



# Strategic Partnership between India and the United States: Examining Driving and Restraining Forces

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**Abstract:** This article aims to analyze the historical trajectory and current state of relations between India and the United States, spanning from India's independence in 1947 to the present, with a focus on identifying key stages of development, outcomes, and prospects. The establishment of a strategic partnership between the two countries has evolved through various phases, driven by economic, political, and ideological factors. However, certain limitations hinder the further deepening of this partnership, including disagreements on international political issues, India's pursuit of an independent foreign policy and reluctance to assume a subordinate role, inadequate US support on critical matters, and India's continued cooperation with Russia. Conversely, factors stimulating the growth of the strategic partnership encompass India's robust economic growth, its potential role as a counterbalance to China's expanding influence in Asia, shared interests in maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, mutual concerns about regional security, recent progress in nuclear policy agreements, and expanding avenues for cooperation in diverse domains. The article further examines the unique characteristics of India's relationship with the United States, which shape the nature of their existing strategic partnership, such as the shifting focus from the political and strategic realm to economic interactions, India's commitment to maintaining "strategic autonomy" and non-alignment in its deepening cooperation, its ability to differentiate between political partnership and economic collaboration, and the preservation of a multi-vector foreign policy approach. Based on the analysis, the authors assert that while a strategic military and political alliance between the two powers is unlikely in the near future, their relationship will continue to evolve within the framework of a strategic partnership. The findings of this study will provide insights for policymakers in the South and Southeast Asia region to anticipate developments and adjust their policies accordingly.

**Keywords:** India, the USA, relations, strategic partnership, factors of formation of strategic partnership, factors constraining the development of partnership, factors of deepening strategic partnership, specific features of strategic partnership

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India's foreign policy has been guided by certain enduring principles throughout its history, with notable significance placed on the principle of non-alignment or "Panchashila" (Gupta and Shukla 2009). However, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, India witnessed shifts in the foundational pillars of its foreign policy. The first shift arose from a transition from the construction of a socialist society to embracing modern capitalism. The second shift encompassed a change in national economic strategy and the implementation of economic reforms in response to the challenges posed by globalization and the emergence of the global economy. As a consequence, there was a marked transition from a predominantly political focus to a heightened emphasis on economic aspects in India's foreign policy. At this juncture, India's foremost objective was to attract foreign direct investment and gain access to developed markets.

The third shift in India's foreign policy was driven by the country's aspirations to transition from the role of a leader in the third world to that of a global power, leveraging its substantial economic potential as a means of affirmation. India successfully transformed the principle of non-alignment into the principle of independent foreign policy. Furthermore, the fourth shift entailed a departure from the "anti-Western" mindset and rhetoric, as India positioned itself as the world's largest democracy deeply committed to Western political values beyond the Euro-Atlantic realm. Lastly, the fifth shift witnessed a move away from idealism and moralism towards realism in India's foreign policy. Presently, Indian leaders adopt a pragmatic approach and seek practical solutions to foreign policy challenges (Mohan 2006).

Today, India's engagements with other nations, including the United States, are founded upon these principles as it strives to solidify its status as a global power by recalibrating its foreign policy priorities. The relationship between India and the United States holds particular significance, not only for India's pursuit of global prominence but also for shaping the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, South Asia, and South-east Asia regions.

The history of India-United States relations, spanning five decades, has been marked by complexity and contradictions. Noteworthy aspects include the continuous quest for common ground and a commitment to steady development, as well as the dynamic and evolving nature of the relationship, characterized by oscillations akin to a pendulum. Cooperation between the two countries has always grappled with inherent contradictions, as M. Malone observes, leading statesmen from both sides lamenting this period as a "lost half-century" (Malone 2014: 153). However, it would be remiss to label the achievements made by both powers during this period as a "lost half-century." Recent years have witnessed a fundamental shift, prompting India's sixteenth Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to declare India as the "world's largest democracy" and the United States as the "world's oldest democracy" as "natural allies."

However, the dynamics of state relations are seldom explained by linear equations; instead, diplomatic relations are often characterized by polynomial equations<sup>1</sup>. The development of relations between India and the United States has been influenced by a multitude of external and internal factors. External factors encompass the global geopolitical situation, regional shifts in the balance of power, and internal factors such as economic, political, and ideological considerations.

Three primary parameters have consistently played a decisive role in shaping the relationship between the two countries: strategy, ideology, and values. The ebb and flow of the relationship, characterized by periods of convergence and cooling, have been contingent upon the specific assessment of these parameters.

The objective of this article is to trace the evolution of India-United States relations, identify the stages of their development, and examine the outcomes and prospects. Notably, the works of Muchkund Dubey and David Malone hold a significant place in the literature on Indian foreign policy. Dubey's monograph provides a comprehensive analysis of key aspects of Indian foreign policy, incorporating a wealth of factual information and current trends shaped by national interests and traditional ideas (Dubey 2016). Malone's book offers a comprehensive analysis of how Indian foreign policy has responded to new challenges, with a particular focus on regional dynamics (Malone 2014).

