

INDIA-USA BILATERAL RELATIONS SINCE 2005

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolution of Indo-US bilateral relations since 2005, focusing on major areas of cooperation such as defence, trade, nuclear energy, technology, and counter-terrorism. It analyses the key developments that have transformed India and the United States from strategic partners to comprehensive global partners. The article also highlights major challenges and differences in the relationship. It argues that despite certain areas of disagreement, growing strategic and economic interests have strengthened Indo-US bilateral relations and made them increasingly significant in contemporary international politics.

Keywords: USA, Cold War, Nuclear, IAEA, NPT, CTBT,

INTRODUCTION

India and the United States of America (USA) are constitutional democracies and share mutuality in their international outlook over the decades. The foundation of this mutuality is based on respect for diversity and commitment to democratic values. However, the international relations and foreign policy of the two countries have not adequately reflected this mutuality. For a considerable part of the last seventy-five years, both the countries have not been under favourable terms, whether in relation to the Cold War era global politics or on the question of a more equitable international economic order or on the issues related to nuclear proliferation. Demise of USSR and end of cold war created a change in the attitudes of India and United States. Drying Russian aid and economic liberalization made India to move closer towards United States. At the same time India rose to prominence in American foreign policy because of the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean.

US President Bill Clinton visited India in 2000 and signed a joint statement known as “Vision statement”. Both countries agreed to establish a joint working group on counter terrorism. Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee also visited US in the same year. It led to the beginning of strategic partnership between India and United States (Adam, 2004). Vajpayee-Bush meeting in 2004 led a signing of Next Step in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) covering four areas: Civilian space programme, Civilian atomic energy cooperation, Missile technology programme, High technology trade. Manmohan Singh who succeeded Vajpayee as the Prime Minister of India in June 2004 showed his eagerness to promote the Ties towards US. In his first meeting with President Bush on September 21, 2004 in New York. Prime Minister Singh expressed his desire to fully implement the NSSP. During his official visit to the United States in July 2005 Prime Minister Singh discussed on civil nuclear cooperation deal that would make the two countries true partners in nuclear cooperation.

During the discussion on civilian nuclear cooperation India agreed to adhere to the (a) separate civilian and military nuclear facilities and programmes and file an International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEA) declaration regarding its civilian facilities, (b) place its civilian nuclear facilities under IAEA

safeguards voluntarily. (c) Sign and adhere to an additional protocol with respect to civilian nuclear facilities. (d) Continue its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing. (e) Work with the US for the conclusion of a multilateral fissile material cut off treaty (f) refrain from transfer of nuclear related technologies and (g) secure nuclear materials and technology through comprehensive export control legislation.

The framework of this agreement was July 18 2005. Joint statement by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and then US president George W Bush under which India agreed to separate its civil nuclear facilities under international atomic energy agency safeguards and in exchange, the United States agreed to work towards full civil nuclear cooperation with India.

The signing of the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement in Washington on 10 October 2008 was a culmination of the civil nuclear energy initiative announced during the visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to US in 2005 India successfully concluded an India specific safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on 1 August 2008 which paved the way for the US to approach the 45 nation nuclear suppliers group (NSG) for an adjustment of the NSG guidelines to enable its civil nuclear cooperation and trade with India (Vickery, 2018).

India-US strategic relations under the BJP-led NDA government post-2014. Recognizing a substantial shift in these ties, the research focuses on the implications of strategic foundational defence agreements, the geostrategic alignment in the Indo-Pacific region. The study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis; evaluating structural, domestic, and leadership-level variables. Using a qualitative research methodology, the study draws on both primary and secondary sources to explore the historical context and the transformative changes in bilateral relations. It highlights the strategic cooperation through foundational defence agreements, engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, and the pragmatic, realist leadership style of Narendra Modi.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

India's relationship with the United States of America began shortly after independence. However, the U.S. was keen to maintain a good relationship with India during the Second World War as the U.S. President Roosevelt had expressed to have support for freedom struggle of India. Washington bilateral relationship with New Delhi. Recent developments, in the world's largest (India) and the oldest (United States) democracies, whether in the field of defence cooperation or any other, indicate that the earlier „tit for tat’ policy is no longer a viable option for either country. Moreover, they understand the nature of their interdependence underpinned by their “overlapping national interests” (Ghosal, 2021). The history of India-United States relationship has been divided in to four phases. Period of Cold War; End of the Cold War; Post-Pokhran II Period and Post-Clinton Visit.

