



India-US Relations: from Bilateral to Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of global politics and security, the transformation of India-US relations from mere bilateral engagement to a Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership marks a significant pivot, not only for the two nations involved but also for the broader international order. This research paper delves into the historical trajectory, catalyzing factors, and the multifaceted dimensions and the complexities of this partnership, arguing that the progression towards a more integrated and strategic alliance is a testament to shifting global paradigms, mutual interests, and a shared vision for global stability, prosperity, and democratic values. The study begins with a historical overview, tracing the roots of India-US relations post-Indian independence. Initially characterized by non-alignment and strategic distance during the Cold War, the bilateral relationship witnessed sporadic engagements, often marred by divergent geopolitical stances. The end of the Cold War, however, ushered in a new era of opportunities, propelling both nations towards redefining their engagement. The turn of the millennium marked a significant pivot, with the civil nuclear deal acting as a cornerstone for this evolving partnership. The research meticulously analyzes the post-Cold War era, highlighting key turning points such as the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement, defense collaborations, and the convergence on counter-terrorism efforts as catalysts that transformed the relationship. Central to this paper is an examination of the multifaceted nature of the current Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, which encompasses defense and security, economic ties, technology and space cooperation, climate change, and global health initiatives. The study employs a multi-dimensional analytical framework, drawing on a variety of primary and secondary sources, including strategic documents, bilateral agreements, and interviews with policy experts. The analysis reveals that the strengthening of India-US relations is driven not only by shared strategic interests but also by converging values and visions for the Indo-Pacific

region's future and global governance. Furthermore, the paper explores the implications of this partnership in the context of a rising China, shifting power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, and global challenges like climate change and pandemics. It posits that the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership serves as a stabilizing force in the region, facilitating a balance of power and fostering a rules-based international order. In conclusion, this research asserts that the evolution of India-US relations into a Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership is a significant milestone that reflects broader shifts in international relations. It underscores the necessity of adapting to new geopolitical realities, leveraging partnerships for mutual and global benefit, and facing contemporary challenges through collaborative efforts. The study not only provides a comprehensive overview of the journey and status of this bilateral relationship but also offers insights into its future trajectory, challenges, and opportunities, thus contributing a vital perspective to the discourse on global strategic partnerships.

Keywords- India, USA, bilateral relations, strategic partnership, South Asia, factors, strategies, China, relationship, QUAD, India-China rivalry, Strategic factors affecting or influencing partnership.

India- US Bilateral Relations

An important turning point in their bilateral relations was the signing of the Indo-American Nuclear Deal, which took place during the terms of Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President George W. Bush, respectively. The choices made at this time still serve as the cornerstone of the current framework that directs the two nations' relationship. Cooperation grew in the years that followed in several areas, including as high technology, economy, energy security, defense, and missile defense in addition to civil space initiatives. This all-inclusive collaboration signified an unparalleled degree of involvement, covering the widest range of domains in their



mutual relations history. Notably, cooperative initiatives to advance democracy and guarantee regional security became important topics of discussion in bilateral agreements.

For India, this strategic partnership held immense importance in advancing its national interests. It allowed India to shed its status as a nuclear outcast, strengthen its position as a global actor, and position itself as an emerging global leader. During the administration of President Barack Obama, the strategic partnership between India and the United States continued to evolve dynamically. In addition to economic and political factors, shared values emerged as an ideological factor influencing their relations.

India turned out to be an exception to the US approach of limiting emerging nations' ability to maneuver in international affairs through partnership-building. To optimize the advantages of the strategic alliance with the world hegemon and strengthen its position as a major power, India joined the nuclear club, actively cooperated with the US, and backed US efforts. As far as foreign affairs are concerned, Washington and New Delhi currently have more stances in common than differences, and their interests and ideals are generally in line. The two countries have grown closer as a result of China's rise, India's expanding economic potential, and their shared experience with terrorism.