Renowned India expert Alyssa Ayres, in her monograph, delves into India's transformation into a major power, exploring the political consequences accompanying this shift and India's quest to find its place in the global arena. Subramanyam Jaishankar observes the realignment of the world order over the past 12 years (2008–2020), which has compelled India to forge pragmatic relations with major powers to pursue its national interests. Jaishankar examines the formation of new foreign policy approaches within the historical and traditional context of the country (Jaishankar 2020).

Shivshankar Menon analyzes the regional geopolitical landscape and traces India's evolving approach, particularly in response to China's rise, positioning India as a counterweight (Menon 2021). Aparna Pande views India as an aspiring global power, grappling with complex economic, social, foreign policy, and military challenges that hinder its path to attaining such status (Pande 2020). Pande's book highlights the potential imbalance in India's policy, wherein the country desires world power status but exhibits hesitancy in taking actions to achieve this goal (Pande 2021).

Undoubtedly, India sets ambitious goals for itself, aspiring to become a global power. According to Mohamed Zeeshan, achieving this objective requires India to address not only internal development challenges but also pursue proactive foreign policy and adopt a coherent and consistent strategy in its external relations (Zeeshan 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> Rajput G. The road ahead for India-US relations. 2020. *The Hindu*. December 22. URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/brand-hub/the-road-ahead-for-india-us-relations/article33394567.ece> (accessed 25.06.2023)

This article employs a method of comparative analysis, enabling the identification of disparities in the goals, geopolitical interests, and policy strategies of India and the United States. This approach facilitates the exploration of various dynamic factors that have influenced the evolution of bilateral relations, taking into account global geopolitical processes, shifts in political forces, and emerging consensus of interests. The systemic approach aids in discerning the essence of the new international reality as a primary external multi-level and intricate factor that has shaped the complex nature of these relationships. By relying on the structural and functional approach, it becomes possible to ascertain the functions, roles, and actions of both parties and formulate projections for the future development of their relationship.

### **The historical perspective of US-India relations**

Upon achieving independence and sovereignty, India approached its relations with other states from an anti-imperialist perspective. Observing the active involvement of the United States in the South Asian region, India harbored legitimate concerns that the British colonial domination it had just escaped could be replaced by American hegemony. Having experienced two centuries of colonial rule, India perceived American imperialism as a potential threat to its freedom and sovereignty.

The emergence of the bipolar system following World War II compelled India to find its position within this dichotomous structure of international relations. Fearful of compromising its sovereignty and independence under the influence of either power, India opted not to align with either the United States or the Soviet Union. Instead, it charted a third, more favorable path: non-alignment. India assumed leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement when it was established in 1961 as a coalition of developing countries from Asia and Africa. It was essential for India to present this movement not as a third bloc, but as a neutral "middle ground" amidst a world divided into two opposing camps.

On the other hand, the United States viewed India's planned economy and policy of non-alignment with caution, perceiving them as potential risks for the country gravitating toward the Soviet Union and socialism. This ideological divergence between the two countries gave rise to distrust and caution in their relationship.

Starting from the mid-1950s, the United States and Pakistan initiated military cooperation, compelling India to weaken its non-alignment policy and seek support from the Soviet Union. This further exacerbated the dissatisfaction of the United States and deepened the divergence between the two countries. Gradually, ideological differences transformed into an ideological chasm, threatening to evolve into a strategic confrontation and intensifying the strategic divergence of their positions, leading to heightened tensions.

The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union played a significant role in shaping the relations between India and the United States. The United States believed that the withdrawal of Great Britain from the region, combined with India's principles of non-alignment and neutrality, created a power vacuum in South and Southeast Asia that they sought to fill by engaging Pakistan as a strategic partner to achieve their foreign policy objectives. Conversely, India, as the alliance between the United States and Pakistan grew stronger, gravitated closer to the Soviet Union, perceiving this rapprochement as an opportunity to balance the regional dynamics.

While externally India's policy under Indira Gandhi retained some socialist rhetoric and demonstrated commitment to non-alignment and anti-imperialism, it also pursued a more proactive regional policy, aspiring to attain the status of a regional power. In 1968, India refused to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) proposed by nuclear powers. In response, the United States withheld nuclear fuel supply to the Indian reactor in Tarapur, further cooling relations between the two states. The combination of these factors exacerbated the strategic differences as they contradicted American interests, ultimately leading to a stage of stagnation in their relationship.

However, two significant events—the end of the Cold War and the economic crisis that struck India—prompted a reevaluation of India's foreign policy and served as catalysts to break out of the stagnation in its relations with the United States. Furthermore, overcoming the economic crisis and the country's growing economic success fueled India's ambitions to emerge as a global power and a leading global actor.