- a. Period of Cold War: Starting from the 1940s till the end of the Cold War, the two countries had minimum relationship. United States interest in India was evident as early as 1942, five years before independence when President Franklin D. Roosevelt suggested to Winston Churchill that he supported India's independence movement. The United States contribution to India's growth is praiseworthy. The United States was good friend, it had provided critical assistance right after the war with China, and the CIA helped India establish a professional foreign intelligence service widely known as RAW. The United States relationship with Pakistan was weakened; the alliance had lost its luster by the late 1950s. Finally, the United States had strongly supported the internal revolutions; the University of Illinois was in the forefront of the Indian Green Revolution and advanced agricultural technologies.

India's strategy of Non-alignment suffered from two inherent weaknesses as follows:

1. India did not have full support and goodwill of the newly emerging nations in Asian and African continents.
2. Nehru ignored the need to evolve a concept of Regional Security.
- b) End of the Cold War: The end of the Cold War liberated both India and the United States from the past. One witnessed positive transform in the relationship between the two countries in the post- Cold War era. Both the countries were willing to start a strategic discussion and work for a better relationship. However, nuclear non-proliferation and global disarmament still remained an issue of debate between the two countries. The discriminatory factor in the indefinitely extended NPT coupled with the discriminate factors in CTBT provided enough reasons for India to believe that these steps were taken by the nuclear weapon states to prevent India from joining their club. It was unacceptable to India that its national security should remain vulnerable to both armed threats and political blackmail through its exclusion permanently from the nuclear club, while its existing members and their allies would continue to enjoy the unhindered protection of nuclear weapons. The then Indian Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee rightly said, “The NPT are discriminatory and hypocritical. Our hope is that those nations that want to continue their nuclear monopoly will accept that the same rules should apply to all”.
- c) Post-Pokhran II Period: “The Buddha has smiled”, India carried out a series of planned Pokhran II nuclear tests successfully, on 11 May 98. There was, predictably, a shock to the United States administration. Sanctions were automatically imposed on India, as mandated by Glenn 3 Amendment¹¹. However, these measures did not have the intended effect on the Indian economy and Political moral. Yet just four years after these tests India’s relations with all these countries were back on normal. The United States has outlined an ambitious strategy toward India, based on common strategic, defence, economic and political interests. United States saw a long-term strategic partnership with India in the overall American and global interest. There has been a remarkable identity of the two countries' strategic vision and common resolve to work together in future.
- d) Post Clinton Visit: The said Clinton visit was a landmark event that symbolized goodwill and improved relations between the two states. The Clinton visit laid the foundation for transforming India- United States relations, which got a boost during the first Bush Administration. The realistic nature of United States foreign strategy was also becoming clear in Clinton’s two-pronged strategy towards India, one emphasizing the subject of markets and trade, and the other non-proliferation. President George W. Bush carried forward the Clinton strategy of engagement in South Asia with a special emphasis on India- United States relations, and more importantly, with a transformed nuclear strategy.

India has been pursuing a well- planned policy of improving and strengthening ties with the United States the visit of Indira Gandhi to America in 1982 worked as “operation defrost” between the two countries. The improved process continued after Rajiv Gandhi took over in 1985. This vivid to America in June 1985 was a smash hit. The memorandum of understanding regarding technology transfer was a definite landmark. This process acquired a new momentum after the end of the cold war in 1989.

Demise of USSR and end of cold war created a change in the attitudes between of India and United States. Drying Russian aid and economic liberalization made India to move closer towards United States. At the same time India rose to prominence in American foreign policy because of the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean.

INDIA USA RELATIONS DURING UPA GOVT

The new United Progress Alliance (UPA) government, headed by Dr. Manmohan Singh as prime minister, took office in New Delhi in May 2004. Manmohan Singh initially followed in the footsteps of Vajpayee in pursuing closer engagements in the first term of the UPA government. The civil nuclear deal signed in 2005 was a historic milestone in Indian-US relations. This agreement provided for India to propose a plan for separating its nuclear program into two branches: a safeguarded civilian part and an un-safeguarded military program. Only the civilian part would be involved in the nuclear trade with the United States. This agreement permitted India to acquire civil nuclear technology from the US and other members of the NSG and accorded India the status of a de facto nuclear weapon state.

