

Growing India-US Strategic Cooperation: An Analysis

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Abstract

India and the US have seen a growth in convergence of their interest in the last one and a half decade. However, a new shift in the relations took place soon after Narendra Modi took oath as Prime Minister of India in 2016. The US-India bilateral relationship, over the past decade, has not only strengthened in the fields of defence, and counter-terrorism cooperation, but India became a prominent partner of the US in the fields of cyber and homeland security. The current paper discusses the emergence of the US strategic partnership with India, which has proved to be a bipartisan success. The paper, primarily, focuses on the growing common strategic convergence between the US and India. Furthermore, the paper also presents a brief analysis of the potential growth of the US-Indian strategic partnership under the Trump administration and explores its potentials as a strategic liability or a partnership for India. In addition, it explores the growing US reliance on India in the wake of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); and for India to act as a global partner and an ally at different strategic levels.

Keywords: India-US Strategic Partnership, Strategic Cooperation Technology, Cyber Security and Space Programme, Maritime and Naval Exercises, Counter terrorism.

Introduction

Historically, the Republicans, as compared to the Democrats, have been more inclined towards India, offering more India-friendly policies in the context of the US's policy towards the South Asian region. Also, in the recent history, India and the US relations have broadly remained on a steady path regardless which US political party (Democrat or Republican) holds the office. The upward trajectory of India-US relationship can be traced back to the visit of the former US President, Bill Clinton, to India in 2000. The milestone in the relationship reached with the signing of the civil

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nuclear deal between the two countries, which paved the way for the US to strengthen its new strategic partnership with India.

During the state visit of the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, to the US in 2009, President Obama revitalised strategic alliance with India to meet and overcome global challenges and termed it as the global strategic partnership. The Obama administration succeeded substantially in strengthening the existing strategic relationship with India and continued to elevate and develop it in other areas. Obama referred to India as one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century, one that will be vital to the US strategic interests in Asia-Pacific and in the world.¹ Simultaneously, Modi also shifted away from India's traditional foreign policy of "Nonalignment" toward a sharper outward strategic focus, showing that the strategic partnership with the US was in India's national interest.² Today the relationship is strategically diverse; both the countries cooperate not only on the conventional lines of geo-politics, economics and military but also cooperate to curb the threat of global terrorism and containment of China.

Under the Modi's government, the relationship between both the countries took a new turn towards a better and a more robust relationship. Against the backdrop of a closer alignment between Russia, China and Pakistan, the US-India national interest-driven Indian foreign policy is seen as a necessary step by the Modi's government.³ Advances in the US India ties during the early 2000s notably the civil nuclear agreement, the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) and the 2005 Defence Cooperation Framework Agreement between the two countries, all heralded greater opportunity for India in terms of the US cooperation. Later on, the renewal of the Defense Cooperation Framework Agreement and the signing of the Joint Strategic Vision in 2015, further solidified the gains that had been made.⁴

¹ "Fact Sheet: US Relations with India," US Department of State: Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3454.htm>

² Hemal Shah, "US-India's Defense: Pivoting the Strategic Partnership Forward," *Foreign Policy*, January 23, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/23/in-u-s-indias-defense-pivoting-the-strategic-partnership-forward/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ "US India Security Cooperation; Progress and Promise for the Next Administration," Centre for Strategic and International Studies, October 2016, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/161003_Hicks_USIndiaSecurity_Web.pdf

During his three-day visit to the US in 2016, Prime Minister Modi besides meeting the former US President, Barack Obama, delivered a speech at the US Congress and mutually agreed on agreements on energy, defence and trade. Three regions under which the Indo-US relations have sought convergence and gained momentum are Asia Pacific, Afghanistan, and Africa. The peace and security relationship further divides into defence, counter-terrorism and political consultations.

India and the US have always shared a mutual awe for other's vision of pluralism, tolerance and equal opportunity.⁵ The current Indo-US strategic partnership foreshadows combinations of political, economic, defence, technology and security apparatus. There is a visible growth in the level of strategic collaboration between both the two countries over the course of time. The growing Indian economy has proved itself as a fertile market to the US which has been imperative to the strengthening of their relations.

The US and India have often characterised their relations as one which has overcome the "hesitations of history."⁶ They refer to the Indian and American shared values and beliefs as a foundation stone for the progress they have achieved over the last few years. Both the countries have reiterated their support for each other on many issues and areas which have ultimately become a point of convergence in their relationship. Issues such as India's inclusion in the multilateral export control regimes, active role in Afghanistan, combat full spectrum of terrorist threats, and partnership to lead the global efforts for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) have remained as top agendas during many US and India joint statements.⁷

This convergence of interest between both the countries have contributed significantly to the success in promoting constant stability in the relation and the rise in strategic partnership regardless of the party in power in either of the states.