The resolution of these challenges compelled India to gradually shift from the dominance of ideology to pragmatism in its foreign policy. This necessitated the search for common interests and shared political values after fifty years of distancing between the United States and India.

The conclusion of the Cold War marked the termination of competition between the two superpowers. The "middle" or "third" path embodied by the Non-Aligned Movement was no longer as relevant. The world was increasingly shaped by a unipolar structure, with the United States assuming the role of the global center of power. India lost the support it had received from the USSR and found itself facing competitors for influence in its own region, particularly China and Pakistan. Regional security concerns emerged as high priorities for India's foreign policy. Simultaneously, successful economic reforms led to economic growth and a reorientation of India's economy towards the international arena.

The convergence of these factors necessitated a review of India's previous approaches to engagement with major powers, as well as the articulation and clarification of its foreign policy and ideological priorities. It was during this stage, when economic and political factors began to take precedence, that the shape of India's strategic partnership would be determined in the near future. These factors significantly influenced the subsequent evolution of Indian-American relations in the following years.

## Dimensions of US-India relations

Economic factors played a crucial role in the strategic partnership between India and the United States. The last decade of the twentieth century marked a turning point in India's economic development, with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao (1991–1996) and Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh initiating liberalization reforms aimed at opening up the economy. This led to a surge in foreign capital flowing into the country, with a significant share coming from American investors. Trade volume between the two countries experienced rapid growth during this period.

While economic cooperation between India and the United States flourished, political relations between the two nations remained relatively cool. However, India began to recognize that achieving its goal of integrating into the global economy was not feasible without forging close ties with the United States. Additionally, the influential Indian diaspora played a significant role in softening America's stance towards India.

The deepening economic rapprochement between India and the United States had a positive impact on political relations as well. Political reforms in India, including the transition from a predominantly one-party system to a multi-party system, the abandonment of anti-American and anti-imperialist rhetoric, and a more flexible approach to the Non-Aligned Movement, encouraged political dialogue with the United States and the emergence of new foreign policy priorities. The new approach was characterized by greater pragmatism and a realpolitik mindset, moving away from morally loaded rhetoric.

During this period, India began forging "strategic partnerships" not only with the United States but also with countries like Iran, Japan, and China, despite occasional disagreements, particularly on regional security issues. However, the implementation of the strategic partnership with the United States faced challenges due to certain US policies in the region. The United States resumed supplying advanced weaponry to Pakistan, imposed restrictions on India's access to American high technologies, pressured India to abandon its national program for the development of advanced missiles, and attempted to block the sale of Russian weapons systems to India. Differences in positions regarding the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) also posed significant obstacles to closer ties between the two countries. India categorically objected to the permanent extension of the NPT in 1995, and later in 1996, it rejected the CTBT.

While outwardly warm, the relationship between India and the United States during this stage was characterized by underlying contradictions that impeded substantial cooperation. Nevertheless, throughout this decade, both countries consistently sought common strategic, political, and economic interests.

In the early 2000s, both India and the United States took significant strides to forge closer ties. India demonstrated its support for President George W. Bush's missile defense initiative (NMD) and offered assistance in the US war on terror follow-



ing the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, on September 22, 2001, the United States lifted all sanctions previously imposed on India (Naidu 2014). Subsequently, in 2002, the two nations initiated bilateral dialogues on regional security and expressed shared perspectives on Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. These discussions culminated in a series of high-level multilateral consultations, covering a wide range of issues such as the economy, finance, trade, security, science and technology, as well as energy and the environment (Naidu 2014).

During the respective tenures of President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Indo-American Nuclear Deal was signed, marking a pivotal moment in their bilateral relations. The decisions made during this period continue to form the foundation of the contemporary framework guiding the relationship between the two countries (Naidu 2014). In subsequent years, cooperation expanded across various domains, including civil space programs, high technologies, economy, energy security, defense, and missile defense. This comprehensive partnership represented an unprecedented level of engagement, encompassing the broadest array of areas in the history of their bilateral relations. Notably, joint efforts in promoting democracy and ensuring regional security emerged as significant areas of bilateral agreements (Naidu 2014).

For India, this strategic partnership held immense importance in advancing its national interests. It provided an opportunity for India to shed its status as a nuclear outcast, strengthened its position as a global actor, and positioned itself as an emerging global leader (Li 2018). During the administration of President Barack Obama, the strategic partnership between India and the United States continued to evolve dynamically. In addition to economic and political factors, shared values emerged as an ideological factor influencing their relations (Li 2018).

Contrary to the typical US strategy of constraining the foreign policy maneuverability of developing countries through partnership-building, India proved to be an exception. India joined the nuclear club, actively collaborated with the United States, and supported American initiatives, aiming to maximize the benefits of the strategic partnership with the global hegemon and bolster its standing as a global power. Presently, Washington and New Delhi exhibit more shared positions than differences in international affairs, with their interests and values largely aligned. The rise of China, the growing economic potential of India, and the shared experience of terrorism have contributed to bringing the two nations closer together (Mações 2019)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Rajput G. The road ahead for India-US relations. 2020. *The Hindu*. December 22. URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/brand-hub/the-road-ahead-for-india-us-relations/article33394567.ece> (accessed 25.06.2023).

