

Unchecked India: A Threat to Peace

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The ambitions of India's military modernization are growing at odds with her ally - United States' 2017 law aimed at deterring nations from procuring Russian military hardware. [The recent friction between two strategic partners surfaced on Russian origin S-400 Surface-to-Air missile system](#), which New Delhi is keen to fully commission by 2022, whereas, Washington is persistently telling the Indians to drop the \$5.5 billion deal of five systems and avoid an inter-state diplomatic crisis.

The Trump Administration had imposed sanctions on Turkey last month for its acquisition of the same Russian air defence system under the stipulations of Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), and warned of similar consequences for India. However, New Delhi is resolutely advancing towards acquiring the defence shield without paying heed to any opposition, and even made an initial [payment of \\$800 million in 2019](#) to initiate delivery. The first set of missile batteries are expected to reach India towards the end of this year. India's undeterred attitude toward military modernization fundamentally reflects several multifarious objectives.

First, New Delhi has adhered to a policy of 'non-alignment' in the past and is still attempting to maintain the same neutrality, which its policy cadre generally propagates as 'strategic autonomy'. Nonetheless, the incumbent BJP Government, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, appears to be oscillating owing to the unfolding geo-political contestation in the Indo-Pacific region between China and the United States.

Second, Indian security manoeuvres come in the backdrop of its security sensitivities vis-à-vis her neighbour China. Both nations have fought one full-fledged war in 1962, followed by various skirmishes of which, the recent stand-off in June last year was the bloodiest one, resulting in casualties on both sides.

By acquiring the S-400 system, Indian planners hope to shield their major cities and sensitive installations from any incoming Chinese missile. They believe that after acquiring the full strength of Rafale Fighters, coupled with the S-400 defence system, the country might have more power parity with China, at least to the level of strategic equilibrium.

Third, New Delhi has hegemonic designs at least within the South Asian Region, which were substantially manifested at the time of the Uri attack in 2016, followed by the Pulwama incident on 26 February, 2019. Both times, India showcased her belligerence by claiming surgical strikes in the border and settled areas of Pakistan in the guise of targeting terrorist hideouts.

Pakistan, on the other hand, should not be considered a pliant state to take such blatant, illegal actions lying down. This was effectively demonstrated on 27 February, 2019 in

response to India through six non-military retaliatory aerial strikes inside Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir.

Albeit China, Russia and US played their respective roles in reducing tensions between the two South Asian arch-rivals, but India's irresponsible state policies pushed the region to the brink of war.

During Narendra Modi's years in government since 2014, a general impression has prevailed that India is leaning toward Washington's camp to curtail China's expanding wings. However, the current diplomatic divergence over S-400 seems to be an attempt to dispel that impression. In response to Washington's warnings, New Delhi has reiterated that "[India has always pursued an independent foreign policy. This also applies to our defence acquisitions and supplies which are guided by our national security interests.](#)" The statement signals to the Biden administration India's future position - whenever a situation demands, New Delhi will choose any side.

One thing is evident, India, by staying away from Sino-US rivalry, is diversifying her options to fulfil her defence appetite. Presently, Indian military needs are being met by France, Israel, Russia and United States. But, the Indian policy of 'strategic autonomy' poses greater risks to South Asian strategic stability, particularly during the present BJP regime. An unchecked India, under a Hindu nationalist government, can commit any misadventure that can drag the region's security situation out of control.

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