The United States and India's relationship reached an unparalleled level under President Donald Trump's administration, resulting in a comprehensive global strategic partnership³. According to Taranjit Singh Sandhu, India's ambassador to the US, the US-India relationship was a source of strength during the worldwide epidemic. In 2024, both nations will further strengthen their strategic cooperation by working together on vaccine development and Indo-Pacific security. The Indo-Pacific area, regional cooperation, and defense and security connections are all shared visions of the two governments. To combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States and India initiated broad cooperation throughout 2020. This cooperation included pharmaceutical companies working together to create vaccines and provide necessary medicines.

Even with these encouraging advances, several difficulties still exist. India's interests, such as its application for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, are not always supported by the

US. India also occasionally disagrees with US policies, especially when it comes to the Islamic world, with whom it shares close historical and cultural links. In addition, there are still unsolved issues between the two nations on nuclear non-proliferation and energy security, which include diversifying energy sources and obtaining natural gas from Iran and other Persian Gulf nations. These differences show that their relationship's harmony is nonetheless ephemeral. Nonetheless, these disparities have been somewhat mitigated by the increasing economic interdependence between the US and India. There is a growing need to address and balance divergent interests due to the growing Indian market for American goods and the significance of the US for India's outsourced services industry. The strengthening of the strategic alliance between the United States and India has been driven in recent years by several reasons that have also created opportunities for the relationship to evolve into an ally.

Firstly, India's economy is expanding at a rapid pace, which boosts both its self-assurance and ambition to become one of the world's most powerful nations in the twenty-first century. Secondly, the United States started to view India as a possible partner in its foreign policy after witnessing its rise in strength and confidence as well as its enhanced military might. Thirdly, both nations have a shared interest in maintaining freedom and security of the Indian Ocean's marine routes, as well as peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. As evidenced by the signing of the U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, this indicates the growing convergence of their geopolitical objectives. Fourthly, this agreement improved understanding among the parties about regional security and stability and opened doors for more military cooperation. The United States seeks to grow its own market while India wants to diversify the sources of its contemporary weapon supply. The two nations have started talking about defense and strategic matters. This includes exchanging military personnel, taking part in training programs, and holding combined military and naval drills. Thus, the government inked a \$3 billion defense contract during US President Donald Trump's visit to India.

Fifth, there are several other encouraging trends in a range of interaction areas: thus far, more understanding has been attained in the areas of nuclear policy and related responsibilities, prospects for nuclear energy cooperation, food security, and trade facilitation; additionally, the



nations have managed to resolve significant disagreements regarding the issue of climate change. The strategic partnership's ideological components. India is seen by the United States as a democratic nation ("the world's largest democracy"), a model of democracy in the post-colonial era, and a possible powerful ally in Asia. Both countries uphold liberal democratic political ideals. India has been designated as a prospective "political ally" of the United States, in contrast to Pakistan, which was designated as a "military ally." Increased cooperation between the two nations was prompted by a deeper comprehension of one another's political ideals as well as a convergence of economic interests. US President Barack Obama declared that he "firmly believes that the relationship between the United States and India... will become one of the defining partnerships of the twenty-first century" during his November 2010 visit to India. With this declaration, a protracted period of conflict came to an end, and Washington and New Delhi's strategic stances converged. During an official visit to India in July 2021, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the people of India and the US had "shared values" and that their relationship was among the "most important" in the world.

The United States and India have increasingly collaborated, particularly in the Middle East and Asia, driven by mutual concerns about China's influence. This partnership is rooted in shared democratic values and converging interests across bilateral, regional, and global issues. As outlined in the "Brief on India-U.S. Relations," available on the Embassy of India's website in Washington, the two nations have forged a "global strategic partnership," spanning various sectors such as trade, education, science, technology, and more.

Despite this progress, several obstacles hinder closer cooperation. Firstly, India's continued military partnership with Russia, especially in arms procurement, acts as a barrier to strengthening ties with the United States. India values its autonomy in military technology, cultivated through Moscow's reliable supply of military technologies and joint production of weapons systems. This collaboration has bolstered India's independence in defense procurement and reduced its reliance on foreign arms supplies and political fluctuations.