During President Donald Trump's tenure, the relationship between the United States and India reached an unprecedented scale, culminating in a comprehensive global strategic partnership<sup>3</sup>. In the words of India's Ambassador to the US, Taranjit Singh Sandhu, the India-US relationship served as a source of strength amidst the global pandemic, with both countries collaborating on vaccine development and Indo-Pacific security to deepen their strategic partnership in 2020<sup>4</sup>. The two states share a common vision for the Indo-Pacific region, regional cooperation, and defense and security ties. Throughout 2020, the United States and India launched extensive cooperation to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, including the supply of essential medicines and collaboration among pharmaceutical companies in vaccine development (Mações 2019).

Despite these positive developments, some challenges remain. The United States does not consistently advocate for India's interests, such as its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Similarly, India does not always align with US initiatives, particularly in relation to the Islamic world with which it has deep historical and cultural ties. Furthermore, unresolved differences persist between the two countries in areas such as nuclear non-proliferation and energy security, including the diversification of energy sources, including natural gas supplies from Iran and other Persian Gulf countries. These divergences illustrate that the harmony in their relationship is not yet solidified (Mações 2019).

However, the growing economic interdependence between India and the United States has played a significant role in mitigating these differences. The expanding Indian market for American goods and the importance of the United States for India's outsourcing services sector have fostered interdependence and provided an incentive to address and reconcile divergent interests<sup>5</sup>.

In recent years, a number of factors have predetermined the deepening of the strategic partnership between India and the United States and created opportunities for its development into an allied relationship.

Firstly, the dynamic growth of the national economy gives India confidence in its strength along with its desire to join the group of global powers as one of the leading countries of the 21st century (Kumar, Verma, Shah 2020; Kaplan 2010).

Secondly, the United States, seeing a confident and strong India, with increased military power, began to consider it as a potential ally in its global policy (Kumar, Verma, Shah 2020).

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<sup>3</sup> 2020: A Milestone in India-US Ties. 2020. *The Economic Times. English Edition*. December 22. URL: <https://economic-times.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/2020-a-milestone-in-india-us-ties/articleshow/79852014.cms> (accessed 25.06.2023).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> For more details on specific events, including official visits and signed agreements, see: URL: [https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-india-relations?utm\\_source=dailybrief&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=DailyBrief2021Jul28&utm\\_term=DailyNewsBrief](https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-india-relations?utm_source=dailybrief&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=DailyBrief2021Jul28&utm_term=DailyNewsBrief) (accessed 25.06.2023).



Thirdly, both countries are united by a common interest in preserving peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, freedom and security of the sea routes of the Indian Ocean (Kumar, Verma, Shah 2020; Kaplan 2010). This reflects the growing convergence of their geopolitical interests; that is also proved by signing of the U.S. – India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region<sup>6</sup>.

Fourthly, this agreement strengthened mutual understanding on regional security and stability and created opportunities for expanding cooperation between the countries in the military sphere. While India is interested in diversifying the sources of supplies of modern weapons, the United States, in turn, strives for expanding its own market. The two countries have launched consultations on defense and strategic issues, including joint military and naval exercises, participation in training programs and exchange of military personnel. Therefore, during the visit of the US President Donald Trump in India, the governments signed a defense deal worth \$3 billion<sup>7</sup>.

Fifthly, there are a number of other positive trends in various areas of interaction: thus, to date, a greater understanding has been achieved in the field of nuclear policy and related responsibilities, prospects for cooperation in nuclear energy, food security, and trade facilitation; the countries have also managed to resolve major differences on the issue of climate change (Naidu 2014).

*Ideological factors of the strategic partnership.* The United States view India as a democratic country ("the world's largest democracy"), a beacon of democracy in the post-colonial world and a potentially strong partner in Asia (Chacko 2014). Indeed, both nations defend common political values of liberal democracy. Unlike Pakistan, which had the status of a "military ally", India has received the status of a potential "political ally" of the United States (Chacko 2014). A better understanding of each other's political values, supplemented by the coincidence of economic interests, led to the expansion of cooperation between the two countries. During his visit to India in November 2010, US President Barack Obama stated that he "firmly believes that the relationship between the United States and India... will become one of the defining partnerships of the twenty-first century" (Dubey 2016: 217). This statement signaled the end of a long period of disagreements as well as the convergence of the strategic positions of Washington and New Delhi. In July 2021, US Secretary of State Antony

<sup>6</sup> US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. 2015. *Ministry of External Affairs. Government of India*. January 25. URL: [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24728/USIndia\\_Joint\\_Strategic\\_Vision\\_for\\_the\\_AsiaPacific\\_and\\_Indian\\_Ocean\\_Region](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24728/USIndia_Joint_Strategic_Vision_for_the_AsiaPacific_and_Indian_Ocean_Region). (accessed 25.06.2023).