After the United States and India concluded the nuclear agreement in July 2005, New Delhi delayed beginning talks with the IAEA on the safeguard agreement because of domestic opposition from communist and other leftist parties that were part of the ruling coalition. The UPA government depended on the support of these parties to continue in power. The left parties threatened to withdraw their support if the UPA government went with the safeguard agreement. In July 2007, India and the US announced that they had concluded a draft agreement, following more than a year of negotiation, to establish a framework of civil nuclear cooperation between them, including fuel assurance technology transfer and safeguard agreements (Ganguly, 2007). Finally, the US president signed the legislation on the Indo-US civil nuclear deal, approved by the US Congress, called the United States India nuclear cooperation approval and non-proliferation enhancement act, on October 8, 2008. In July 2009, during US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to India, a strategic dialogue was initiated with the aim of enhancing bilateral cooperation between the two countries across several sectors. As a result of the strategic dialogue, both nations agreed to strengthen their "people to people, business to business, and government to government linkages... for the mutual benefit of both countries and for the promotion of global peace, stability, and security," as per a joint statement. The areas were covered in the outline of the external bilateral initiative: promoting global security and counterterrorism in the first place; disarmament and non-proliferation in the second; trade and economic relations in the third; high technology in the fourth; energy security, clean energy, and climate change in the fifth; agriculture in the sixth; education in the seventh; health in the eighth.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, reaffirmed the US and India's global strategic cooperation during his 22–26 November 2009 visit to Washington. A long-term framework for the Indo US global strategic partnership was established with the support of President Obama's visit to India from November 6–9, 2010, which gave the bilateral collaboration more impetus. President Obama called the US-India relationship one of the most significant partnerships of the twenty-first century- science and technology.

INDIA USA RELATIONS DURING NDA GOVT

the India-US relationship is the most consequential relationship of the 21st century and is defined as a "comprehensive global strategic partnership." It is a consequential relationship because of the impact that this relationship will have on shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region and the emerging future world order. Additionally, the India-US relationship is the most comprehensive global strategic relationship as it isn't limited to bilateral engagements; rather, today there is additionally a growing level of cooperation between the two countries at the regional and global levels.

Strategic cooperation between the two countries has substantially gone up after the signing of all the pending foundational defence agreements and other initiatives like the LEMOA agreement in 2016, the revival of the QUAD initiative in 2017, the initiation of the 2+2 dialogue in 2018, the COMCASA agreement in 2018, the Industrial Security Annex in 2019, the BECA agreement in 2020, and the

initiative on critical and emerging technology (ICET) in January 2023. Additionally, today, the private sector has become much more involved. One of the biggest shifts in the bilateral relationship between the US and India is the open ideological commitment made by his government to the strategic relationship. Furthermore, Modi's plan for India's dramatic economic transformation largely. One of the biggest shifts in the bilateral relationship between the US and India is the open ideological commitment made by his government to the strategic relationship. They also identified other projects including weapons for co-production and co-development. In a country where the virtue of India's foreign policy is determined by how far apart it is from Washington, Modi worked closely with the United States to reach a significant global climate deal in Paris at the end of 2015 (Khan, 2017).

Modi's geostrategic embrace of the USA was not merely rhetorical; the Modi government signed multiple foundational defence agreements and cooperated closely with the US within the regional security framework in the Indo-Pacific region. In order to boost its strategic cooperation with India, the United States designated India as a "major defence partner in 2016," which opened the door for increased cooperation on a range of defence issues, most notably defence trade and technology. In 2018, the United States provided India with "strategic trade authorization category 1 status," which further opened the door for dual-use and cutting-edge technologies for India by reducing bureaucratic licensing processes for India. Furthermore, in order to pursue deeper strategic cooperation with the United States, the Narendra Modi government signed the "Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)" in 2016, which allows the militaries of both countries access to each other's facilities (Khurshid, 2023).

Subsequently, the "communications compatibility and security agreement (COMCASA)" signed in 2018 allows the sale and exchange of encrypted communications data and equipment between countries (Bhatia, 2020). Additionally, in December 2018, Washington and Delhi inaugurated their first "(2+2) defence and foreign ministers-level dialogue" (Banna, 2020). In 2020, India and the US signed the BECA agreement. Under this agreement, there is an exchange of geo-spatial intelligence between the two countries on a real-time basis.