Secondly, significant disparities exist between the perspectives of the two countries regarding the global order. While the United States advocates for maintaining the existing status quo, India, as part of the BRICS coalition, asserts the

need for transformation. India emphasizes the establishment of a world order grounded in international law, contrasting with the US approach, which has at times prioritized its national interests over adherence to international legal norms.

Several factors contribute to hindering the development of a closer partnership between India and the United States, impeding progress towards a robust military-political alliance. Firstly, India's commitment to multilateralism through the United Nations contrasts with the US's tendency to resort to unilateral or NATO-supported military actions, bypassing UN mandates. India's expectation of US support for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council was not met, leading to disappointment. Similarly, India sought US assistance in addressing the Kashmir issue and improving relations with Pakistan, but did not receive the desired backing. Despite this, the US has expressed solidarity with India in combating terrorism and has increased information sharing and technology transfer in this area.

However, India gradually realized that the US was not inclined to sever ties with Pakistan or pursue a more assertive policy. This suggests that Washington may not be particularly interested in India's emergence as a major military power. Secondly, the countries hold divergent views on disarmament, with India advocating for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons while the US seeks to legitimize their possession by select nations. Disagreements also persist on various issues including trade negotiations, climate change, and the Doha Round agenda. Despite efforts to resolve trade disputes, differences remain on matters such as agriculture, tariffs, arms control, labor laws, and energy security.

Furthermore, India's assertive stance in pursuing a multi-faceted foreign policy impedes closer ties. India maintains constructive relations with Iran and plans to implement the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project for energy security. Additionally, India's amicable policies towards undemocratic regimes in neighboring countries, notably Myanmar, have caused tensions with Washington. These collective factors hinder the deepening of the partnership between India and the United States, preventing progress toward a more intimate military and political alliance

India's Position in Quad

Even with Indo-Pacific geopolitics taking center stage, the Quad remains a major topic of discussion on a worldwide scale. The United



States, Australia, India, and Japan formed the Tsunami Core group in 2004 in response to an earthquake and tsunami that occurred in the Indian Ocean, which is where the Quad got its start (Yang, 2022). The four countries' potential cooperation to address regional issues was encouraged by the efficient diplomatic coordination. Contrary to common misnomers such as the "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue," which has been officially absent from documents since the Quad's resuscitation in 2017, the Quad is a consultative group rather than a military alliance with the goal of influencing the Indo-Pacific landscape in a way that benefits its members, especially in light of China's ambitions for regional dominance. Since the Quad's founding in 2007 and revival in 2017, there have been ongoing discussions about India's place in it. Considering that India is the only member not in a formal alliance with the other members, this topic is not unusual. To clarify the nuances of India's foreign policy and evaluate the viability of its present strategy, coordinating with other partners that have different long-term goals. India continues to be a cautious player in traditional security affairs despite its tighter ties to the Quad. India is hesitant to label the Quad as an anti-China alliance, even in light of China's increasing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Delhi, on the other hand, is always emphasizing that the group is not against any organization but rather supports a particular set of values and goals.

Analysis of Regional Security Dynamics

In the near future, the Indo-Pacific region of the Asia-Pacific is expected to emerge as one of the most important regions. The security situation in this region is being shaped by the emergence of rivalries between former rivals, and economic growth is occurring at a rapid pace. The Indo-Pacific area is a vital hub for global trade, with a significant amount of trade passing through it. Of the ten greatest economies in the world, five are found here: the United States, China, Japan, India, and South Korea (Heiduk, 2020). It is essential to the global supply chain, especially for sectors connected to technology and significantly dependent on electronic components. In addition, this area has abundant natural resources that are required for the development of these technologies. There has always been a security conundrum in South Asia. The strategic relationship between the United States and India is another setback that has exacerbated the rivalry between Pakistan and India, so undermining the strategic stability of South Asia. The security situation with Pakistan has

gotten worse as a result of India's ambitions of regional hegemony and technological advancements. Pakistan is making every effort to continue serving as a counterbalance in the South Asian region. The stability of the region is seriously threatened by the rapidly changing climate in South Asia, but military confrontation is prevented by the existence of nuclear deterrence. The strategic stability of South Asia is being threatened by new and developing technologies.

