. China's assertiveness in its neighbouring region has been a cause of concern for India, given the fact that India's shares a long tenuous border with China, and is in competition with China over energy resource extraction in several regions in the world, especially in South East Asia (Singh, 2008; Selth, 1996). These competitions for energy and a contested border requires careful diplomatic management from India and China which otherwise could easily slide into chaos, and then on to open conflict if these two nations

continue to remain wary of each other. This seems to be the case in the contemporary context where Chinese assertiveness in its neighbourhood is viewed with extreme apprehension by India. This may segue to both countries using hard power, with disastrous consequences rather than opting for amicable solutions to the issues that continue to plague their relations (Emmott, 2008).

While the European Union and India are having to grapple with Russia and China respectively, there are limits to their cooperation in this regard as the relations of Russia with India and those between China and the European Union remain extremely cordial, given the fact that Russia continues to be the main source of Indian arms acquisition, and China remains a significant economic partner of the European Union. However, given the closeness of Russia and India on the one hand, and the buoyant nature of economic ties between China and the European Union on the other, it could be useful to exchange notes on these issues. This may enable India and the European Union to manage China and Russia respectively.

The European Union and India are interested in maintaining buoyant ties with the USA. The relative and perceivable decline of the USA is challenging for nations to manage their relations with the possibly waning superpower while, at the same time, having to deal with other powers which are on the rise. Managing the USA is, thus, a common challenge which the European Union and India are facing; each has been grappling with specific US related issues which are becoming detrimental for their relations with the superpower.

In the recent past, trans-Atlantic ties appear to be in trouble due to several reasons; chief among these is the Snowden affair (Dover, 2014). The European Union has been expressing concern about the ability of the US National Security Agency to spy on European citizens. Concerns about American snooping on the Europeans have also become an election issue for countries like Germany. These concerns about snooping — which were brought into focus after the Snowden affair — is doing a lot of damage to the US-European relationship due to concerns about future intelligence sharing and possible legislation which will cover American internet companies. This will no doubt undermine the current cooperative nature about intelligence sharing and the way the internet works. Angela Merkel has gone on record saying that she wants data protection legislation in Germany. Such data protection legislation in Europe will balkanize the internet. It will create walls around the European Union, making it difficult for traffic to pass across servers, thus undermining the US business models. This is a big concern for companies like Google, Facebook, among others, which have benefitted from the ability to use the World Wide Web.

The election of Donald Trump as President of the USA adds an element of uncertainty to US-European Union relations. Trump's policies with regard to Climate Change, migration, ISIS, nuclear weapons, and militarization (among others), would lead to definite ramifications in the rest of the world, especially for countries in Europe, which have been closely aligned with the USA with regard to these issues. Changes in US policies after Trump's election became apparent with the withdrawal of the USA from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) — the trade agreement between Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the USA (until 23 January 2017), and Vietnam. Trump argued that the agreement would undermine the US economy and independence which made the withdrawal necessary. The withdrawal of the US from the TPP has also been seen as indicating the withdrawal of the USA from its companion agreement — the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which is a proposed trade agreement between the European Union and the USA, with the aim of promoting trade and multilateral economic growth. Thus, Trump's election has already led to a major setback for trade between the USA and the European Union.

Donald Trump's overall attitude towards the European Union is also a cause for concern for the leaders of the regional grouping. A few days before his inauguration as the US president, Trump belittled NATO as "obsolete," rebuked Germany for its openness to asylum seekers, and called the European Union a "vehicle for Germany." Such comments from President Trump have marked a break from the usual bonhomie which has characterised US-European Union relations, as they have been important partners, bound by alliances, institutions, liberal democratic values, and share close trade and investment ties. Trump's volte-face with regard to the European Union may lead to the closing of ranks by its member countries, or may further undermine the already tenuous European project by rousing anger against the technocrats and elites of the European Union who are blamed by the citizens for their problems linked to the global financial crisis, as well as income inequality which are perceived to be aggravated by the European Union's open border policy in the face of the ongoing refugee crisis. Many of Europe's populist leaders, including the heads of France's National Front, Italy's Five Star Movement, and the Northern League, have welcomed Trump as President, as has the British Conservative Party — the only centrist party in the European Union to have done so. If President Trump continues to disparage the European Union, it will signal the end of US support to an institution which the US helped bring about to promote

liberal values in the post-World War II era.

Other issues plaguing trans-Atlantic relations include the US's Afghan exit-plan and European 'Afghanistan fatigue', the pressure by the US on anti-Russian sanctions, and the US plan to pivot to Asia which is being perceived as a comedown for the importance of the European Union in the strategic scheme of things.

India-US economic and military relations have been on an upswing despite the change in regime in the USA. Some of major issues which are complicating the Indo-US relationship include, and are not limited to, differences over Afghanistan, trade issues related to super and special 301, and internal developments in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The Devyani Khobragade episode marked a low in Indo-US relations. India's Deputy Consul in New York City, Khobragade was arrested on 12 December 2013, on charges of visa fraud and making false statements regarding the employment of her domestic worker. The way in which Khobragade was treated by the New York police, hurt Indian national pride, forcing New Delhi to take various retaliatory measures against US diplomats posted in India. Eventually, the US accepted Khobragade's right to immunity, but requested it be waived because of the existing case against her. New Delhi refused the request which led to her forced departure from New York. The issues of American disregard for India's sovereignty, US disrespect for the Indian judicial system, the unwillingness of the US to share information about the impending arrest of Khobragade, raised questions of mutual distrust, which adversely affected diplomatic interactions. This episode created major fissures in Indo-US relations, and stirred resentments which had possibly been lying dormant since the end of the Cold War, thereby boding ill for the future of the two nations which have been constantly trying to build more robust and meaningful partnerships in areas as diverse as security, science and technology, trade, and even education.