⁵ Narottam Gaan, *India and the United States: From Estrangement to Engagement* (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications), 35.

⁶ Narendra Modi, "For the US and India, a Convergence of Interests and Values," *Business Standard*, June 27, 2017, http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/for-the-us-and-india-a-convergence-of-interests-and-values-117062600134_1.html

⁷ "US India Security Cooperation."

India-US Strategic Partnership

Prime Minister Modi in his address to the US Congress in 2017, highlighted the beginning of a new chapter in the India-US strategic relations. He expressed that a strong relationship could anchor peace, prosperity and stability from Asia to Africa and from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. This growing strategic cooperation is not just geopolitical in nature but both the countries also share numerous areas of interests. These areas include, defence, the space programme, technology, civil nuclear cooperation etc. India's pivotal interest in developing its strategic relations with the US is to ultimately see itself elevated to a great power status in the region. The US also wishes to see the rise of India as a counterweight to China. Washington has also expressed its support for India to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which will enable India to benefit from global nuclear trade. This will boost India's nuclear power status and access to modern technology.

In the economic domain, as a result of the India-US partnership the US investments in India have soared — from a total of US\$7.7 billion in 2004, to US\$28 billion in 2017; the India-US bilateral trade has nearly tripled from US\$36 billion in 2005 to US\$104 billion in 2014, with an aim to reach US\$500 billion in trade.⁸ The Modi government also stepped-up to demonstrate its growing market and booming economy.

Defence Cooperation

Another major part of this strategic partnership is cooperation in the defence sector. It is evident that in the last decade, India has worked assertively to elevate itself in South Asia and rise as a competitor to China, not only economically but also militarily. India, previously had been lagging behind in terms of military modernisation, considered it as a major challenge vis-a-vis China. With a desire to modernise the ageing Indian armed forces, the Modi government started to invest heavily on its military build-up and to achieve its strategic objectives, India started to orient itself with the US arms industry.

⁸ Remarks by Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, Consulate General of India, New York , US Department of State, August 4, 2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2015/245769.htm>

Growing India-US Strategic Cooperation

The level of defence cooperation between the two countries is evident from the breadth and the depth of the defence dialogues, between the Indian Defence Minister and his counterpart in Washington. The dialogues and interaction is not only maintained at a higher political level, but also throughout the defence bureaucracy, and staff level as well. The overall India-US defence cooperation has come through dozens of institutionalised dialogue mechanisms, as well as through people-to-people contacts; investment partnerships and infrastructure.⁹

To strengthen defence cooperation, many agreements were signed which broadened the India-US strategic and security relationship, e.g. joint patrolling of the Indian Ocean, better integration of the two navies and a joint outlook on Afghanistan and global terrorism.

It is estimated that since 2004, India has acquired over US\$10 billion worth of military hardware, equipment and services from the US. This included a number of high-end assets such as the P-8, maritime surveillance and anti-submarine warfare aircraft; Apache attack helicopters; CH-47 Chinook, transport helicopters; C-17 and C-130, transport airplanes and many other systems.¹⁰ Earlier signed in 2005, Washington and New Delhi made strides in their formal defence relations with extending the New Framework for Defence Cooperation for another 10 years and the 2012 US Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI).¹¹

The 2012 DTTI — transforms India-US defence ties from a buyer-seller relationship to a partnership of co-development and co-production.¹² It is to explore and develop efforts by the defence bureaucracy both in India and the US, on how to strengthen and move forward in terms of defence

⁹ K Alan Kronstadt and Shayerah Ilias Akhtar, “India-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, June 19, 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44876.pdf>

¹⁰ “US India Security Cooperation.”

¹¹ Mark Rosen, and Douglas Jackson, “The U.S.-India Defence Relationship: Putting the Foundational Agreements in Perspective,” *CNA Analysis and Solution*, February 2017, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DRM-2016-U-013926-Final2.pdf

¹² Shah, “US-India’s Defense.”

cooperation.¹³ It will also cover the defence trade between the two countries like the purchase of C-130 and other deals, through which India gained access to a host of other US defence equipment and technology, including an aircraft carrier working group, to support India's indigenous defence capabilities.¹⁴ Although the DTTI has magnified India's defence capability but it will lead to an arms race in the region. Over the same period, India has made significant investments in developing its own systems and acquired highly capable systems from other countries.¹⁵

