

EVENT REPORT:

Roots of India's Approach to the US and China

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TALK: ROOTS OF INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE US AND CHINA

(Organised by Ramjas Political Review on August 25, 2025)

1. The Ramjas Political Review (RPR) organised a talk on “Roots of India’s Relations with the US and China” on August 25, 2025. The objective of this talk was to reflect upon the historical context and significance of the foreign policy decisions opted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.
2. It was a two hour engaging deliberation held after the offline release ceremony of Ramjas Political Review, Volume 2(2) with Prof SD Muni, Professor Emeritus, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, gracing the event as the Chief Guest.

Moderator’s Comments

3. **Prem Ansh Sinha**, Editor-in-Chief, Ramjas Political Review, introduced the Speaker, Prof Muni, and spoke about the journal, emphasising to the audience its undergraduate-run nature, which makes it one of the foremost student-run political science journals with an ISSN credential.
4. He brought up the wide range of interviews that the RPR has conducted, including the most recent with Professor Quentin Skinner, that has been featured in Volume 2 (2) of the journal as well.
5. **The moderator** went on to individually contextualise each of the pieces within the journal and explain their broader themes and their relevance to the contemporary world. Expressing his desire for freshers to join, he remarked that every review, every essay, is an act of freedom—the freedom to think, to imagine, to explore, and that this legacy would continue within the RPR.

The Talk

6. **Prof SD Muni** began the discussion by remarking at how his time as an Editor-in-Chief of previous journals had made him realise how difficult it is to sustain an academic journal over the long run, especially biannual journals and praising RPR for continuing to publish its journal issues and having designed the journal issue exquisitely.
7. **The speaker** claimed that political science as a distinct scientific field does not exist because of its heavy reliance on human behaviour, which is extremely unpredictable, and can significantly alter policy outcomes.
8. He introduced two critical variables to understanding how foreign policy is shaped—the context of foreign policy and the personalities involved in policy formulation. Through this, he posited that the appropriate way to understand international relations in hindsight is to understand the geopolitical context behind decisions made and the nature of the personalities making those decisions.
9. With this context set, **Prof SD Muni** brought up the statements made by Prime Minister Modi blaming former Prime Minister Nehru for having been responsible for the country's contemporary troubles.
10. Beginning with his analysis of Nehru's policy towards the United States, he posited that India's independence occurred in the backdrop of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. He claimed that the Western notion of India's Non-Alignment Movement indicating Indian alignment with Moscow was a myth due to Washington's prior support for India's independence. Additionally, he highlighted how Nehru believed that India's relations with Washington were grounded in the notion that democracies should work together.
11. **Prof Muni** pointed to letters written by Nehru to VK Krishna Menon indicating his willingness to solidify ties with the West to boost India's scientific and technological capabilities. However, according to him, Nehru's state visit to the US made him realise that the Americans were rather interested in a puppet state in New Delhi while utilising Pakistan to serve their geopolitical and military interests.
12. Pointing to Nehru's remarks about the 'dull' nature of his negotiations with the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, **the speaker** claimed that the US was significantly dissatisfied due to India's active advocacy for decolonisation and engagement with Moscow—despite Indian

support for Western initiatives during the Korean War and the Suez Canal crisis. Moreover, the Americans seemed to be more concerned with containing India, especially at the UN Security Council during the discussion of the Kashmir issue, by supporting Pakistan's claims. On the contrary, the Soviet Union expressed support for India.

13. Highlighting that the US foreign policy is dependent, not on the President but on the Pentagon and the State Department, **Prof Muni** remarked that the US policy towards India has undergone a fundamental change, primarily due to New Delhi having possession of nuclear weapons which prompted Washington to negotiate a civil nuclear deal, as well as the rising threat to the US dominance from the People's Republic of China (PRC), which has historically been a strategic concern for India.
14. Thus, he stated that Nehru could not be blamed for tensions with the US since US-India relations improved drastically following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.
15. Speaking on India's ties with Beijing, **the speaker** emphasised the naivety of Indian foreign policy, acknowledging that Nehru's policy with the PRC was based on his vision for pan-Asian solidarity. He remarked that India had no capacity to fight Beijing militarily but continued to support British-era agreements such as the Radcliffe Plan, the McMahon line, and the Durand Agreement. Additionally, Nehru supported the Dalai Lama's rule in Tibet and facilitated the formation of his government-in-exile, much to China's displeasure. He added that Nehru's Forward Policy aimed at establishing outposts in disputed regions further antagonised Beijing.
16. Commenting on India's Neighbourhood First Policy, he stated that it was a failure due to its inability to garner support among key partners such as Nepal, Maldives, and Bangladesh. Moreover, the PRC's significant economic and military growth over the past several years has put it at a dominant position in an emerging South Asia. According to **the speaker**, India's neighbours feel pressured by the country, which has resulted in several of India's neighbours joining China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He remarked that even post the Galwan clashes, India's economic dependence on China has grown.

Moderator's Comments

17. **Prem Ansh Sinha** expressed his appreciation for **Prof Muni's** remarks, conveying to the audience to read his edited book on India's neighbourhood.

Chair's Comments

18. **Prof Vikas Kapoor**, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Ramjas College, thanked Professor Muni for his contributions towards the academic field of international relations and authoritative insights on South Asia.

Q&A Session

19. On being asked about the future of US-India relations under the Trump administration, **Prof SD Muni**, while addressing the problems imposed by contemporary US tariffs, expressed hope for the relationship due to factors including but not limited to the involvement of the Indian diaspora, the steadily growing nature of the Indian economy, and the consistent need to balance against China. He pointed to statements made by several US policymakers hoping that India does not follow the authoritarian path of Beijing.
20. When enquired about the distinctions between New Delhi's and Beijing's negotiation styles which have historically influenced geopolitical outcomes, he reiterated that the PRC usually tends to resort to deceit to alter outcomes—be it through the swapping of territories or using trade as a weapon. He also acknowledged that China uses diplomatic flexibility to ensure favourable positions during negotiations.
21. On being asked about the Quad as an effective alliance to counter Chinese influence, **Prof SD Muni** remarked that the Quad does not wish to position itself as a military alliance such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) but has rather begun playing a role almost equivalent to that of the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) alliance due to its recent emphasis on climate resilience, energy security, et cetera.
22. When asked to comment on the India-Nepal dispute over the Lipulekh Pass, **the speaker** explained that this was largely due to the ambiguities of the treaty of 1860 which have been utilised by Nepali parties to influence domestic political dynamics. He however, expressed hope for India and Nepal to come together.

Concluding Remarks

23. The Q&A concluded with the moderator, **Prem Ansh Sinha**, thanking the audience and speaker for their enthusiastic engagement. He expressed his gratitude to the faculty advisor and the audience for attending the talk and hoped that the freshers would express interest in writing for and joining the RPR.

Ends.