THE CHANGING FACE OF DEFENSE RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND THE US: PROSPECTS AND DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract: Given their common interests and concerns about several challenging issues, India-US relations are currently considered to be among the most significant partnerships of the twenty-first century. The US is presently India's third-largest defense partner. Despite their defense cooperation, India and the US have more opportunities and issues in their relationship. The study examines current trends in US-India alliances across four key domains: defense, industrial, technological, and strategic partnerships. The Quad, the outcomes of Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to the US, India's delicate balancing act in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, US security worries in South Asia and the Asia-Pacific, and more.

Introduction

Recognized as one of the "Defining Partnerships" of the twenty-first century, Indo-US cooperation is marked by concrete and dynamic strategic interactions. With a great degree of strategic maturity, India and the US have sought to go beyond simple cooperation in their relationship. This alliance has grown into a worldwide cooperation based on similar interests in trade, security, strategy, defense, and other areas. (Adhikari 2015) India's economy has grown over the past three decades, and the end of the Cold War has made it a prospective player in the global arena. India has become a focal point of US foreign policy due to its growing military capabilities, diversified populace, cultural influence, and strategic supremacy in the South Asian region. (Kronstadt 2012).

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the US reevaluated its foreign policy. As a result, India was recognized as a developing global force with shared strategic objectives in the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS). The 10-year Defense Framework Agreement, sometimes referred to as "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership" (NSSP), was signed in 2005, which strengthened the partnership even more (Samuel, 2007). Aside from this context, this paper will highlight various events in the current bilateral relations between the US and India. Among these are the current alignment between India and the US, India's involvement in the Quad, US security concerns in South Asia, obstacles to India-US defense cooperation, the recent visit of the Indian PM to the US, and India's balancing act in the Russia-Ukraine war.

I. A Journey of Estrangement to Engagement in Indo-US Relations

Due to the convergence of structural, domestic, and individual-level factors, the relationship between the United States and India has shifted from estrangement to engagement. Globalization and interdependence in the twenty-first century demand unprecedented international cooperation for freedom, democracy, prosperity, and peace. Although the United States showed little interest in South Asia during the Cold War, the region is now crucial to the country's long-term military, economic, and political objectives. (Chait 2006).

On June 22, 2023, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a joint session of Congress after being warmly welcomed by President Biden and the first lady at a state dinner at the White House. The current administration is only hosting him as the third state leader. Apart from that, the Modi administration has brought about a practical alignment of common

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objectives and values in India-US relations, replacing the past's ideological blind spots. It was clear that Modi and Biden got along, as well as the promises made during the state visit. Given the shifting geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific area, this was a pivotal moment in the mutual recognition of strategic interests (Sinha, 2023).

Ideological differences between the leaders of India and the United States caused tension in their defense ties during the Cold War. However, there has been a significant shift since the end of the Cold War, with the US and India trying to establish closer ties. At the core of this shift is the recognition of shared values, goals, and opportunities for cooperation across a variety of fields (Sharma 2008).

The two nations' alignment and shared interests include supporting democracy and the established international order, having similar ideologies, and fortifying their tactical alliance with the United States of America. The United States and India share a common interest in trade, investment, and connectivity to promote global security, stability, and economic prosperity. Washington and New Delhi reaffirmed their commitment to a strong, rule-based international order that upholds democratic values, protects national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and promotes prosperity and peace for all in two direct talks. Both leaders have attended numerous meetings with Australia and Japan as part of the Quad agreement. The United States supports India's rise to prominence as a significant global force and an important partner (U.S. Department of State 2022).

In addition to the aforementioned, India and the US have close working relationships with several international organizations, including the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the United Nations. The United States of America welcomed India's two-year term on the United Nations Security Council in 2021 and supports reform of the UNSC that would make India a permanent member. (US Department of State 2022).

II. Strategic Engagements

Despite the strong bonds that exist between India and the US in a variety of areas, the two nations face several relationship issues, which are highlighted below;

We no longer see South Asia as a strategically significant region. Before the Second World War, the US had little involvement in South Asia and saw it mainly through a commercial lens. However, US involvement in the region grew gradually due to geopolitical factors, such as the Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union. The US has reevaluated its security and policy concerns in South Asia in light of recent events, despite the region's marginal strategic importance during the Cold War. This article examines the reasons behind US security concerns in South Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

The rise of China across various domains, including the military, economy, technology, and politics, has led to a notable shift in the distribution of power. The effects are now felt worldwide, as the movements are audible. It is said that preventing the emergence of a subtly aggressive China will be essential to maintaining the stability and security of the Indo-Pacific area. “The US, UK, and Australia have announced plans to hold a trilateral security agreement (AUKUS) in September 2021 in response to China's increasing aggression. Additionally, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has been reactivated. Growing power centers like Australia, Japan, and India are regarded as regional balancing powers” (Dev, 2022).