<sup>7</sup> Will Sign Defence Deal Worth \$3 Billion Tomorrow: Trump Announces in Ahmedabad. 2020. *Hindustan Times*. February 24. URL: [https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/will-sign-defence-deal-worth-3-billion-tomorrow-trump-announces-in-ahmedabad/story-JG8TPlafqsSnn1udKWHMWM.html?utm\\_source=dailybrief&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=DailyBrief2020feb24&utm\\_term=DailyNewsBrief](https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/will-sign-defence-deal-worth-3-billion-tomorrow-trump-announces-in-ahmedabad/story-JG8TPlafqsSnn1udKWHMWM.html?utm_source=dailybrief&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=DailyBrief2020feb24&utm_term=DailyNewsBrief) (accessed 25.06.23)

Blinken paid an official visit to India, during which he stated that the India-U.S. relationship was one of the "most important" in the world whose people were "connected by shared values"<sup>8</sup>.

Despite the fact that the United States has often criticized Indian democracy for its human rights policy, the promotion of democracy and freedom in the world has become a common platform for interaction in the field of global politics. India has been a welcome partner of the United States in implementing its strategy in the Middle East and Asia (Chacko 2014). Rising China and its increasing influence in the Asia-Pacific region has further stimulated the rapprochement of the two powers (Pan 2014). India is seen as a counterweight and balancer to China in the region, and its value as a partner has increased even more (Heydarian 2020). The United States tends to recognize India not as a potential great power but as a major power along with Russia and China.

The official document titled "Brief on India-U.S. Relations," available on the website of the Embassy of India in Washington, acknowledges the development of a "global strategic partnership" between India and the United States, which is founded on shared democratic values and an increasing convergence of interests pertaining to bilateral, regional, and global matters. Presently, the bilateral cooperation between India and the U.S. encompasses a wide range of sectors, including trade and investment, defense and security, education, science and technology, cyber security, high-technology, civil nuclear energy, space technology and applications, clean energy, environment, agriculture, and health<sup>9</sup>.

Nevertheless, certain factors impede closer cooperation between the two countries. These limiting factors can be delineated as follows:

1. India's reluctance to relinquish its collaboration with Russia, particularly in the realm of arms procurement, presents a hindrance to enhanced ties with the United States. Over the years, Moscow has demonstrated itself as a reliable partner by offering military technologies and engaging in joint production of weapons systems with India. This approach to military cooperation has bolstered India's autonomy and diminished its susceptibility to foreign arms supplies and political vicissitudes.

2. Significant disparities exist between the perspectives of the two countries concerning the new world order. While the United States advocates for maintaining the existing status quo, India, as one of the BRICS countries, contends that transformation is necessary. India emphasizes the importance of establishing a world order based on international law, whereas the United States has, in pursuit of its national interests, repeatedly violated international law.

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<sup>8</sup> Haidar S. 2021. Great Challenges for All Democracies. *The Hindu*. July 28. URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/antony-blinken-holds-talks-with-nsa-ajit-doval-meets-civil-society-representatives/article35577671.ece> (accessed 25.06.23)

<sup>9</sup> Brief on India-U.S. Relations. *Ministry of External Affairs. Government of India*. URL: [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India\\_US\\_brief.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_US_brief.pdf) (accessed 25.06.2023)

3. India has traditionally upheld a commitment to multilateralism underpinned by the United Nations, whereas the U.S. has displayed a tendency to resort to the use of force, bypassing UN mandates either unilaterally or in conjunction with NATO. India had anticipated U.S. support in obtaining permanent membership in the UN Security Council, but this expectation went unmet, leading to great disappointment. Additionally, India sought U.S. assistance in addressing the Kashmir issue and improving relations with Pakistan. However, New Delhi's expectations of U.S. support in pressuring Pakistan to recognize it as a state sponsoring terrorism and take necessary actions to dismantle terrorist camps operating on its territory for cross-border attacks against India were not fulfilled. Although Washington has not met these expectations, it consistently expresses solidarity with India in its fight against terrorism, increases information exchange in this domain, and expands the transfer of new technologies, leading to the establishment of a joint working group on combating terrorism. Over time, India gradually comprehended that the United States was not prepared to sever ties with Pakistan or pursue a more assertive policy. It appears that Washington is not particularly interested in India's ascent as a major military power.

4. The countries hold divergent positions on disarmament issues. While India has long advocated for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, the United States has sought to legitimize the possession of nuclear weapons by a select few nations.

5. Disagreements also arise between the parties regarding the agenda of the Doha Round, trade negotiations, and climate change. Despite protracted negotiations aimed at resolving trade issues, disparities persist concerning agricultural matters, tariffs, arms control, labor law, and energy security.

