

Rapprochement Between Superpowers? Towards A US-China “New Détente”?

Will the US Sell India Out to China to Sweeten the Deal for a Sino-American New Détente?

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There’s a legitimate reason to wonder whether the Sino-American discussions over a New Détente involve India since the US wouldn’t otherwise hang Delhi out to dry by staying committed to its planned two-day talks with China despite those two having their worst clashes in two and a half years just two days prior. The tacit signal being sent by this decision is that the US is considering adopting a policy of neutrality towards the Sino-Indo border dispute in order to maximally incentivize China into agreeing to a New Détente.

The Fast-Moving Rapprochement Between The Superpowers

The Chinese Foreign Ministry [revealed](#) on Monday that their country had just concluded two days of talks with American officials covering a wide range of issues. Their side was represented by Vice Foreign Minister Xie Feng while the US one was represented by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian & Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink and the National Security Council’s Senior Director for China Laura Rosenberger. The high level of the participants demonstrated the seriousness of their talks.

The two-day event just outside of Beijing came after the American and Chinese Defense Ministers [resumed talks](#) last month at the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus in Cambodia despite the People’s Republic having unilaterally suspended those interactions in August following US Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s [provocative trip to Taiwan](#). That aforementioned resumption of high-level dialogue was in turn the first tangible result of Presidents Xi Jinping and Joe Biden [meeting](#) at the G20 in mid-November.

It was also [announced](#) around that time that Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Beijing early next year, which is expected to advance the goal that the National Security Council’s Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell spoke about last week. [According to him](#),

“[China] want(s) a degree of predictability and stability, and we seek that as

well...We're going to see some developments that I believe will be reassuring to the region as a whole."

Towards A Sino-American New Détente

This sequence of fast-moving developments suggests that the [Sino-American bi-multipolar superpower duopoly](#) is exploring the parameters of a "New Détente", which refers to a series of pragmatic compromises aimed at establishing a balance of influence between them as the "new normal". The [multipolar processes](#) unleashed by Russia's [special operation](#) threaten their premier positions in the international system, ergo the desire to cooperate in delaying this trend as explained here:

- 12 August: "[Speculation About Russia Becoming A Chinese Puppet Ignores India's Decisive Balancing Role](#)"
- 1 October: "[The Ukrainian Conflict Might Have Already Derailed China's Superpower Trajectory](#)"
- 5 October: "[Kissinger's Prediction About A Forthcoming Policy Recalibration By China Is Probably Correct](#)"
- 19 November: "[Analyzing The US-Chinese-Russian-Indian Interplay In The Global Systemic Transition](#)"
- 20 November: "[China's Stated Desire For Military Talks With The US Signals Its Interest In A New Détente](#)"
- 22 November: "[The Emerging Military-Strategic Dynamics Of The New Cold War In The Asia-Pacific](#)"
- 23 November: "[China's Reported Pause Of Russian Oil Imports Ahead Of The West's Price Cap Is Revealing](#)"
- 28 November: "[The US' Arms Backlog For Taiwan Caused By Ukraine Can Facilitate The New Détente](#)"
- 29 November: "[The Evolution Of Key Players' Perceptions Across The Course Of The Ukrainian Conflict](#)"
- 30 November: "[Russia's Energy Geopolitics With China & India](#)"
- 5 December: "[Why Is The Washington Post Rehabilitating President Xi's Image In The Western Consciousness?](#)"

India's Black Swan Rise As A Globally Significant Great Power

To oversimplify the analytical series above, the [latest US-provoked phase](#) of the [Ukrainian Conflict](#) had the black swan effect of unprecedentedly accelerating the [global systemic transition](#) to [complex multipolarity \("multiplexity"\)](#) by turbocharging India's rise as a globally significant Great Power. It's beyond the scope of the present piece to explain this in detail, but the following analyses can bring the reader up to speed, with the first of them citing nearly four dozen related ones from the past year:

- 28 November: "[Korybko To Rajagopalan: India's Principled Neutrality Does Indeed Ensure Its Security](#)"
- 1 December: "[Russia's Reported Request For India To Scale Exports By 5x Is Strategically Significant](#)"
- 4 December: "[India's G20 Chairmanship Will Champion The Global South's Interests](#)"
- 9 December: "[Russia Officially Declared That India Is At The Center Of The Emerging Multipolar World Order](#)"

- 10 December: "[It's Actually Not A Big Deal That Modi Isn't Visiting Moscow This Year](#)"
- 12 December: "[Russia's G20 Sherpa Is The Latest Kremlin Official To Praise India's Newfound Global Role](#)"

Changing Geostrategic Calculations

The most important point is that Russia's special operation created the opportunity for India to perfect its balancing act in the [New Cold War](#) between the US-led West's [Golden Billion](#) and the jointly [BRICS](#)- & [SCO](#)-led Global South of which it's [nowadays the voice](#) via its policy of [principled neutrality](#). The grand systemic consequence of that move was that the Sino-American bi-multipolar superpower duopoly was broken as a result of [Indian-pioneered tripolarity](#), which in turn catalyzed the New Détente.

Their ongoing talks are conceptually aimed at restoring the bi-multipolar system or at least temporarily delaying its seemingly inevitable evolution to tripolarity en route to its final form of multiplexity. To that end, they're seriously exploring the parameters of a series of mutual compromises intended to establish a balance of influence between them that could serve as the "new normal", which in practice would advance the "Chimerica"/"G2" scenario of jointly leading global affairs that both hitherto balked at.

The dramatic events of the past year changed their respective strategic calculations, hence why they both realized that it's in their best interests to pursue this scenario. China's superpower trajectory was derailed after the Ukrainian Conflict completely destabilized the globalization processes upon which its ambitious plans depended, while India's reaffirmation of its hard-earned strategic autonomy in the New Cold War ruined the US' plans to manipulate it as a proxy for containing China "to the last Indian".

The Deal Of The Century

In response, China was compelled to consider security concessions to the US in exchange for relief from its economic pressure whereas the US was compelled to consider economic concessions to China in exchange for it accepting the reality of [NATO-like AUKUS+'s entrenchment in East & Southeast Asia](#). This quid pro quo lies at the heart of their discussions over the New Détente, and while it's too early to confidently predict the form that it could take, some educated inferences can still be made.

For instance, the US might delineate clear red lines in the East & South China Seas that it'll reward China for respecting by not crossing its counterpart's own around Taiwan. Trade tensions could gradually thaw upon both respecting the other's aforesaid lines, thus leading to the American-Australian axis of AUKUS agreeing to scale up LNG exports to China as a mutually beneficial trust-building gesture. To maximally incentive China, the US might also hint that it'll turn a blind eye towards the Sino-Indo border dispute.

That last-mentioned scenario might be what ultimately results in them agreeing to a series of mutual compromises aimed at restoring bi-multipolarity or at least temporarily delaying its end. Their premier positions in the international system are threatened by Indian-pioneered tripolarity/multiplexity processes, which are in both of their interests to contain. This could be advanced by the US encouraging China to redirect its military focus from the Asia-Pacific to the Himalayas as part of their New Détente.

An Indian Incentive To Sweeten The Deal

To explain, the Sino-American bi-multipolar superpower duopoly wants to punish India for breaking their hold over the international system, but neither can act unilaterally in this respect out of fear that their actions will push that globally significant Great Power into their rival's arms in response. The only way to resolve this security dilemma is to jointly coordinate to that end, which also serves the purpose of creating a "face-saving" pretext for China's possible security concessions to the US.

Its related interests in the East & South China Seas are extremely sensitive, especially in terms of public opinion, yet domestic attention can be redirected towards the Himalayas to preemptively avert grassroots pressure upon Beijing accepting NATO-like AUKUS+'s entrenchment in that maritime region. Escalating military tensions between China and India could also create the "face-saving" pretext for the US' own possible security concessions regarding its respect of Beijing's red lines around Taiwan.