There are territorial disputes between China and several of its neighboring countries. In addition to asserting sovereignty over the South China Sea, it has disputed Japanese control over the Senkaku Islands. In an attempt to expand the exclusive economic zone and boost its power and responsiveness, Beijing has also built airfields, military bases, and artificial islands in the Paracel and Spratly Islands. There are competing claims in the South China Sea

between the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Sino-Indian relations have collapsed because of the Galwan incident, and Taiwan remains on China's list of outstanding issues. These hotspots can worsen and lead to unrest in the area. (Dev 2022).

The relationship between the US and South Asia has changed in the wake of 9/11 and the strategic engagement between the US and India. Because of its involvement in Afghanistan, the rivalry between Pakistan and India, worries about the spread of nuclear weapons, counterterrorism initiatives, and China's growing sway over the region, the US has been forced to reassess its policy. Consequently, a wide range of fundamental issues is now included in US security concerns regarding South Asia.

II.1 Indo-Pacific

The three main countries that the US is concerned about in South Asia are Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The US developed a substantial military presence in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks. US involvement in Pakistan is concentrated on counterterrorism and non-proliferation programs. The United States has interests in both commerce and diplomacy with India.

The Taliban took over Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul on August 15, 2021. President Ashraf Ghani was compelled to flee Afghanistan as a result of the security forces' refusal to stand up. The expected 20-year troop withdrawal of US and NATO soldiers from the country had just begun a few days before this incident. We and our NATO allies saw the Taliban's comeback as a strategic setback and proof that Afghanistan is a graveyard of empires. Extremist groups have benefited from the Taliban takeover in their efforts to establish their own religious paradise in the region. As a result, Afghanistan's neighbors have had to bear the consequences. (Wani 2022).

The US acknowledged India in a joint statement on July 18, 2005, as a sophisticated nuclear state that should be accorded the same privileges and benefits as other such countries. According to President Bush, the US would provide full civil nuclear energy cooperation for India, and the partnership would advance India's status as a nuclear power. (Sultan, 2006). However, non-proliferation pledges pertaining to WMDs and related technologies are a requirement for this cooperation. (Thomas, 2008). Its specific goal is to keep India's nuclear programs for civil and military use apart, with India's civil nuclear facilities protected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). As part of the cooperation, 44 countries must also give their approval for India's civil nuclear program to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). (Khanna, 2007).

As an advanced nuclear state, India is subject to a number of obligations under the Indo-US nuclear deal. These include identifying and distinguishing between its civilian and military nuclear programs, putting civilian nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards by signing an additional protocol, continuing its unilateral nuclear testing moratorium, working with the US until a multilateral fissile cut-off treaty is reached, and refraining from transferring technology for enrichment and reprocessing. To safeguard nuclear materials and technology, India must also comply with the regulations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), as well as extensive export control laws. The US-Indian agreement aims to change US laws and fully cooperate in civil nuclear energy. (Thomas, 2008).

The United States of America (USA), India, Australia, and Japan comprise the Quad, also known as the "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" (QSD). One of the Quad's main goals is working toward an Indo-Pacific region that is free, open, prosperous, and inclusive. China's strategic response to its military and economic growth is expected to be reflected in the forum. As a member of the Quad, India may ask the other members for assistance in retaliating against Chinese hostilities should they escalate close to its borders. India may also

conduct strategic analysis in the Indo-Pacific area with the aid of its naval force. (Deshpande, 2021).

Based on the Quad's current trajectory, India has employed substantial diplomatic means to normatively structure the strategically important Indo-Pacific alliance. India's efforts aim to establish a consensus-building, normative framework that will serve as a declaration of intent for the Quad's future direction. This framework will organize the Quad as a platform that promotes freedom, openness, and transparency while attempting to preserve multipolarity in the area. (Ranade, 2022).

II.2 Russia-Ukraine War

Due to the crisis in Ukraine, which has wreaked havoc throughout the world as well as in the country's immediate vicinity. India is navigating its relations with both major countries during the unrest in Ukraine while maintaining its historical ties to Russia and forging new alliances with the United States. This has resulted in the emergence of a complex web of international partnerships and relationships. (Tripathi 2023). India also needs to consider the ongoing conflict in Ukraine when determining the best way to secure its energy supply. Russia is one of India's leading suppliers of crude oil, so any disruptions to the energy sector caused by the conflict could have significant economic effects. India has made efforts to diversify its energy supplies by reducing its reliance on any one country, particularly Russia. To reduce potential risks and maintain energy stability, it has increased imports from other nations, including the US (Tripathi, 2023).