South Asia's security dynamics diverge significantly from those of the rest of the globe, as Pakistan and India acquire nuclear capability for distinct reasons. Pakistan, a state that prioritizes security, resorted to nuclear warfare in response to the challenges presented by the surrounding region.

Additionally, because of their history of tense ties, the two states' strategic environment is extremely vulnerable, which exacerbates their deterrence strategy against one another.

The perpetual competition between India and Pakistan, the two neighbors with nuclear weapons, defines the security landscape of South Asia (Ali, 2022). India and Pakistan, who have fought three wars during the previous 70 years, including the Kargil conflict and numerous border skirmishes, are a reflection of complicated geopolitical factors.

Ballistic missile development is one example of how India's drive for regional and global power status has sparked an arms race, while Pakistan's security environment is shaped by political, economic, diplomatic, technological, and military factors as well as local, regional, and international events. India's pursuit of great power status is demonstrated by significant investments that go above and beyond requirements for regional security in order to strengthen its conventional and strategic forces (Kakar, 2022).

India has invested about \$100 billion to enhance its military capabilities over the last ten years, according to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). India upped its military spending to \$53.5 billion in the 2017–18 budget. The article's author contends that Pakistan will be forced to choose nuclear weapons in the unlikely event of a conflict between India and Pakistan due to the modernization of India's military capabilities. Pakistan's air force will be exposed as a result of India acquiring the S-400 missile system from Russia because of its extremely sophisticated capabilities.



The stability of strategic dynamics in South Asia is being greatly impacted by the continuous rivalry between the United States and China in the Asia-Pacific region, especially with regard to the rivalry between India and Pakistan on a regional scale (Younus, 2020). The United States' overarching plan is to restrict China by offering India leverage in the US-India strategic alliance and cutting-edge military technologies. In order to confront its enemy, China's grand strategy, as demonstrated by the Belt and Road Initiative, undoubtedly strengthens geoeconomic and geostrategic ties with Pakistan. Pakistan and India may face both possibilities and challenges as a result of the US-China rivalry. Both India China rivalry will be impacted if the tensions between the two superpowers in the Asia-Pacific region worsen.

Prospects of US-India Relations

Both India and the US are currently making a concerted effort to build strong bilateral ties by having frank conversations about difficult problems and looking for workable solutions. India, however, is staunchly protecting its national interests while also exhibiting tolerance and understanding of the perspectives held by the opposite side, all by the core principles of its foreign policy.

India holds a stance against the United States' practice of labelling countries as democratic or rogue states and opposes isolating or sanctioning them. Consequently, India has not supported US policies towards Syria, Iran, and Russia, especially if they conflict with India's interests or disrupt peace in South and Southeast Asia. Dubey highlights the challenge of conducting bilateral relations with a more powerful nation like the US, pointing out the difficulty arising from power imbalances and the US's approach to foreign policy, which expects complete alignment or opposition without room for middle ground.

India faces specific challenges in pursuing an independent foreign policy, particularly due to opposition from influential groups within the country who advocate for closer alignment with the US-led coalition of major powers. The positive developments in India-US relations in the 21st century's second decade were driven by India's economic growth, military influence, and nuclear capabilities. The future of this relationship hinges on India's sustained economic growth and further enhancement of its nuclear capabilities, along with factors like increased economic interdependence and India's role in balancing China's influence in the region.

India's strategic partnership with the US is characterized by a shift towards economic interaction while maintaining a clear distinction between political partnership and economic cooperation to uphold its principle of "strategic autonomy" and non-alignment policy. In a joint article, Barack Obama and Narendra Modi described the relationship between the two countries as a "natural and unique partnership."