As an umbrella initiative, the DTTI focuses on six "pathfinder" projects: i) Development of a chemical-biological protective ensemble for troops; ii) Development of mobile electric hybrid power stations; iii) A next-generation small unmanned aircraft; iv) Intelligence and surveillance module for transport aircraft; v) Digital helmet-mounted displays and vi) The joint biological tactical detection system, along with two joint working groups one on aircraft carrier technology development and the other on jet engine technology.¹⁶ The US Congress has cleared the decks for India to become a "major defence partner," with the US Senate overwhelmingly passing the US\$618 billion American defence budget for 2017.¹⁷ To strengthen the relationship further, Pentagon created an India Rapid Reaction Cell (IRRC), which magnifies India's growing importance for the US. The IRRC, operational for a few months now, is part of the efforts to pursue all aspects of the DTTI.¹⁸ In addition, the US also seeks collaboration with India to develop mutually agreeable mechanisms to verify the security of defence articles, defence services and related technology such as appropriate cyber security and end use monitoring arrangements consistent with the US export control laws and policy.¹⁹

¹³ "US-India Security and Defense Cooperation," Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/programs/wadhvani-chair-us-india-policy-studies/past-india-chair-projects/us-india-security-and>

¹⁴ Remarks by Nisha Desai.

¹⁵ "US India Security Cooperation."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "US Congress Clears Decks for India to Become Key Defence Partner," *Indian Express*, December 9, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/us-congress-clears-decks-for-india-to-become-key-defence-partner-4418631/>

¹⁸ Josy Joseph, "Pentagon Cell to Push India Trade Ties," *Hindu*, June 10, 2016 <http://www.thehindu.com/news/pentagon-creates-india-rapid-reaction-cell/article7655766.ece>

¹⁹ "US Congress clears decks for India."

Regarding the Indo-US nuclear deal, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India and the US firm, Westinghouse, have agreed to begin engineering and the site design work immediately for six nuclear reactors in India and conclude contractual arrangements by June 2017.²⁰

Cyber Security and Technology Cooperation

India has a very robust space and cyber security programme. Engagement on cyber security related issues between the US and India began in earnest in 2001, with the establishment of the Indo-US Cyber Security Forum, a track 1.5 dialogue. The forum brought together stakeholders from both the governments and their respective private sectors to discuss and collaborate on key issues in the cyber domain.²¹ However, the programme came under serious criticism and doubt when India arrested three of its nationals who had participated in the forum on charges that they had been recruited by the US intelligence services.²²

Later in 2011, both Washington and New Delhi recognised the growing importance of cyber security and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that formalised a relationship between the US Department of Homeland Security and India's Department of Information Technology.²³ The signing of the MoU made way for a new generation security collaboration between the two countries, as it broadened the avenue of security reliance and sharing of critical cyber information as well as collaboration on key cyber related domain issues and theft. The two countries have also inaugurated a yearly strategic and commercial dialogue that covers, in part, cyberspace issues and runs in parallel to the existing

²⁰ "US-based Westinghouse to Build 6 Nuclear Power Plants in India," *Times of India*, June 7, 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/US-based-Westinghouse-to-build-6-nuclear-power-plants-in-India/articleshow/52644065.cms>

²¹ "US India Security Cooperation."

²² Srijith K Nair, "The Case for an India-US Partnership in Cybersecurity," Takshashila Institution, July 14, 2010, <http://takshashila.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/TDD-CyberCollab-SK>

²³ "United States and India Sign Cyber Security Agreement," US Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Press Secretary, July 19, 2011, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2011/07/19/united-states-and-india-sign-cyber-security-agreement>

Cyber Security Forum.²⁴ In June 2016, the US and India announced a shared commitment to a framework for cyberspace cooperation. The framework includes 13 common principles and 21 areas of cooperation to advance the shared principles. Of note, the framework calls out a shared commitment to the multi stakeholder model of Internet governance.²⁵

The US, to a great extent, has also shown its keen interest in India's space programme. In order to further enhance its cooperation with India on its space programme, the US extended cooperation on specific systems, including sensors, satellite etc. In a broader overview the level of cooperation in space programme include earth's oceans and global precipitation, missions to Mars, monitoring climate change, natural disasters and deep space exploration programmes.²⁶ Similarly, India also actively utilises its space programme for military purposes and, through its space based programmes, provides real-time command and control data and information.

The US and India have developed a steady pace of cooperation between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the US.²⁷ Advance space programme collaboration also provides an open opportunity to the US to share technology, for military as well as scientific purposes. Both India and the US further seek to cooperate with each other on areas such as manned space flight, which will undoubtedly increase India's space programme's strength and further enhances accurate earth-sensing capability of India. Nonetheless, the US and India are not able to fully cooperate because of restrictions on the sharing of commercial space launch technologies or capabilities. The US cooperation with India has largely been in the form of US provision of subsystems for a larger or a full satellite to be launched on an Indian rocket.²⁸

²⁴ "Joint Statement on the First US India Strategic and Commercial Dialogue," US Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, September 22, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/09/247192.htm>

²⁵ "Fact Sheet: Framework for the US-India Cyber Relationship," White House, June 7, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/07/fact-sheet-framework-us-india-cyber-relationship>

²⁶ Remarks by Nisha Desai Biswal.