6. India exhibits a lack of enthusiasm for assuming a subordinate role and asserts its right to pursue a multi-faceted foreign policy. It maintains constructive relations with Iran and plans to implement the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project to enhance energy security. Furthermore, India has pursued amicable policies towards undemocratic regimes in neighboring countries, particularly Myanmar, which has caused tension with Washington.

These factors collectively impede the deepening of the partnership between India and the United States and hinder its progression towards a close military-political alliance.

### **Prospects of US-India relations**

Currently, both India and the United States are actively working towards developing robust bilateral relations by engaging in dialogue on contentious issues and seeking reasonable compromises. However, India remains committed to the fundamental principles of its foreign policy, steadfastly defending its national interests while also demonstrating tolerance and understanding of the positions held by the other side.

India opposes the United States' categorization of countries into democratic and rogue states and is against isolating the latter or imposing sanctions on them. Consequently, New Delhi has not supported U.S. policies towards Syria, Iran, and Russia. India cannot be expected to endorse U.S. ambitions in the region, especially if they infringe upon its own interests or jeopardize peace and stability in South and Southeast Asia (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko 2020: 258).

Dubey asserts that conducting bilateral relations with a more powerful nation is challenging, particularly when dealing with the United States. This difficulty arises not only due to the power asymmetry but also because of the way the U.S. conducts its foreign policy. The U.S. has dichotomized the world into two categories: those who are with it and those who are against it. There is no room for an independent or middle position within this framework. Furthermore, those who align with the U.S. are expected to do so in all respects. This poses a significant challenge in dealing with the country (Dubey 2016: 231-232).

India's pursuit of an independent foreign policy encounters specific challenges, as it faces opposition from a powerful lobby within the country that has gained prominence under the current regime. This lobby includes representatives from big business, industry, the media, and parts of the political elite, who argue that India's continued adherence to the policy of non-alignment is morally outdated and prevents the country from choosing the "right" allies and joining a coalition of major powers led by the United States.

The positive developments in India-U.S. bilateral relations in the second decade of the 21st century were driven by India's economic success, rapid development, increased military influence, and its *de facto* status as a nuclear power. Thus, the key factors likely to shape the future of these relations are the continuation of India's economic growth and, paradoxically, further advancement of its nuclear capabilities. The strengthening of the bond between the two countries depends on the successful integration of India into the global economy, expansion of the market for American goods and services, increased access to American technologies and capital, and growing economic interdependence. Moreover, India's ability to balance China's rising influence in the region and its own ascent make this alliance not only desirable for both countries but also imperative. In a joint article published in an American newspaper, Barack Obama and Narendra Modi referred to the relationship between the two countries as a "natural and unique partnership"<sup>10</sup>.

India's strategic partnership with the United States exhibits distinct characteristics. Firstly, there is a shift in emphasis from the political and strategic sphere to economic interaction (Pande, 2020). Simultaneously, India strives to maintain a clear distinction between political partnership and economic cooperation to preserve its principle of "strategic autonomy" and its policy of non-alignment.

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<sup>10</sup> Mishra V. Indo-US Relations: After Narendra Modi's Visit. *IPCS*. URL: <http://www.ipcs.org/issue-brief/us-south-asia/indo-us-relations-after-narendra-modisquot-visit-257.html> (accessed 25.06.2023)

India's foreign policy is not solely focused on a strategic partnership with the United States; it remains multi-vector in nature. It considers global changes and can be characterized as flexible, dynamic, and pragmatic. India is poised to become an economic superpower in the near future, and it takes necessary steps to promote its national interests across all domains. Furthermore, India seeks to establish and maintain constructive relations with all major global powers (Ayres 2017; Jaishankar 2020).

US President Joe Biden has demonstrated a more flexible approach to foreign policy compared to his predecessor, Donald Trump. This has raised expectations in India that Biden will provide greater support to India rather than China, as the United States is wary of China's continued rise<sup>11</sup>. The Indian government also hopes for the further strengthening of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which would help India and its partners in containing China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region more effectively (Roy-Chaudhury, Estrada 2018).

The potential establishment of relations between the United States and Iran through further negotiations could indirectly contribute to the development of Indo-American relations. This is because it might encourage the supply of affordable Iranian oil to India, a country with a booming economy. Additionally, India will be keen to observe Biden's response to issues such as Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship Amendment Act, the caste system, and social violence. The US-India relationship has the potential to reach new heights under Biden's presidency, as he is known for advocating closer India-US ties<sup>12</sup>. The invitation extended to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the G-7 summit in June 2021 signifies the importance of India as a strategic partner for the United States. India's significance as a potential democratic counterweight in the Indo-Pacific region is growing, particularly as the authoritarian challenge continues to expand<sup>13</sup>.