This strategic relationship has extended under the leadership of Narendra Modi and Donald Trump. Historically, relations between India and the United States were tense during the Cold War, but they began to improve significantly about 19 years ago. Prime Minister Modi made his first State Visit to US from 21-23 June 2023 at the invitation of President Biden. In addition to a bilateral meeting with President Biden, he addressed a Joint Meeting of US' Congress and interacted with business and thought leaders. PM Modi had visited the US in September 2021 for the first in-person Quad Leaders' Summit on 24 September 2021 and had a bilateral meeting with President (Desk, 2023).

INDIA & UNITED STATES STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP: NUCLEAR & SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

Nuclear Issues are always sensitive to political, social, military and strategic shifts. Such a critical issue, therefore, cannot be separated from the overall geo-strategic relations.

In March 1998, the BJP became the major party after parliamentary elections and took power. Soon afterwards, Prime Minister Bihari Vajpayee gave orders to arrange for a nuclear weapons test. The BJP-led government decided to conduct a nuclear test primarily due to domestic politics and secondarily because of the BJP's new strategic vision that included competition with China. In May 1998, BJP agreed with Fernandez and took the nuclear test decision by referring to the need for a nuclear balance with their potential opponent. China had tested, from 1964 to 1995 and India wanted to display its nuclear capabilities to its strategic competitor.

India's May 1998 test ended the country's three-decades-old moratorium on nuclear tests. In a statement to the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, after the test, Prime Minister Vajpayee announced that India would not be the first to use nuclear weapons and he promised to avoid an arms race, which would mean that India would produce just enough weapons for minimum deterrence. United States sanctions after the Pakistani test and pressures further influenced Indian leaders to devise a Nuclear Doctrine and consider a specified Security Strategy. Starting in July 1998, a series of conciliations between then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and then US emissary Strobe Talbot dealt with nuclear weapons command-and-control and a transparent nuclear doctrine, as well as arms control²¹. The Singh-Talbot dialogues eventually led to the reaffirmation of civilian command and-control and a doctrine of "minimum deterrent and no-first-use."

On December 15, 1998, Prime Minister Vajpayee spoke before the Rajya Sabha, India's upper house of parliament, and outlined the main features of nuclear weapons doctrine and policy as follows: "deployment, survivability, and second-strike capability India will deploy its nuclear deterrent - "minimum recessed deterrence." . India's nuclear doctrine includes a policy of No-First- Use and —Non-use against non-nuclear weapons state (Mahapatra, 1998).

In October 2001, Bush waived sanctions placed on India following the 1998 tests. By November 2002, India and the United States agreed to set up the High Technology Cooperation Group (in short, H.T.C.G.), a body to facilitate the transfer of sophisticated civilian and military technology and to discuss space and nuclear cooperation. This organization soon became a part of the larger India-United States N.S.S.P. initiative begun in January 2004. The N.S.S.P. assumed the function of expanding India- United States cooperation in civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programs, and high-technology trade, leading to modification of the United States' export licensing policies.

India's former defence minister Pranab Mukherjee and US then Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld signed a 10-year defence agreement entitled "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defence Relationship" on June 27, 2005, just prior to the U.S.-India joint statement. This agreement called for expanding the bilateral defence trade including technology transfer, as well as joint research, development, and production programs. Russia and France have already voiced approval of the United States' broad lifting of constraints on trade with India, hoping soon to be able to provide fuel and technology for India's nuclear, space, and defense programs.

United States have reached an historic agreement on civil nuclear cooperation. The agreement addresses India's rising energy needs for its growing economy. On July 18, 2005 meeting between the United States President George W. Bush and India's Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh, India made major gains in one area of particular note: access to dual-use technology. Nuclear technology will lift India's masses to a higher level of electricity and convenience.e. India and the United States have charted a course toward transforming India into a "major world power in the 21st century." While the joint U.S. India statement issued on July 18 represents a significant step forward in strategic bilateral relations. India successfully concluded an India specific safeguards agreement with the international atomic energy agency (IAEA) on 1 August 2008 which paved the way for the US to approach the 45 nation nuclear suppliers group (NSG) for an adjustment of the NSG guidelines to enable its civil nuclear cooperation and trade with India.