²⁷ "US India Security Cooperation."

²⁸ Ibid.

Counter-terrorism Cooperation

Post 9/11, the area of counter-terrorism acquired great focus for both India and the US, and has become a key area of cooperation. After Mumbai attacks in 2008, the India-US counterterrorism cooperation Initiative was meant to promote intelligence sharing and capacity building activities,²⁹ which led to the establishment of the first Homeland Security Dialogue in 2011.³⁰ Reinvigorating this dialogue and ensuring that it is held annually proved important for developing and maintaining focus on this important issue. At the same time cooperation in areas such as border monitoring technology including software based imagery analysis as well as in sensors to detect chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) materials became avenues of useful cooperation between the two countries.³¹ Both the countries developed a mutual understanding of fighting the challenges and reducing the risks of terrorist attacks. The two countries are bound together by common interests like containing China's growing power, post-US withdrawal coordination in Afghanistan and the need for maritime security in Asia.³²

The US and India had already launched a formal Counterterrorism Joint Working Group (CTJWG) in 2000 that meets once or twice annually, although the two countries cooperated informally before 2000.³³ Nevertheless, many political corners in India echo concerns regarding Washington's willingness to cooperate in curbing terrorists which pose direct threat to India.

²⁹ "India, US Sign Counter-Terrorism Initiative," *Hindu*, July 24, 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-us-sign-counterterrorism-initiative/article529983.ece>.

³⁰ Rick O Nelson, "US India Homeland Security Cooperation Building a Lasting Partnership via Transportation Sector Security," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2013, 4, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/130618_Nelson_US-IndiaHomeland_WEB.pdf.

³¹ "US India Security Cooperation."

³² Shah, "US-India's Defence."

³³ Lisa Curtis, "Building a Strategic Partnership: US-India Relations in the Wake of Mumbai," Testimony before the Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, the US House of Representatives, February 26, 2009, <http://www.heritage.org/testimony/building-strategic-partnership-us-india-relations-the-wake-mumbai>

In the past, India has been frustrated, by what it viewed as inconsistencies and backsliding in the US public statements, concerning the Pakistan-based terrorist threat to India. The Indian officials also believe that the US has withheld information on terrorist operatives suspected of having ties to Kashmiri militants. Furthermore, they are of the view that the US has been reluctant to assist the Indian government with investigations related to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir to spare embarrassment to Pakistan, which has assisted Kashmiri militant groups, many of which are also connected to al-Qaeda.³⁴ Moreover, India's national security establishment fears "as long as Pakistani terrorism is not a threat" to American interests, the US will not expend blood or treasure eliminating Pakistan-origin terrorism for India.³⁵ Nonetheless, both Delhi and Washington tries to remove their differences and work on mutually beneficial level. Its joint cooperation in counterterrorism and law enforcement has generated numerous initiatives, programmes, and working groups, and terrorism has been fore grounded as a key issue in almost every high level US India summit.³⁶

Maritime Security Cooperation

Maritime security is another key area of cooperation between the US and India. In 2016, US-India Maritime Security Dialogue was launched; the second round of the dialogue took place in May 2017 in the US.³⁷ The Maritime Security Dialogue is aimed at establishing to improve cooperation at operational level of the Indian and US maritime forces. Both the countries agreed to include the conclusion of a "white shipping" technical arrangement to improve data sharing on commercial shipping traffic and navy-to-navy discussions on submarine safety and anti-submarine warfare.³⁸ India sees China as being heavily invested in establishing its presence as an economic superpower across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and even Europe, as well as the Indian Ocean region (IOR) — long seen as India's sphere of strategic influence. With the advance of China's Belt and

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Shivshankar Menon, "What China's Rise Means for India," *Wire*, January 4, 2016, <http://thewire.in/2016/01/04/what-chinas-rise-means-for-india-18511/>

³⁶ "US India Security Cooperation."

³⁷ "US India Maritime Security Dialogue," *Media Note*, Office of the Spokesperson, US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/05/270817.htm>

³⁸ Danikar Peri, "India, US hold First Maritime Security Dialogue," *Hindu*, May 17, 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-us-hold-first-maritime-security-dialogue/article8608442.ece>

Road Initiative (BRI), the Chinese military footprint will extend all the way from the Mediterranean to Guam.³⁹

Joint Military Exercises

Another area of strategic cooperation is the joint military exercises. Both the countries take part in numerous military exercises, like the naval exercises, the Marine Corps exercises, and the army exercises. Also, both the countries contribute to fight the threats at sea. The US and India conduct regular service-level exercises, including *Shatrujeet* involving the US Marine Corps and the Indian Army; *Yudh Abbas*, an annual army-to-army exercise; and *Balanced Iroquois*, a special forces training exercise.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, India also took part in the Malabar naval exercise, the exercise mobilised over 8,000 personnel, which included the US and Indian submarines, the US carrier strike group, as well as surveillance planes. Japan also took part in the exercise and the assets in the exercise included the super carrier Nimitz class, the USS John C Stennis, over 20 major warships, about 50 anti-submarine warfare helicopters, long range maritime surveillance aircraft, and over 100 aircraft including Super Hornet fighters.⁴¹ In response, the US is also taking interest in collaborating with India to train peace keeping forces in Africa along with other countries.