As the Russia-Ukraine war approaches its first anniversary, the UN General Assembly is debating a resolution that emphasizes "the need to reach, as soon as possible, a comprehensive, just and lasting peace" as stipulated in the UN Charter. (Roy 2023).

India, the current rotating president of the G20, hosts a number of yearly gatherings with some of the world's most influential nations. These conferences emphasize cooperation while focusing on global connections and economic challenges. (Mettela, 2023). India has long expressed its ambivalence about the conflict, condemning it but, for example, refusing to back resolutions from the United Nations against Russia. In October, Jaishankar had stated, "We've been quite clear about our opposition to the Ukraine war." We believe that this disagreement serves none of the parties. The participants, not even the International Community. We believe that this conflict serves no one's interests. (Mettela, 2023).

In summary, India's response to the Ukrainian war demonstrates its commitment to carefully balancing its relations with both the US and Russia. The country's evolving strategic alliances with the US and its long-standing historical ties to Russia have led to its complex posture. India expresses disapproval of Russia's actions but also highlights the importance of positive communication and diplomacy (Tripathi, 2023).

III. Defence Industrial Cooperation

The September 2013 joint "US-India Declaration on Defence Cooperation" and the September 2015 "Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship" were two key occasions that sowed the seeds of defense cooperation between the US and India. These two simultaneous events catalyzed the continuation of defense cooperation and co-production for regional and international security and stability in each other's best interests. (Ministry of Defence Media, 2023).

Unprecedented excitement was displayed from both sides regarding the co-production of defense systems and research on the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit to the US in June 2023. Both parties joined forces to foster this highly significant opportunity to jointly develop the necessary system to meet India's military requirements. In the areas of

logistics, ship and aircraft maintenance, repair, and infrastructure, the United States of America is committed to providing full support. (Luthra, 2023). On the other hand, the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance program is included in the focus area (ISR). Before the official visit, the Prime Minister had already started working together on joint projects called "SPRINT Challenges" and "Innovation for Defence Excellence (iDEX)" as part of the R&D sector under the "Atmanirbharbharat" program, which aims to speed up the Indian Navy's domestic technology production for the defence industry. Such concerted efforts are helping to strengthen confidence between the two largest democracies in the world, while also supporting each other's home defense industries. (Ministry of Defence, 2022; Panth and Bommakanti, 2023).

Ajit Doval, the national security advisor for India, traveled to Washington, DC to discuss the Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) with Jake Sullivan, the national security advisor for the United States, after the formal readout during the meeting between President Joe Biden and the Prime Minister of India in Tokyo during the Quad Summit 2022. Afterwards, the US National Security Council (NSC) and the Indian National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), two esteemed organizations from both nations, coordinated this effort. This coordination between organizations aimed to "expand partnership" in the field of iCET in order to improve the current technological cooperation. (Chaudhuri and Singh, 2023). Both nations are leading in the most important areas of contemporary international politics, marked by exceptional progress in ICETa collaboration. This collaboration encompasses co-producing GE jet engines, India's Quantum Mission, India's Space Ecosystem, the Semiconductor industry, and the "game-changing" Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory Facility (LIGO). (Bhandari and Chaudhuri, 2023; Rajagopalan, 2023a; Levesques, 2023). India expressed interest in purchasing 31 General Atomics MQ-9B combat intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance drones as part of this extensive cooperation agenda. Both nations have reached an agreement on space technology, ship repairs, and other matters, and are working to formalize their roadmap for defense-industrial cooperation. (Levesques, 2023).

The two leaders praised the India-US Defense Acceleration Ecosystem, or INDUS-X, for its creation and launch. The two nations' sectors will be able to collaborate on the research and development of cutting-edge defensive technologies thanks to a network of universities, businesses, organizations, and think tanks known as INDUS-X. The US Department of Defense's Space Force and Indian startups 114 AI and 3rdiTech have signed their first international cooperative research and development agreement. The two businesses will utilize General Atomics' state-of-the-art semiconductor and artificial intelligence technologies to develop key components. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023).

Both Prime Minister Modi and President Biden praised India's plans to purchase General Atomics MQ-9B HALE UAVs. The Indian-developed MQ-9Bs will enhance the armed forces' ISR capabilities across all domains in India. As part of this strategy, General Atomics will also establish a Comprehensive Global MRO facility in India to support India's long-term objectives of enhancing its domestic defense capabilities. (Ibid.). The visit of Prime Minister Modi has a range of effects, including on investment, technology, and the defense sector. This defence partnership between the US and India is more than just a token gesture; it is a practical move away from an over-reliance on Russia and signifies a critical recalibration of India's defence supply chain. (Sinha, 2023).