These grand strategic calculations aren't groundless speculation like critics might claim but are extended credence by the objective observation that the two-day Sino-American talks that just concluded still went ahead despite the worst clash in two and a half years along China's disputed border with India. The second-mentioned's Defense Ministry [revealed](#) earlier this week that these Asian neighbors had a serious skirmish in the Tawang Sector on 9 December, two days before those superpowers' talks began.

Hanging A Fellow Democracy Out To Dry

India is the US' first-ever and thus far only Mutual Defense Partner, a member of the Quad, key participant in the American-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, and a fellow democracy, the latter category of which is considered privileged by Washington after its "[Summit for Democracy](#)" last year. The optics of the US going through with its preplanned two-day talks with China despite its clashes with India two days prior therefore powerfully contradicts conventional wisdom in the New Cold War.

A year ago, nobody could have predicted that the US would continue with its plans to hold high-level talks with the People's Republic outside Beijing after China's worst clashes with India since their deadly ones over the Galwan River Valley in summer 2020. After all, the US officially regards China as its top systemic rival while considering India to be an important ally in upholding the so-called "rules-based international order" that Washington regularly accuses Beijing of attempting to unilaterally violate.

The only reason why these talks proceeded is that the US believes that it has more to gain in the grand strategic sense from China in the scenario of them ultimately clinching a New Détente, which those aforesaid talks were anticipated to advance, than in scuttling this possibility out of solidarity with India. Washington is furious with Delhi after that fellow democracy refused to voluntarily become its vassal, which resulted in unleashing systemic processes that are accelerating the decline of bi-multipolarity.

The US' Emerging "Neutrality" Towards The Sino-Indo Border Dispute

It's with these grand strategic calculations in mind that the US decided not to cancel its preplanned talks with China over the New Détente despite the worst Sino-Indo border clashes in two and a half years that immediately preceded this event. It's unimportant which

of those two Asian neighbors was responsible for what transpired since the fact of the matter is that Washington went against all prior expectations of its stance towards this sensitive issue, which speaks to how drastically its calculations are changing.

With this in mind, there's a legitimate reason to wonder whether the Sino-American discussions over a New Détente involve India since the US wouldn't otherwise hang Delhi out to dry by staying committed to its planned two-day talks with China despite those two clashing just two days prior. The tacit signal being sent by this decision is that the US is considering adopting a policy of neutrality towards the Sino-Indo border dispute in order to maximally incentivize China into agreeing to a New Détente.

The reasons for this were previously explained, but to remind the reader, these are to: encourage China's military reorientation away from the Asia-Pacific and towards the Himalayas as part of its possible security concessions to the US; establish the pretext for the US respecting China's red lines around Taiwan per its quid pro quo security concession for ultimately unlocking mutually beneficial economic-energy deals; and jointly punish India for breaking their bi-multipolar system.

Sacrificing India On The Altar Of The New Détente

Turning a blind eye towards the worst Sino-Indo border clashes in two and a half years was intended as a goodwill gesture on the US' part ahead of its preplanned two-day talks with China meant to show its sincerity towards the speculative compromise of becoming neutral when it comes to their sensitive dispute. That outcome would be mutually beneficial if agreed to as part of their New Détente since it also creates the "face-saving" pretext for the superpowers to militarily de-escalate in the Asia-Pacific.

With China [focused much more on the Himalayas](#) than on the East & South China Seas, the US would have a publicly plausible reason for not crossing Beijing's red lines around Taiwan, which could thus lead to a balance of influence between them that eventually becomes the "new normal" in their relations. The bi-multipolar system in which the superpowers have a self-interested stake could then be temporarily preserved to their benefit, thus helping to erode the security dilemma between them too.

To crudely simply the complex sequence of geostrategic insight that was shared in this analysis, the US might therefore sell India out to China in order to sweeten the deal for a Sino-American New Détente aimed at upholding the bi-multipolar system that Delhi's tripolarity-multiplexity advances risk breaking. The mutual trust that this outcome could foster might even facilitate those two eventually agreeing to the "Chimerica"/"G2" scenario for indefinitely sustaining their restored joint leadership of global affairs.

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