

CONSTRUCTIVIST DIMENSIONS OF CONTEMPORARY US-INDIAN RELATIONS

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Abstract: *In the contemporary global landscape, India has assumed a prominent and influential role within the framework of international relations. Notably, the United States has accorded substantial priority to India within the context of South Asian geopolitics. The bilateral relations between the United States and India are characterized by a comprehensive and multifaceted engagement across various dimensions.*

The primary objective of this scholarly article is to scrutinize the contemporary dynamics of US-Indian relations through the lens of constructivist theory. The article argues that India is becoming the Major Defense Partner of the United States, Washington is using a “triangular diplomacy” and the US-China-India circle is being created, the values of democracy are the basis of US-Indian relations, India is pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy, etc.

In sum, this scholarly inquiry illuminates the evolving contours of US-Indian relations, emphasizing their strategic importance in contemporary international relations.

Keywords: *South Asia, India, The USA, China, constructivism, democracy, multi-vector diplomacy.*

Introduction

According to the theory of constructivism, international relations depend more on ideological, cultural and social factors than on material ones. Its rules and regulations are not clear, complete, eternal and immutable. They exist temporarily in a certain period and space and are not permanent. Rules in international relations are temporary and flexible¹.

In modern international relations, there is a discernible shift in the approach of the United States towards South Asia, specifically the Republic of India, from a constructivist perspective. This transition is evident in the elevation of India's status to that of a Major Defense Partner, marking a departure from their historically neutral relationship. India has now emerged as the United States' primary ally in the South Asian region. According to A. Wendt, anarchy reigns in international relations, however, even in this, countries can unite into various unions². The introduction of the concept of the Indo-Pacific region in Western

¹ Dunne T., Kurki M., Smith S. International Relations Theories. Oxford University Press. 2013. – 223-236p.

² Wendt A. Social theory of international politics. Cambridge University Press. 1999. – 257-299p.

political discourse since 2017 carries significant constructivist implications³. This new geopolitical construct not only reflects the deliberate introduction of regions in a constructivist manner but also underscores the United States' diplomatic overture to India by incorporating its name into the newly defined region. Consequently, this transformation has diminished the strategic importance of the traditional South Asian region for the United States in contemporary times.

Indian vector of US foreign policy

According to constructivism, state sovereignty and its borders are not natural, but artificial concepts established on the basis of certain agreements⁴. Constructions in international relations are constantly changing, that is, they are always in the process of formation⁵. South Asia is not among the priority regions in the Biden-Harris National Security Strategy⁶. The United States has a constructivist approach to the South Asia region. India, which is geographically located in South Asia, is considered within the newly created Indo-Pacific region. For the US establishment, the perception of India as an Indo-Pacific country has led to the decline in the importance of South Asia.

Constructivism emphasizes the importance of concepts such as beliefs, identity and perceptions⁷. They form the basis of world political processes. Constructivist aspect, such as shared beliefs, underlies US-Indian relations. Concepts like democracy, liberalism, human rights and equality are celebrated in both countries. Shared perceptions directly affect decision-making elites and public perception. This ultimately leads to positive relationships developing. It should be noted here that India has a higher democracy index than Pakistan, which has experienced several military revolutions in its history. That is why Americans see a more reliable partner in India, which promotes democratic ideals.

In the modern era, the following tasks have been defined by the USA in relation to India:

³ U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific. Washington: White House.

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>

⁴ Dunne T., Kurki M., Smith S. International Relations Theories. Oxford University Press. 2013. – 192p.

⁵ Kauppi M., Viotti P. International relations theory. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. 2020. – 145p.

⁶ Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy. Washington: White House. October 12, 2022. – 37p.

⁷ Theys S. Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory. UK: Newcastle University. 2018.-1-4p.

To enhance India's security capabilities and make it a Major Defense Partner of the US. Enabling its armed forces to move in tandem with the United States and its allies;

- To provide India with the most advanced technologies as a Major Defense Partner. Increase its leadership in the region and involvement in processes beyond the Indian Ocean;
- To support India's aspirations to become a powerful country in the world;
- Implementation of joint procedures of the US and India in the Indian Ocean;
- Expansion of cooperation in the fields of information, maritime security and intelligence;
- Increase India's cooperation with South Asian countries;
- Developing US relations with countries such as the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh⁸.