The Indo-Pacific region has become a top-level priority in the foreign policy of both India and the United States. This is evident in the US National Defense Strategy of 2018 and India's Maritime Security Strategy of 2015<sup>14</sup>. The rise of China, its military modernization, and its assertive policies in the Indian Ocean region pose challenges to both the United States and India. Consequently, both countries engage in negotiations to establish common goals and strategies in the Indo-Pacific region to safeguard their economic, political, military, and strategic interests (Grieco 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Singh J. *India's Foreign Policy*. URL: <http://www.slideshare.net/duawahab/foreign-policy-of-india-36407477> (accessed 25.06.2023)

<sup>12</sup> 2020: A Milestone in India-US Ties. 2020. *The Economic Times. English Edition*. December 22. URL: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/2020-a-milestone-in-india-us-ties/articleshow/79852014.cms> (accessed 25.06.2023)

<sup>13</sup> Ayres A. 2021. How Biden Can Bolster India's Democracy. *Foreign Affairs*. July 26. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-07-26/how-biden-can-bolster-indias-democracy> (accessed 25.06.2023)

<sup>14</sup> *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*. 2018. Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge. 11 p. URL: <https://introvertum.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; Ensuring secure seas: Indian maritime security strategy. 2015. *Indian Navy, Naval strategic publication (NSP)*. 184 p. URL: [https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_Document\\_25Jan16.pdf](https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf) (accessed 25.06.2023)

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue plays a significant role in the cooperation between India and the United States. Comprising Australia, Japan, India, and the United States, this strategic security dialogue supports India's efforts to counterbalance China in the Indo-Pacific region with the assistance of Quad partners, particularly the United States. This allows India to avoid assuming direct responsibility for conducting an anti-Chinese policy in the region while fostering close cooperation with the United States in defense and new technologies.

In 2021, the Quad's activities have witnessed a noticeable revival. Virtual and in-person summits have taken place, emphasizing the desire for an Indo-Pacific region free from disputes and friction, resolved in accordance with international law. Bilateral talks between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Biden have outlined prospects for further cooperation, encompassing pandemic response, peace and stability in South Asia, digital and information technologies, innovation, education, environmental conservation, counterterrorism, and more. Following the negotiations, a joint declaration titled 'A Partnership for Global Good' was issued<sup>15</sup>. In Alaska, the joint military exercises (the largest ones between the two states) called 'Yudh Abhyas 2021' were held; earlier India and the United States also conducted Malabar naval exercise. Later in 2021 the Pentagon declared that India and the United States had opened a new chapter in Major Defence Partnership<sup>16</sup>.

Despite these positive developments, differences in the vision of the Indo-Pacific region persist. India aims to maintain the status quo and protect its geopolitical influence, particularly as vital trade routes from Africa to India traverse the region. On the other hand, the United States seeks to enhance its political and military presence in two oceans and strengthen its global leadership.

India recognizes the need to rely more on the United States to counter China's assertive policies in the region. However, increased strategic partnerships, particularly in defense, may potentially limit India's sovereignty or restrict its freedom of action in international politics. India does not view the Quad as an anti-Chinese "alliance of democracies", as articulated by President Biden<sup>17</sup>. The recent AUKUS project, which involves the United States transferring nuclear submarine technology to Australia, a Quad member, has highlighted the asymmetry between the Quad members<sup>18</sup>. This asymmetry could potentially impact India's relations with the United States and may motivate India to continue diversifying its arms supplies, including from Russia.

<sup>15</sup> U.S.-India Joint Leaders' Statement: A Partnership for Global Good. September 24, 2021. *White House*. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/u-s-india-joint-leaders-statement-a-partnership-for-global-good/> (accessed 25.06.2023)

<sup>16</sup> India, U.S. Discuss Indo-Pacific, Regional Issues ahead of 2+2 Dialogue. *The Hindu*. URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/india-us-discuss-indo-pacific-regional-issues-ahead-of-22-dialogue/article36910983.ece> (accessed 25.06.2023)

<sup>17</sup> Miller M.Ch. The Quad, AUKUS, and India's Dilemmas. *Council on Foreign Relations*. URL: [https://www.cfr.org/article/quad-aukus-and-indias-dilemmas?utm\\_source=twtr&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=TWTW%202021October15&utm\\_term=TWTW%20and%20All%20Staff%20as%20of%207-9-20](https://www.cfr.org/article/quad-aukus-and-indias-dilemmas?utm_source=twtr&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=TWTW%202021October15&utm_term=TWTW%20and%20All%20Staff%20as%20of%207-9-20) (accessed 25.06.2023)

<sup>18</sup> AUKUS – security pact between Australia, the UK and the USA



India's agreement with Russia for the purchase of S-400 missile systems has caused tensions between the two countries. The US Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) of 2017 includes provisions for punitive measures against countries engaging in military cooperation with Iran, North Korea, and Russia. According to this law, India's actions in purchasing the S-400 systems could potentially trigger sanctions similar to those imposed on Turkey and China for their S-400 purchases. The imposition of such sanctions, if they were to occur, could undermine the foundations of the global strategic partnership between India and the United States.