Afghanistan Issue

Afghanistan on the counter-terrorism front also plays a pivotal point of convergence of interest for both the countries. In the past few years, the US has significantly increased its consultations with India with regards to Pakistan. The US increased its correspondence and consultation with India over Afghanistan. The US officials frequently visit New Delhi to consult its government officials on its shared interests in Afghanistan.⁴² Following up its cooperation on Afghanistan with India, the US in 2016, restarted the US-

³⁹ “An Historic Opportunity to Partner with India,” Atlantic Council, June 22, 2017, <http://www.publications.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/An-Historic-Opportunity-to-Partner-with-India-web-0622.pdf>

⁴⁰ “US India Security Cooperation.”

⁴¹ Sudhi Ranjan Sen, “India, US, Japan Begin Malabar Joint Naval Exercise Close to South China Sea,” *All India*, June 10, 2016, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-us-japan-begin-malabar-joint-naval-exercise-close-to-south-china-sea-1417661>

⁴² “US India Security Cooperation.”

India-Afghanistan Trilateral Dialogue. The purpose of this initiative was to exchange regular views on the ground situation in Afghanistan, and as a vehicle to work collectively and exchange views on issues of development, economics and security in Afghanistan.

Future Prospects

President Donald Trump has not yet laid a definitive policy towards the South Asian region. Some of his statements, while running his presidential campaign as well as after taking the office of the President, however, provides a sneak peek into the contours of an expected policy. While running his campaign, President Trump, in some of his tweets, proclaimed his love for India and said that the Indian community will have a friend in the White House. The Trump administration is expected to continue and play an imperative role to re-elevate the already thick Indo-US relations. The roots of the relations lie deep within the new Trump administration. The Republican Hindu Coalition supported the campaign of President Donald Trump throughout and donated a massive amount of US\$898,000 to the Trump Victory Fund.⁴³ The Hindu lobby has its tentacles deep in the administration and is highly successful whilst copying the footsteps of the Republican Jewish Coalition lobby. The lobby itself is anti-Islamic and a major platform for unfriendly Pakistani policies. The lobby works hard to be a voice of India in the Trump administration and to advance and amplify the existing trade, economic and defence relations between both the nations. The founder of the coalition, Shalabh Kumar, supported the executive orders passed by President Trump banning immigration and proposed the administration to further ban Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia along with the already banned seven Muslim countries.

President Trump on assuming Presidency, called the Prime Minister Modi. According to the White House read out, the President emphasised the importance of US-India relations, and discussed many areas of interest, which can be further strengthened. The two counterparts also discussed their bilateral relations and committed themselves to stand shoulder-to-shoulder

⁴³ Ishani Duttagupta, "How Republican Hindu Coalition did their bit to help Donald Trump," *Economic Times*, November 10, 2016, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/how-republican-hindu-coalition-did-their-bit-to-help-donald-trump/articleshow/55341851.cms>

with each other, while addressing the security threats and terrorism in the region collectively. Although symbolic, the readout of the courtesy call deeply reflects on the foreseeable developing relations between the two countries.

Trump's administration has more than five Indian American representatives serving at important positions, which make the Indian presence strong. The trade between both the countries stands tall at US\$100 billion, while both aspire to expand it five-fold in the near future and bring the figure to an estimated US\$1 trillion. Also, President Trump criticised China in his campaign and called it US top adversary. This might also work in the favour of India. India, as well as the US, desire to magnify not only their economic and trade relations but also uplift their strategic and defence partnerships. India is interested in purchasing of advance weapons from the US. It is also expected that legislations will be proposed in the Congress with the help of the ardent Republican Indian lobby to make it possible for the certain US companies to sell advance military weaponry to India without any difficulty.

Both the countries have entered into several agreements like the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which allows both the militaries to use each other facilities, spare parts, usage of military bases and most importantly to keep a check on the Chinese activities in the region.⁴⁴ With the LEMOA, now in place, the US is no longer prevented from providing resupply to the Indian ships that are in transit or participating in "authorised port visits, joint exercises, joint training and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts."⁴⁵ While several other agreements like the Communications Interoperability, Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA) are on the table to be signed between both the countries.