In addition, India is seen by the U.S. establishment as an potential ally in the Indo-Pacific region to deter the People's Republic of China, which has become the main foreign policy competitor of the USA. Since 1973, a huge US military base has been located on the island of Diego Garcia in the Chagos archipelago, which de facto belongs to Great Britain in the Indian Ocean⁹. Through an island in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the United States has great influence over the entire region. In addition, since 1995, the influence of the US Fifth Fleet based in Manama (Bahrain) is high in the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and South Asia¹⁰. The military bases in Diego Garcia and Manama have become the main tools of the US foreign policy in South Asia.

However, since the US is geographically and culturally far away from this area, it cannot hold full control here. It is becoming clear that India will become the main hegemon in the Indian Ocean. The USA, Great Britain, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, China and other countries lag behind him in this regard. In turn, the USA agreed to this and opened the way for an Indian partner. In this regard,

⁸ U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific. Washington: White House.

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf>

⁹ Carnes Lord, Andrew Erickson. Rebalancing U.S. forces: Basing and forward presence in the Asia-Pacific. Annapolis: Naval Institute press. 2014. – 140-141p.

¹⁰ Robert J. Schneller Jr. Anchor of Resolve: A History of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/Fifth Fleet. Washington: Naval Historical Center. 2007. – 38- 41p.

Washington takes into account the fact that India, which opposes China's rise in the region, is the most potential partner country.

Today, the US-China competition is intensifying in this region. The issues of holding positions and strengthening them are being raised¹¹. In such competition, the United States needs a reliable ally. A strong economy, a developed democratic system, a huge territory, a convenient geographical location (on the Asian continent and the Indian Ocean), access to world ports, huge human resources, powerful armed forces (ranked 4th in the world)¹², a numerically large army (about 1.5 million soldiers) and with 150 nuclear warheads with a range of more than 5,000 km, India is seen as a potential ally. The US recognizes India as a "Major Defense Partner". It should be noted that this term is used by the US only for India¹³. In the 1970s, the United States, united with China, managed to break up the communist bloc. As a result of the "diplomatic triangle" that emerged in its own way, the US-China tandem triumphed over the USSR. Today, plans to use that "triangular diplomacy" against China are being considered by the USA¹⁴. In this case, the "US-India: China" format seems more realistic than the "US-Russia: China" format.

Warm relations between China and Pakistan, China's regular visits to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, and long-standing enmity are raising India's concerns. India rejects China's "Belt and Road Initiative". On its part, China also opposes India's entry into the UN Security Council as a permanent member. In 2020, a conflict arose on the border between them¹⁵. As a result, this paved the way for further improvement in US-India relations. Relations reached their peak under President D. Trump. The US President's state visit to India during the pandemic in 2020 is an example of this¹⁶. We can see some constructivist aspects in the development of US-India relations during the time of the US president, who blames China for all problems in his political views. Because, precisely, constructivism recognizes that the perception of the political elite and the head of

¹¹ Blinken A. A Foreign Policy for the American People. Washington, D.C. March 3, 2021.

<https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/>

¹² https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=india

¹³ Congressional research service. India-U.S. relations. Washington. July 19, 2021. – 9-13pp.

¹⁴ Vu Le Thai Hoang and Huy Nguyen. The Modern China-Russia-US Triangle. The Diplomat. June 04, 2021.

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/the-modern-china-russia-us-triangle/>

¹⁵ Shivshankar Menon. Some Consequences of the India-China Crisis of 2020. Aspen Institute: Domestic & International (Dis)Order: A Strategic Response. – 77p. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Chapter-11_Menon_Some-Consequences-of-the-India-China-Crisis-of-2020.pdf

¹⁶ U.S.-India Relations. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-india-relations>

state is important in the state's foreign policy and international relations¹⁷. Experts say that relations will take a positive turn during J. Biden's time and India will remain the main partner of the USA in the region. In the near future, it looks promising that India will join the G7 group with the help of the USA¹⁸.