India argues that the deal with Russia for the S-400 missile systems is an integral part of the country's defense against growing security threats, particularly along its eastern and western borders. India sees the possibility of sanctions as a challenge to its national principles of sovereignty and strategic autonomy<sup>19</sup>.

### Concluding remarks

The partnership between India and the United States is indeed considered "indispensable" by both sides and is seen as playing a crucial role in the global community. There is a convergence of strategic interests between the two countries, with a shared desire to strengthen cooperation further in order to promote global peace and stability.

The analysis of India-US relations has shown an evolution from mutual alienation to interaction, with an increasing convergence of interests and strengthening of cooperation in the economic, political, and security spheres. However, despite the positive progress in their relationship and the desire for deeper cooperation, there are still some disagreements between India and the United States.

India is not willing to compromise its foreign policy principles, abandon its worldview, or play a subservient role in bilateral relations. India's foreign policy is characterized by independence of judgment and freedom of action in international affairs. While India is eager to be a partner of the United States and supports many of its foreign policy initiatives, it does so on the basis of equality and mutual respect, while preserving its freedom to maneuver and the right to choose its own partners and allies.

India believes that as a country with a unique geographical location, international influence, rich history, traditions, and the status of a major developing power, it is not appropriate to simply follow the policy of another country, regardless of its power. India intends to build its foreign policy and bilateral relations with the United States based on its national interests, principles, and values, which underlie its non-alignment policy. Forming an alliance with the United States would entail difficult obligations that could potentially limit India's freedom of action in the international arena

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<sup>19</sup> For more than a waiver: On India-US Global Strategic Partnership. *The Hindu*. URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/for-more-than-a-waiver-on-india-us-global-strategic-partnership/article37529450.ece> (accessed 25.06.2023)

and undermine the principles of non-alignment that India has steadfastly adhered to for over 70 years. Therefore, India is cautious about entering into any formal alliances with major powers.

The government of India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has consistently adopted a pragmatic and results-oriented approach to its relations with the United States. Therefore, it is unlikely that the formation of a strategic *alliance* between the two powers will be the immediate result of the bilateral relations. Instead, the relations between India and the United States is expected to remain at the stage of *strategic partnership*, serving the interests of both countries in the foreseeable future.

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## На пути к стратегическому партнёрству Индии и США: движущие и сдерживающие факторы

О. Леонова<sup>1</sup>, Д. Кхатри<sup>2</sup>[DOI 10.24833/2071-8160-2023-3-90-180-198](https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2023-3-90-180-198)<sup>1</sup> Московский государственный университет им. М.В. Ломоносова (Россия)<sup>2</sup> Университет Мандсаура (Индия)

Цель настоящей статьи – показать логику эволюции двусторонних отношений между Индией и Соединёнными Штатами Америки с момента обретения Индией независимости в 1947 г. по настоящее время, а также выявить этапы их развития, итоги и перспективы.

Отношения между Индией и США прошли несколько стадий, что в результате привело к созданию стратегического партнёрства. Авторы выявляют экономические, политические и идеологические факторы формирования стратегического партнёрства Индии и США. Выявляются факторы, препятствующие дальнейшему углублению сотрудничества, среди которых разногласия по важным вопросам международной политики, нежелание Индии играть роль «младшего брата», стремление отстаивать своё право на реализацию многовекторной внешней политики, отсутствие поддержки США по принципиальным вопросам для Индии и неготовность Нью-Дели к отказу от сотрудничества с Россией. Факторами, стимулирующими углубление стратегического партнёрства между Индией и США, выступают: интенсивный рост индийской экономики, потенциал страны в качестве противовеса растущему влиянию Китая в Азии, разделяемый интерес к сохранению мира и стабильности в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе и сотрудничеству в других сферах безопасности, расширение перспектив сотрудничества в других областях. В статье раскрывается специфика отношений Индии с США, определяющая характер сложившегося стратегического партнёрства. Происходит перемещение акцента с политического взаимодействия в сферу экономики, сохраняется приверженность Индии принципу «стратегической автономии» и политике неприсоединения, нацеленность на разграничение политического партнёрства и экономического взаимодействия, а также многовекторности внешней политики.

Авторы приходят к выводу, что в краткосрочной перспективе отношения двух держав вряд ли перерастут в стратегический военно-политический союз; они сохранятся на стадии стратегического партнёрства. Результаты исследования позволяют заинтересованным сторонам прогнозировать ситуацию и корректировать политику в регионе Южной и Юго-Восточной Азии.

**Ключевые слова:** Индия, США, двусторонние отношения, стратегическое партнёрство, факторы формирования стратегического партнёрства, факторы углубления стратегического партнёрства, особенности стратегического партнёрства

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