IV. Defence Technologies Cooperation

The cutting-edge technologies found in every nation's defense system have no comparable alternatives. The military's ability and strategies to uphold its framework of military security

were strained by the "disruptive technology" dynamic. Super technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), cyberwarfare, space weaponry, and AI-based missiles are all present in modern battlefields and have the power to make or break your success. In order to counter the threats posed by the third and fourth industrial revolutions, every nation seeks to modernize its military capabilities. Under the direction of Prime Minister Modi, India is focusing on integrating next-generation technologies into the nation's military readiness, with the assistance of several defense partners, to become an indigenous developer of military technology.

The India-US Major Defence Partnership is essential to maintaining global peace and security. Through joint exercises, the formation of defense industry collaboration, the annual "2+2" Ministerial Dialogue, and other counseling mechanisms, the two countries have made significant progress toward creating an unconventional and inclusive defense corporation in which the militaries of the United States and India closely synchronize across all domains. General Electric and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to produce “GE F-414 jet engines in India for the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited Light Combat Aircraft Mk 2”. The creative idea to produce F-414 engines in India would boost the quantity of US jet engine technology exported overseas. The leaders are committed to carrying out this creative plan for technology transfer and co-production. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023).

During the cold water period, India and the US have already collaborated in science and technology (Taourangbam, 2023). Furthermore, the swift advancements and obstacles in the field of military technologies serve as a pivot for fortifying amicable relations between the two nations.

The 66th R'Day celebration and President Obama's visit to India as Chief Guest changed bilateral ties between the US and India in trade, defense, technology, and strategy. Furthermore, this visit established the United States of America's presence in the Indo-Pacific region. In particular, the defense relationship between the US and India has grown significantly in a number of sectors since Obama visited India. There are more defense-related milestones in the works, including: a) the establishment of the New Framework for the India-US Defense relationship in 2005. b) In 2012, the "Defence Technology and Trade Initiative" launched a new phase of defense co-production and co-development between the two nations. The goal was to collaborate on the development of cutting-edge science and technology while minimizing the influence of bureaucratic processes. c) A cooperative strategic vision between the United States and India for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region to maintain peace and stability in the Indian Ocean (The U.S. Department of Defence Fact Sheet, 2023).

India's defense technology collaboration is strategically essential to both regional and international security. Combating China's infamous actions along borders and in South Asia, specifically in the Indian Ocean (the Maldives at the moment), Pakistan's terrorism, Afghanistan's concerns, and, strategically, the significance of QUAD regions globally, all contribute to regional security. Thus, in cooperation with the United States of America, Prime Minister Modi entered into multiple multifaceted and all-encompassing technology alliances. General Electric (GE) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to produce GE F-414 jet engines for HAL's light combat aircraft MK2, which is part of the joint venture Modi-Biden. (Taourangbam, 2023; Mishra, 2023).

The governments of the United States and India are committed to strengthening and growing their strategic technology partnership in the defense sector, according to a statement issued by the White House on January 31, 2023. Both sides place a high priority on the US-Indian initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) and cooperation in the area of "defence innovation and technology cooperation" (The White House, 2023; The U.S. Department of Defence Fact Sheet, 2023). India and the US are becoming more concrete in

their defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Japan and the United Kingdom, two of the QUAD's other defense partners, have joined forces to create the Defense Reciprocal Access Agreement, which aims to streamline and improve port-to-port communication and vessel cooperation. (Rajagopalan 2023b).

The Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Gaza conflict, the Houthi attack on the Suez Canal, and other events have caused the world to relive the Cold War era and bipolarity in international politics since 2022. The world has entered a state of crisis due to these events, especially in the supply chains of developing and small states, which are under threat in this unstable environment. Unlike the Non-Aligned Movements, India must take positions that serve its interests as a rising global power. India and the US set up a 2+2 annual strategic dialogue on November 10, 2023, despite stark differences in the circumstances surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war, to ensure military, defense, and civil space cooperation. (Rajapopalan, 2023c). India and the US also strongly opposed China's aggressive encroachment in the Indo-Pacific area. Without any delay, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to working together to use QUAD allies to create a free, inclusive, and secure Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion

Mutual trust, common goals, and shared perceptions of threats and agreements are the foundations of India-US defense cooperation. Their defense partnership has grown stronger as a result of the route development, becoming more enduring, transparent, and decisive. During the last three decades, India has become one of the biggest importers of US defense hardware. Some issues persist, including the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, terrorism, and China's ascent in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia. However, there are Indo-US alignments and shared interests in a variety of fields. For example, the Quad platform actively opposes China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region by defending freedom, transparency, and openness; it also seeks multipolarity and supports India's nuclear program and permanent membership in the UN; both nations participate in organizations like the G-20 and ASEAN, which provide a focal point for economic growth and the escalation of terrorism; and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's most recent visit to the US and the two nations' agreement on current and future defense cooperation are essential to their bilateral relations.

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