India's multi-vector diplomacy

Today, India's actions in the world community and its relations with the leading countries of the world are taking a constructivist tone. India by conducting multi-pronged diplomacy does not face a choice between the US, China or Russia that many countries are facing. India is not trying to follow the leading countries, but rather it is trying to lead others. On the one hand, it is a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) platform with the US, Australia and Japan. The activity of this "rhombus" is aimed at ensuring security in the Indo-Pacific region and restraining China. On the other hand, India is also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization together with China, Russia as well as Central Asian countries and closely cooperates with them in the field of security within the framework of this organization. At the same time, it is one of the main member states of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South African Republic) platform.

It also cooperates with Iran, which is under Western sanctions. On the one hand, India is interested in Iran's gas and oil products (10-12% of Iran's energy exports go to India). On the other hand, Iran is India's gateway to the center of Central Asia and Eurasia. It is for this purpose that the Chabahar port is being built by India today. To date, India has invested 500 million US dollars in the development of this port¹⁹. Russia is also one of India's close partners. The fact that India purchased the S-400 air defense system from this country had a somewhat negative effect on US-India relations²⁰.

Diversity in foreign policy, ie warm relations with USA, Russia and China as well as Iran, indicates that India's foreign policy has acquired a constructivist

¹⁷ Kauppi M., Viotti P. International relations theory. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. 2020. – 159p.

¹⁸ Dwivedi Sh., Ahanger G. India in The United States South Asia Policy. Shodhasamhita, Vol. No IX. 2022. – 63-66pp.

¹⁹ Dolven B., Vaughn B. Indo-Pacific Strategies of U.S. Allies and Partners: Issues for Congress. Washington. January 30, 2020. – 13-14pp.

²⁰ Chopra T., Singleton Sh. Russia supplying S-400 air defense systems to India on schedule - defense official. Reuters. August 14, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/russia-supplying-s-400-air-defence-systems-india-schedule-defence-official-2023-08-14/>

tone. That is, state interests are variable and flexible²¹. It is not interested in the interaction of the above countries. India seeks cordial relations with all of them. In this case, the diversity of the foreign policy approach and the fact that it is beyond the stereotypes of belonging to certain parties in international relations, the fact that the decision-making elite constructively approaches issues and communicates equally with all parties means that India's actions in the international arena are more consistent with the theory of constructivism.

Still, India is likely to lean towards the US in its geopolitical choices today. If this is fully implemented, a military alliance of the two largest democracies will be created. According to former US Secretary of State R. Tillerson, “the two largest democracies should have large armed forces”²². Similar democratic principles deepen their cooperation. In other words, ideology and beliefs serve as the basis of communication.

Constructivist aspects in US-India relations

Constructivists often cite that “5 North Korean nuclear weapons are more dangerous to the United States than the United Kingdom's 500 nuclear weapons”. It takes into account that Great Britain is a “friend” of the United States, while North Korea is not²³. If we look at the situation from the point of view of realism, each country is a rival of the other²⁴. From a security point of view, the UK's nuclear weapons are a threat to any country. The existence of such a large number of nuclear weapons is a real danger. But the Americans and their leadership do not think so. They see their friends and allies in Great Britain. That is, the state establishment and the people's perceptions are positive towards the British.

The same formula applies to other US allies. That is, the country is not excited by the nuclear arsenal of France and Israel. In turn, there is a threat to the United States from the nuclear weapons of countries such as the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and Pakistan. At one time, India was

²¹ Wendt A. Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics. MIT: International Organization, Vol. 46, No. 2. 1992. – 391-392p.

²² Panda A. White House: Trump and Modi Resolve That US and India Should ‘Have the World’s Greatest Militaries’. The Diplomat. November 14, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/white-house-trump-and-modi-resolve-that-us-and-india-should-have-the-worlds-greatest-militaries/>

²³ Wendt, Alexandr. Constructing international politics. MIT: International security, Vol.20, №1. 1995. – 73p.