It is interesting to see how the recent change in the global geopolitical landscape have brought together India and the US, who have traditionally remained critical of each other. This drastic change in posture reflects on the actual nature of relationship, both the countries share. For the US, India is

⁴⁴ Anwar Iqbal, "US-India Defence Pact to Impact Pakistan, China," *Dawn*, August 30, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1280873>

⁴⁵ *Rosen, Jackson, "The US-India Defence Relationship."*

an ideal candidate to restrain the rise of China, and for India, the US is an ideal partner to push back the growth of Pakistan. It is indeed a relationship of convergence of interest, which is only geopolitical while rest remains a smokescreen. The political and economic rise of China as a global power remains profound for the US. While, the progress Pakistan is making in terms of its economy, security and stability as well as bolstering relations with China, poses a threat to India's aspiration of becoming a regional power.

The desperate need for a firmer relationship between the US and India also stems from the success of the CPEC, which is seen as a threat not only by India but also by the US. The success of the project adds to India's traditional fear of being encircled by the Chinese naval activity through its massive investment in deepening the Gwadar port in Pakistan.⁴⁶ Many of the defence agreements that are being done between the US and India are in the wake of the CPEC project which is said to be a 'serious concern' for the Washington.⁴⁷ The rise of China remains to be an object of anxiety for both India and the US while at the same time the increasing assertiveness of China has rung alarm bells in many parts of Asia.⁴⁸

The CPEC project will also bring economic prosperity to Pakistan, which is considered as another challenge to India as it failed to isolate Pakistan, by anchoring it to terrorism and extremism at the different international forums. The World Bank (WB) had already accredited Pakistan's economy as showing signs of sustained recovery aided by falling commodity and fuel prices, increased energy availability and improved security conditions which is being driven primarily by the initiation of CPEC infrastructure and energy projects.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Gaan, "India and the United States," 208.

⁴⁷ "US Making 'Big Bet' on India in Wake of Pak-China Alliance: Russian Media," *Nation*, March 26, 2017, <http://nation.com.pk/national/26-Mar-2017/us-making-big-bet-on-india-in-wake-of-pak-china-alliance-russian-media>

⁴⁸ Siddharth Varadarajan, "A Partnership Built on Flawed Assumptions," *Hindu*, November 05, 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/A-partnership-built-on-flawed-assumptions/article13670117.ece>

⁴⁹ "The World Bank, Country Profile," <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview>

Many policy and political quarters in India are wary of Pakistan's economic growth as it possibly will make Pakistan an equal contender to India, and break its regional hegemony. At the same time, the CPEC will provide China direct access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, which is worrisome for the US. As a consequence, the US is making a 'big bet'⁵⁰ on India, which also reflects on the US concerns for the growing relationship between Pakistan and China in the larger Asia Pacific region.

The US has for long seen India as a countermeasure for China as a deterrent factor. The CPEC project has impelled the US to further enhance its defence, economic and strategic relations with India. The project after its completion will not only strengthen China's footprint in Asia but also in Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa which adds to the US and India concerns.

The success of the CPEC project, along with the success of the military operations in Pakistan is paving ground for it to reach new heights not only in the region but also globally. It also fuels India's rival intentions towards the Pakistan, as it will help the latter to gain immense strategic advantage in the future. The Indian media is actively propagating against the CPEC project and has repeatedly termed the CPEC as a 'holy cow'⁵¹ for Pakistan by criticising the project for having a footprint in Gilgit-Baltistan, which according to the Indians is part of Jammu and Kashmir. India has also failed to malign and isolate Pakistan internationally as the CPEC project will bring change in the economic status of not only Gilgit-Baltistan but also Balochistan, which will leave India with nothing to exploit Pakistan, within the international community, which is seen as a concern by policy pundits in India.

Strategic Partnership or Liability

The Indian geopolitical landscape and its aspirations to become a regional power demands for better relations with its neighbouring countries, which is

⁵⁰ "US Making 'Big Bet.'"

⁵¹ "CPEC: Pakistan's Newest Holy Cow could also become its Millstone," *Zee News*, December 21, 2016, http://zeenews.india.com/blogs/cpec-pakistans-newest-holy-cow-could-also-become-its-millstone_1960454.html

to some extent becoming a victim of Indo-US strategic relations. From an American perspective, India serves as the best ally in the region; an ally which has proved itself to be a fertile ground from where the US can lead its strategic motives. Where else, the relatively recent evolution of the Indo-US strategic partnership and the Indian proactive following of the US has provided lesser opportunities for India to gain, as it is a substitute in the region, who can curtail the rise of China and play a better more enlarged strategic and security related role in Afghanistan on behalf of the US.