India's foreign policy isn't solely fixated on aligning with the United States; it's diverse and adaptable, taking into account global changes. India aims to become an economic powerhouse and works actively to advance its interests across various fronts. It seeks constructive relations with major global players. President Biden's more flexible foreign policy approach, different from Trump's, has raised hopes in India for increased support over China. India also looks forward to strengthening the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to better manage China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

The potential for improved relations between the United States and Iran could indirectly benefit Indo-American ties by potentially allowing India access to more affordable Iranian oil. India, a rapidly growing economy, will also closely watch Biden's stance on issues like Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship Amendment Act, the caste system, and social violence. There's optimism for enhanced US-India relations under Biden, known for favoring closer ties with India. The invitation to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the G-7 summit in June 2021 highlights India's strategic importance to the US. India's role as a potential democratic counterbalance in the Indo-Pacific region is gaining significance amid increasing authoritarian challenges. Both India and the US prioritize the Indo-Pacific region in their foreign policies, as seen in their respective defense strategies. With China's rise and assertive actions in the Indian Ocean, both countries negotiate to establish common goals and strategies to protect their interests in the region.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is crucial for cooperation between India and the United States, along with Australia and Japan. It helps India balance China's influence in the Indo-Pacific with support from Quad partners, particularly the US, without directly confronting China. This cooperation strengthens India's defense and technology ties with the US without committing to an explicit anti-China policy.

In 2021, the Quad saw a significant revival with virtual and in-person summits,



emphasizing a desire for a peaceful Indo-Pacific region based on international law. Bilateral talks between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Biden outlined areas for further cooperation, including pandemic response, regional stability, technology, education, and counterterrorism. Joint military exercises like 'Yudh Abhyas 2021' in Alaska and the Malabar naval exercises further solidified ties. The Pentagon's declaration of a new chapter in Major Defense Partnership reinforced this cooperation.

Despite these positive steps, differences remain in the Indo-Pacific vision. India aims to maintain its geopolitical influence, safeguarding crucial trade routes, while the US seeks to bolster its political and military presence to enhance global leadership. India acknowledges the need to work closely with the US to counter China's assertiveness in the region. However, deepening strategic partnerships, especially in defense, may constrain India's sovereignty in international affairs. India doesn't view the Quad as an anti-China alliance, as President Biden articulated. The recent AUKUS project, where the US transfers nuclear submarine technology to Australia, a Quad member, highlights the asymmetry among Quad members, which could affect India's relations with the US, prompting India to diversify its arms supplies, including from Russia.

India's purchase of S-400 missile systems from Russia has strained relations between the two nations. The US Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) of 2017 includes provisions to penalize countries engaging in military cooperation with Iran, North Korea, and Russia. Under this law, India's procurement of the S-400 systems could potentially lead to sanctions similar to those imposed on Turkey and China for their S-400 acquisitions. Such sanctions, if imposed, could weaken the core of the global strategic partnership between India and the United States. India asserts that the deal with Russia for the S-400 missile systems is crucial for its defense against increasing security threats, particularly along its eastern and western borders. India views the possibility of sanctions as a challenge to its fundamental principles of sovereignty and strategic independence.

The partnership between India and the United States is seen as essential by both sides, playing a crucial role globally. They share strategic interests, aiming to enhance cooperation for global peace and stability. Over time, their relationship has evolved from initial distance to increased interaction and cooperation in economic, political,

and security realms. However, despite progress, some disagreements persist.

India prioritizes its foreign policy principles and independence, refusing to compromise or play a subordinate role. While eager to partner with the US and support its initiatives, India insists on equality, mutual respect, and the freedom to choose its own path in international affairs. India believes its unique position, history, and status as a major developing power warrant an independent foreign policy.

India intends to base its relations with the US on its national interests, principles, and values, rooted in its non-alignment policy. Forming an alliance with the US could impose obligations limiting India's international maneuverability and contradict its longstanding non-alignment stance. Thus, India is cautious about formal alliances with major powers.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India has pursued a pragmatic approach to US relations, prioritizing tangible results. It's unlikely that a strategic alliance will immediately result from bilateral ties. Instead, the India-US relationship is expected to remain a strategic partnership, serving both countries' interests in the foreseeable future.

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