²⁴ Jørgensen Knud Erik. International Relations Theory: A New Introduction. United Kingdom: Macmillan. 2018. – 88p.

also concerned, but as the two countries became close allies, US concerns about India's nuclear program subsided. And today, when it talks about denuclearizing South Asia, the US mostly refers to Pakistan²⁵.

Why is this so? Constructivism asserts that international relations and foreign policy depend on the identity of the state, as well as on the perception of political institutions, elites, and the people. Nuclear weapons of countries considered “friends” are not considered as a threat. One nuclear weapon of countries considered as “enemy” or a nuclear program that is still being developed (for example, Iran) also causes great panic. The image of “friend” and “enemy” is an imaginary formation that depends on the time, place and situation. For example, the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran are not perceived as a threat by Russia or China.

That's why the US acknowledges only India's nuclear program, which is not a member of nuclear club states (USA, Russia, China, France and Great Britain). At the same time, it does not recognize Pakistan's nuclear program. The main reason for this is shared beliefs and values. India is a democratic country just like the US when Pakistan is not. Therefore, the US trusts India more than Pakistan. The US establishment thinks that Pakistan's nuclear program can lead to unpredictable consequences. The development of such a scenario in South Asia indicates a constructivist US foreign policy in the region.

The US is taking a constructivist approach to the policy of deterring China. In this regard, the India-Russia alliance is also given a positive assessment. Because strengthening India-Russia ties will reduce Russia's dependence on Beijing. As a result, there will be a estrangement between the two competitors of the United States, such as Russia and China. In turn, this idea is acceptable to New Delhi²⁶. It is in foreign political interests to weaken the Sino-Russian tandem by bringing closer relations with Russia.

In addition, the United States is pursuing not only a neorealist approach but also a neoliberal policy in its relations with India. That is, in addition to the QUAD platform, from 2022, the United States, India, Israel and the United Arab Emirates joined the economic platform "I2-U2" (India, Israel, United States and

²⁵ Nawaz M., Shaheen M., Saif A. The US Policy Toward South Asia: An Historical Assessment. University of Sargodha. Journal of Historical Studies. 2020. – 270-271p.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342708593_The_US_Policy_Toward_South_Asia_An_Historical_Assessment

²⁶ Congressional research service. India-U.S. relations. Washington. July 19, 2021. – 32-42pp.

United Arab Emirates)²⁷. Moreover, aspects of realism are visible in these relations. For example, the sanctions imposed by the US against Russia due to the conflict in Ukraine do not affect India. According to K. Donfried, assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, "the US does not intend to impose sanctions on India, India is important for the US"²⁸. The fact that the US is conducting different policies towards this country and involving it in different political and economic circles means that the U.S. establishment is taking a constructivist approach to the Indian vector.

In addition, the "2+2 Dialogue", that is, dialogue between the ministers of foreign affairs and defense, has been established in US-India relations. There is also cooperation between the US Congress and the Indian Parliament. For example, 150 members of the US Congress are members of the largest Indian caucus²⁹. Of course, this could serve as a tool for the US legislature to take decisive action in India's favor. Communication at the level of state bodies, in particular executive and legislative authorities, serves to further strengthen mutual relations.

During 2014-2020, Indian Prime Minister N. Modi visited the USA 6 times. However, in the era of D. Trump compared to the era of B. Obama, the personal relations of the heads of state played a significant role in US-India relations. During this period, communication reached an unprecedented level. The US has called India a "pillar of regional stability and security" and formed alliances with it in the areas of maritime security, counter-terrorism and defense. However, a number of constructivist problems arose in the development of relations. For example, the slogans "Make America Great Again", "America First" did not match with the slogan "Make in India"³⁰. The fact that both countries are promoting their domestic industry and development has created some problems in their relations. In other words, slogans focused on one's own greatness (a linguistic feature characteristic of constructivism) can sometimes create mistrust between states³¹.

²⁷ Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy. Washington: White House. October 12, 2022. – 12p.