Regardless of the development that both the US and India has achieved in the past decade, certain quarters in India believe that its unparalleled strategic relationship with the US comes at a cost. Its strategic closeness to the US has resulted in India's declining relationship with many other countries, especially with Russia and China. Its strong embrace of a western ally has marked India's departure from its traditional stance of Non-alignment and at the same time has pushed away India's long kept ties with other important countries. A large portion of the Indian media prefers India to work with the Asian states rather than the US because of their view that Americans tendency to meddle, lecture and fixate on issues mainly through the lens of their effects on the US interests.⁵²

In the post-Cold War era, the US and India primarily remained on conflicting paths, as India saw US's policy as an effort to achieve world dominance.⁵³ The Indo-US relations have historically remained on a zigzag path with more downs and less ups, since the non-aligned foreign policy.⁵⁴ The new Indian posture has altered the ritualistic idea of non-aligned India. As a result, India has moved strategically closer to the US, which in return, propelled Moscow to forge closer ties with China and to build new relationships with the Taliban and Pakistan.⁵⁵ The Indo-Russia fall-out is a

⁵² Peter R Lavoy, Shoshana Iliach and Brian Haggerty, "Unlocking the US-India Relationship," *Monitor 360*, <http://www.monitor-360.com/resources/unlocking-the-u.s.-india-relationship>

⁵³ "The United States and India; A Shared Strategic Future," Council for Foreign Relations, and Aspen Institute India, September 2011, https://www.cfr.org/content/publications/.../USIndia_jointstudygroup_IIGG.pdf

⁵⁴ Gaan, "India and the United States," 118.

⁵⁵ Brahma Chellaney, "Revitalising India-Russia Ties a Challenge for Modi," *Hindustan Times*, June 01, 2017, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/revitalising-india-russia-ties-a-challenge-for-modi/story-N7MoezZkITwF9u4thIrxgL.html>

concern for many in New Delhi as it was the longest international alliance during the Cold War. Many policy observers in India attribute this Russian policy change to India's closeness to the US in the recent years, and the fact that India-US partnership changes the power dynamic in Asia completely.⁵⁶

India, while latching on to the US for developing and shaping its strategic interest globally, possibly will lose compatibility in the region and workable relations in the region. The strategic partnership in the longer-run may perhaps drag India into an international competition to prove its reliability to the US and weaken its ability to manoeuvre openly and independently. Given the fickleness of the US political system and the almost whimsical way in which technology and supply restrictions are imposed and lifted, India will place itself at risk by getting too dependent on the American supplies for major weapon systems.⁵⁷

Another important factor is the continuation of common strategic ambition between both the countries. With President Trump's hawkish narrative of 'America first,' some argue that India may quite figure high on Trump's radar.⁵⁸ Similarly, substantive differences over immigration, trade and relations with other countries, not least Iran, a major energy supplier for India may also lead to discomfort between both the countries.⁵⁹ President Trump is considered to be more of an opportunistic, which also makes his policy risky in nature. He lacks strong ideological views on any policy issue, and makes assessments regarding a policy based on its current standing and gains.

⁵⁶ Kanishka Singh, "Russia Risks Derailing Healthy Relationship with India with Pak Bonhomie," *Indian Express*, October 13, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/web-edits/russia-risks-derailing-healthy-relationship-with-india-with-pak-bonhomie-3080321/>

⁵⁷ Varadarajan, "A partnership Built on Flawed Assumptions."

⁵⁸ Indrani Bagchi, "Modi must Visit Trump to Stay on the Radar, India has Huge Stakes in the US," *Economic Times*, May 26, 2017, http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/58852206.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

⁵⁹ Kronstadt, and Akhtar, "India-US Relations."

Certain issues such as climate change, immigration,⁶⁰ especially to tighten the H-1B visa rules, which will adversely affect the Indian Information Technology (IT) industry in the US. India in return signalled its displeasure and made it clear that New Delhi could retaliate in the face of protectionism by the US and several other countries.⁶¹

Another alarming development for India came when the US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, while referring to the Kashmir conflict, said that the Trump administration is concerned about the relationship between India and Pakistan and wants to de-escalate any sort of conflict going forward.⁶² The remarks were not welcomed by India, and it responded by snubbing the US's offer, and restated that its position on bilateral redressal of all issues between the two neighbours including Kashmir has not changed.⁶³ On the other hand, India has repeatedly criticised the US that its war on terrorism does not point toward Pakistan for its terrorism in Kashmir as it is still glossing over Pakistan due to its past record as a reliable friend.⁶⁴

India has remained wary of the love hate relationship between the US and Pakistan despite all the harsh rhetoric from the US. Even at its low, Pakistan's relations with the US remain a cause of concern for the US. It has often debated of the US posture towards the region in teh face of any Indo-Pakistan crisis. Although both, India and the US claim to be strategic partners, certain quarters in India still doubt the tilt US will acquire during Pakistan-India crisis. Certain policy pundits in Delhi are

⁶⁰ Rishi Iyengar, "H-1B Debate: Trump is Making India's Tech Industry Nervous," *CNN*, February 15, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/02/14/news/economy/india-h1b-visa-software-industry/index.html>