The election of Donald Trump has also led to uncertainty with regard to India-US relations, which was manifest in the proposed changes to the H1B Visa rules which will make it more expensive and difficult for Indians to attain a US work Visa. The other major concern for Indians is the perceived rise of racism in the USA. There has been a disconcerting increase in the attacks on members of the Indian-American community on account of their ethnicity in the USA.

The turbulence which has marred Indo-US and European Union-US relations may be due to the power transition that is underway in the structural level of international relations. The USA as a power facing challenges from

several sources; understandably it has hangovers, suspicions, and desperations which are perhaps being manifest in its role in the above-mentioned issues which have affected its relations with the European Union and India. In this scenario, the question arises: is it possible for India and the European Union to aid each other in managing their relations with the USA?

Besides the need to manage their relations with the USA, other threats also persist which plague India and the European Union. These include religious extremism, violence, and terrorism, which are on the rise. Chiefly worrying are the following facts: the Taliban has proved its resilience in Afghanistan and Pakistan; the presence of the Al-Qaeda in Arabia and Africa has expanded; and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has seen growth. Both the European Union and India are energy dependent on external countries, including those in the Arab world. This makes these developments extremely worrisome for them. India and the European Union are democratic and open societies, and are multicultural with large Muslim minorities, which adds greater complexity to the ways in which the rise in religious extremism can hamper the interests of both entities. Both cooperated in Afghanistan, and will undoubtedly face unforeseen challenges in the near future.

Cooperation between the EU and India: Glimmers of Hope?

The growth of convergences between India and the EU was visible in the 14th India-EU Summit held on the 6 October 2017. The joint statement clearly mentioned that states should take measures to prevent their territory from being used for terrorist activities. It declared Hafeez Sayeed, Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, Dawood Ibrahim, the LeT, the JeM, and the Hizbul Mujahideen as terror entities, which can be understood as a convergence of their views on terrorism in South Asia. In addition, the 10th India-EU Counter Terrorism Dialogue in August 2017 bolstered connections between the security agencies of India and the security agencies of Europe, including Europol.

Moreover, in the Joint Statement of 2017, India and the EU articulated the need for connectivity to follow international norms and the rule of law as well as transparency and openness. All these underlined the similarity of the EU and Indian stance on China's "One Belt and One Road" initiative. The mention of the significance of observing the rules set by the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Seas (UNCLOS) of 1982 by the EU and India underscored their common reservation with regard to Chinese highhandedness in the South China Sea.

India and EU are also reasonably placed to cooperate on issues relating to nuclear non-proliferation, especially with India entering many of the multilateral bodies such as the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Australia group. However, the objection of Austria and Ireland (both members of the EU) to India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group continues to be a thorn in the overall ties of the two entities.

With regard to the Middle East, India and the EU both seek similar goals. For instance, both entities are keen on expanding ties with Iran. The EU seeks to access Iran's economy after the lifting of many of the previous sanctions; India perceives Iran as a significant link to regions such as Central Asia and beyond. Both countries approve the continuation of the US-Iran nuclear deal. India's relations with Israel have also moved in a direction which is more compatible with that of the European Union as was evident in the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Israel in 2017.

A significant issue which has remained elusive in EU-India ties has been the proposed Free Trade Agreement treaty or the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA). In March 2018, Commerce and Industry Minister, Suresh Prabhu, mentioned that negotiations on the BTIA would resume soon. The negotiations had begun in 2007 and, after 16 rounds of talks, stalled due to differences among the EU and India on major issues. Some of the key demands of the EU include the reduction of tax on wines, spirits, and dairy products, and strong intellectual property rights. On the other hand, India wishes to be granted data secure nation status by the EU as it would impact those IT companies of India who seek market access. Overcoming these hurdles would ensure greater cooperation in other matters as well since not only would it provide a common platform for economic and commercial ties but would also signify the ability of the two entities to iron out their differences and suggest ways suitable to both. This could help set a precedent for future endeavours requiring collaboration between India and the EU.

Conclusions

In the current times and the near future, India's foreign policy focus will be on strengthening the economy; the same will also be the focus of the European Union. This convergence in goals which are overtly economic in nature provides fertile ground for both to promote mutual help and cooperation. In the defence sector, the European Union is unlikely to do more despite the Ukraine phenomenon, and will let the USA take the lead on this issue. However, India faces serious threats to its stability and development from two of its neighbours,

and is likely to make its conventional and unconventional forces more robust. This will no doubt signal a divergence from the goals and the nature of the defence policy that the European Union will pursue, making it difficult for the EU and India to find common ground to pursue collaboration and cooperation. However, despite the differences in their attitudes in the defence sector, the range of common challenges which both face (as mentioned above), and the similarities in their goals of ensuring economic growth, provide enough ground for both entities to pursue coordination, greater cooperation, and collaboration. These will enable them to better fulfil their agenda, and are intrinsic to cementing robust and enduring ties between the two actors.

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