Indian Defence forces are in need to expand its sourcing of military hardware. According to 2005 edition of "Deadly Arsenals", India presently has between 70 to 110 Nuclear-Weapons plus 400 to 500 kilograms of weapons grade uranium on hand⁶¹. Given India's present level of technology, a stockpile of that size can produce about 100 atomic weapons. Those weapons are fairly unsophisticated for long range missiles, like Agni III (IRBM). On June 2005 India and United States signed "US-India Defence

Relation Agreement”, which gave India access to sophisticated missile technology e.g. ICBM, under the guise of aiding India’s space program. Indeed by allowing India to buy uranium by NSG in the Uranium market, the Nuclear Deal will let India divert all of its domestic uranium supplies to weapon production.

US DEFENCE AND SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

The positive growth in India-U.S. relationships is generally attributed to the successful conclusion of civil nuclear cooperation agreement between the two countries in 2005 and additional Defence and security support to the cooperation that came about in the wake of successful conclusion of related agreements over the years. India US defence cooperation is based on “New Framework for India-US Defence Cooperation”, which was renewed for ten years in 2015. In 2016, the defence relationship was designated as a Major Defence Partnership (MDP).

When the Narendra Modi led BJP government signed the “Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)” in 2016 and the “Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)” in 2018 with the United States of America (USA), many in Indian political circles claimed that Modi had sounded the “death knell” for the “Nehruvian policy” of non-alignment. As a result, India has effectively become a tool for achieving US policy objectives in the area, with the main one being to contain China. Additionally, New Delhi has increased the likelihood of war breaking out between India and its larger neighbour to the north, whose military is far stronger and larger.

Indi bilateral dialogue, military exercises, and defence procurements. At the apex of dialogue mechanisms is the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue co-chaired by the Minister of External Affairs and Minister of Defence and the US Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence. This dialogue provides guidance on political, military and strategic issues. The security agreements and treaties with other countries serve as the foundation upon which the United States determines the scope of its collaboration. These are known as foundational defence agreements, and they provide the essential framework and enhance interoperability between militaries by creating shared standards and facilitating the same technologies.

The U.S. is obligated by its congressional laws to sign these foundational defence agreements before exporting any sensitive military hardware to another country. The four "foundational" defence cooperation agreements with the USA are GSOMIA, LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA. These agreements are largely intended to defend the interests of the United States, its allies, and partners in terms of extremely sensitive military data and technology, and they also involve varied amounts of information and data sharing.

India -US Military to Military exchanges take place through high-level visits, Exercises, Training Courses, and regular service-specific bilateral mechanisms. India has the largest number of military exercises with USA, which are growing in scale and complexity. Important bilateral exercises include Yudh Abhyas (Army), Vajra Prahar (Special Forces), Malabar (Navy), Cope India (Air Force), and Tiger Triumph (tri-services). Red Flag, RIMPAC, CUTLASS Express, Sea Dragon, Milan are some of the Multilateral Exercises in which the two countries participate.

The India-US Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap which concluded in May 2023, seeks to fast-track technology cooperation and co-production in areas of mutual interest. The India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS X)– a network of universities, incubators, corporates, think tanks, and private investment stakeholders was launched in June 2023. The second INDUS X Summit was held in New Delhi in February 2024. The third edition of the INDUS-X Summit concluded in the

United States, marking a progress in the advancement of a joint defence innovation ecosystem in India and the USA. Held on 9-10 September 2024, the Summit was a landmark event jointly organised by the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) and Stanford University.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between India and America improved significantly. They improved their ties in different areas including defence, security, and strategic areas. The George W. Bush–Manmohan Singh era saw significant advancements in India-US relations. The Narendra Modi Government took office in May 2014, the relationship between India and the US in terms of defence and security has significantly improved. On the Indian side, the long-standing Indian policy of strategic autonomy has been reinterpreted in the context of pursuing stronger strategic engagement with the US by signing these strategic foundational agreements. For India, expanding defence partnerships with like-minded countries, especially with major powers like the US, is the only appropriate option and the best use of strategic autonomy.

India and the United States have signed a series of foundational agreements in an effort to strengthen their strategic relations with one another in the face of a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. India faces security concerns from China, and as a result, the government of Narendra Modi has displayed a greater urgency to finish these defence foundational agreements with the US. Modi has sought closer strategic ties with the United States without worrying about the ideological baggage of non-alignment left over from the Cold War. These strategic foundational defence agreements have strengthened India-US strategic ties in a substantial way. It is because of these foundational defence agreements that today there is greater technology transfer from the United States to India. These foundational defence agreements have additionally developed the strategic capabilities of Indian defence forces in both land, air, and sea and subsequently strengthened India's strategic autonomy.

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