⁶¹ "H-1B Visa Debate: India says it's a Trade and Services Issue, Talks Tough after Trump Move," *Hindustan Times*, April 21, 2017, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/h-1b-visa-debate-india-says-it-s-a-trade-and-services-issue-hints-at-retaliation-against-trump-move/story-GVwsiTf4G7LPp9icYokGGM.html>

⁶² Anwar Iqbal, "Pakistan Accepts, India Rejects US Peace Talks Offer," *Dawn*, April 05, 2017 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1324928>

⁶³ "MEA Reacts To Nikki Haley's Offer, Says India's Stand on Bilateral Talks With Pakistan Remains Unchanged," *Huffington Post*, April 04, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/04/04/mea-reacts-to-nikki-haleys-offer-says-indias-stand-on-bilater_a_22025407/

⁶⁴ Gaan, "India and the United States," 34.

wary that deep strategic cooperation with the US will leave little or less space for India to manoeuvre on its own at the global stage. Engaging with the US on strategic matters will land the relationship hostage to a 'yes/no' decision for India next time the US calls for a global coalition to exert force on a third nation, which India might be reluctant to.⁶⁵ The Indian defense industrialists and elites have often complained about the US reliability as a supplier (due to past nuclear sanctions) and have raised concerns regarding purchasing of the American military hardware.⁶⁶ Some also suggest that the US wants India to develop economically and militarily but not too strong to challenge the US.⁶⁷ The changing regional, domestic and global environment will keep on impacting and challenging the Indo-US strategic partnership. The border standoff between India and China was attributed to Washington's direct involvement as an instigator in encouraging India to come face to face with China. India was blamed to be a pawn in the hands of the US who was the "South China Sea trick" and seek strategic benefits.⁶⁸ Similarly, the Indo-US joint naval exercises in the South China Sea are also setting a tone for India's relations with China.

Conclusion

The growth in the Indo-US strategic partnership over the course of time is one of the most notable geopolitical developments in the post-Cold War world. Currently, Washington is seeking to further open the Indian market not only to the US but to the world. In order to serve the US corporate interests, the US is pressing New Delhi to introduce regulatory and other legal changes, strengthen intellectual-property rights provisions and initiate broader economic reforms.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ "US India Security Cooperation."

⁶⁶ Curtis, "Building a Strategic Partnership."

⁶⁷ Gaan, "India and the United States," 135.

⁶⁸ "Chinese Daily Accuses US of Trying to Escalate Sikkim Standoff," *Economic Times*, July 26, 2017,

http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/59770726.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

⁶⁹ Brahma Chellaney, "When will the US Accommodate India's Strategic

Interests?," *India Abroad*, June 10, 2016, http://www.indiaabroad-digital.com/indiaabroad/20160610?sub_id=9fcrmcUgDgeM&folio=M1&pg=47#pg

Although Pakistan has been a close ally of the US since decades, the US approach towards Pakistan has been nothing more than a policy of denials and sanctions. While on the other hand, the US not only supported India but also helped it in its strategic growth. The defence relationship extends beyond military exercises and meetings of senior officers or officials. Important interactions also occur among lower-level officers and officials.

The US supports such interactions and exchanges through US\$1.3 million in annual International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding, used to support the Indian officers' and officials' attendance at the US educational programmes offered through Department of Defence and Department of State's educational institutions.⁷⁰ Even after a decade of collaboration, it views Pakistan through the lens of security and doubt.

The successes of the Indo-US relation under the Obama administration have set a positive precedent for the new Trump administration and hence, expansion in the US India strategic partnership. The constant collaboration between New Delhi and Washington at different levels – military or trade has built a compelling case for India in the US.

Moreover, India has been able to use its cards extremely well, while selling itself globally, exploiting narratives such as common risks, threats, challenges and opportunities. Under the tenure of Trump, the relations will remain on a steady path and perhaps bolster. Another important reason for a stable and growing India is Trump's vested personal business interests. Trump has heavily invested in the construction of Trump towers in Mumbai, Gurgaon and Pune, which also contributes to his inclination towards India.

India has also managed to overcome its issue of mistrust with the US, while Pakistan is still struggling to do so. One of the other major reasons of the success of the Indo-US relation is the constant communication between both the countries not only at the government level but also on various other levels, including the academia and think tanks.

The US has been able to play with the two nuclear power states in South Asia with quiet an ease. It supported military build-up of Pakistan during the

⁷⁰ "US India Security Cooperation."

Growing India-US Strategic Cooperation

Cold War time while preventing India to stand against Pakistan. Decades down the road, the US is still doing the same but with different regional partners. Its main ambition is to maintain an upper hand in South Asia by keeping both Pakistan and India reliant on technology and resupply from the US which will give it leverage with both the states.