²⁸ Sharma K. India's Russian imports soar 400% as U.S. offers little resistance. February 17, 2023.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Trade/India-s-Russian-imports-soar-400-as-U.S.-offers-little-resistance>

²⁹ India - US Bilateral Relations – A Brief. https://www.indianembassyusa.gov.in/pdf/menu/Washington_IndUs_21Nov2022.pdf

³⁰ Ganguly S. Obama, Trump and Indian foreign policy under Modi. Springer Nature. International Politics. 2021. – 16-21pp.

³¹ Dunne T., Kurki M., Smith S. International Relations Theories. Oxford University Press. 2013. – 196-197p.

D.Trump and N.Modi's friendship showed that there are factors of constructivism in US-India relations. For example, Trump awarded Indian Prime Minister N. Modi with the highest order of the USA "Legion of Merit"³². In 2019, N. Modi's visit to the USA was greeted with the slogan "Howdy Modi", and in 2020, 100,000 people in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) warmly welcomed D. Trump under the slogan "Namaste Trump"³³.

Today, J. Biden's administration continues this friendship-relay. During his 36 years in the Senate, Biden has supported India. His personal relationship with this country is a factor in the positive development of US-India relations today. In addition, Kamala Harris, who was elected vice president with him in 2020, is of Indian origin (her mother, Shamala Gopalan, is an immigrant of Indian origin). The fact that the country's number two head of state is ethnically Indian will in itself encourage the US-India relations to develop more positively. Realism asserts that state interests are rational. But as long as the state apparatus is managed by people, it will be positive to approach the concepts that are characteristic of a person, that is, their values, ideology, nationality and identity. Although sometimes this is not a rational choice, a person makes a decision based on the values close to him³⁴. In the approach of K. Harris, there are aspects of sincere support for India. This means that constructivism is theoretically dominant between these two countries.

In constructivism, it is important to create a sense of fear in the opponent through the politics of show of force and thereby influence his thinking. Constructivism asserts that fear is not a natural state, but an emotion created in the human mind³⁵. Thoughts affect actions. It follows that changes in thoughts lead to changes in actions. Today, the factor of China's rise is further strengthening India-US relations. In order to deter China and reduce its influence in the Indo-Pacific region, India and the United States are jointly pursuing a policy of showing force in this region. For this purpose, naval training exercises called "Malabar" are held every year. Joint exercises allow to improve mutual military operations

³² Gupta Sh. US' Legion of Merit award for QUAD architects sends multiple messages. December 22, 2020. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/us-legion-of-merit-award-for-quad-architects-sends-multiple-messages/story-bSHX0b7SNJXkmxTiHVU8hI.html>

³³ Ellis-Peterson H. 'Namaste Trump': India welcomes US president at Modi rally. February 24, 2020. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/24/namaste-donald-trump-india-welcomes-us-president-narendra-modi-rally>

³⁴ Wendt, Alexander. Social theory of international politics. Cambridge University Press. 1999. – 257-299p.

³⁵ Wendt A. Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics. MIT: International Organization, Vol. 46, No. 2. 1992. – 405p.

and demonstrate the full strength of the two countries. The purpose of this is to somehow influence and restrain China through the policy of showing power³⁶.

It is known that public diplomacy is an effective method for developing relations between countries. It is a constructive tool that contributes to changing the worldview of countries towards each other. The US is also emphasizing public diplomacy in its relations with India. The United States Educational Foundation in India has been operating since 1950. To date, 20,000 Indian students and researchers have been awarded Fulbright grants. In 2020, the number of Indian students studying in the US exceeded 200,000 (21% of foreign students in the US). This, in turn, brings about 8 billion to the US economy. Since 2014, 1000 American teachers come to India for training every year. Today, 4.2 million Americans of Indian origin live in the United States³⁷. This all definitely affects US-Indian relations.

Conclusion

In general, US-Indian relations are currently reaching their peak. The United States views India as its Major Defense Partner and is trying to strengthen its position in the Indo-Pacific region with the help of this alliance. Common values such as democracy are a significant factor in the formation of allied relations, which gives a constructivist approach to relations. That is the reason why US recognizes nuclear program of India. However, India's involvement in many international platforms such as the SCO and BRICS, as well as India's neutral and unique approaches to the processes of international relations, slightly complicate US plans to build a strong alliance along the Indian vector.

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