

Defence Diplomacy in US-India Strategic Relationship

Saroj Bishoyi*

Defence diplomacy helps build trust and confidence between nations and facilitates cooperation at political and economic level. This is evident from the growing US-India strategic relationship. Since the end of the Cold War, the US-India relationship has been evolving and “reaching new heights”. In this budding relationship, the most visible manifestation is cooperation in the sphere of defence. It is quite apparent from the increasing frequency and scope of bilateral military exercises, seminars, personnel exchanges, high level and unit visits, officer and unit exchanges, as well as the defence technology sales. During President Barack Obama’s visit to India in November 2010, both the countries signed about 20 trade deals worth \$10 billion which President Obama believed would not only create fifty thousand jobs in the US but would also advance US-India relations. However, given the huge potential that the Indian defence market holds, the common security challenges that the two countries face and the common values, interests and visions that they share, defence diplomacy can play an important role in further strengthening this burgeoning strategic relationship.

Introduction

Defence diplomacy plays vital role in achieving specific foreign and security policy objectives of nations. It helps build trust and confidence between nations and also facilitates cooperation at political and economic level. This is evident from the growing US-India strategic relationship. Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US-India relations have improved considerably. Defence diplomacy has helped significantly in building trust and confidence between the two nations. After the end of the Cold War, while the US decided to maintain “cooperative engagement” with militaries of the friendly countries. India also reoriented its foreign and security policy as per the

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need of the emerging international security environment which demanded close cooperation with the United States, especially, in the area of defence and security. India had begun to rethink its foreign policy priorities, which in a way facilitated a modest level of cooperation with the United States. Moreover, lessening of differences on many global as well as bilateral issues prompted the military in both the countries to utilise the opportunity to develop closer relations.¹ India has also moved away from its traditional emphasis on the “power of the argument” towards the “argument of power”.² Consequently, the visit of Lieutenant-General Claude M. Kickleigher, commander-in-chief, US army Pacific Command, to India in 1991 marked a turning point in the relationship. The “Kickleigher proposals” envisaged expanded cooperation and partnership between the militaries of the two countries.³ As a result, army executive steering groups (ESGs) were established in both countries to intensify military-to-military cooperation which followed the formation of navy and air force ESGs in March 1992 and August 1993 respectively.

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Indian and US army and air force paratroopers held a first ever-joint training exercise named ‘Teak Iroquois’ followed by a second in October 1993. The two navies held three rounds of the first ever – joint naval exercises, Malabar I, II, and III.⁴ Since then there have been a number of initiatives undertaken guided by the changes in the geo-strategic realm. These are the agreed minutes for the expansion of defence cooperation between the US and Indian defence departments and service-to-service military exchanges in 1995, statement of principles for US-India high technology cooperation in 2003, the next steps in strategic partnership in 2004, the new framework for US-India defence relationship signed in June 2005, and, the civil nuclear cooperation in July 2005.

The US programmes related to defence diplomacy, with specific emphasis on military cooperation and assistance, include international military education and training; non-combat and non-technical training in areas such as defence management, civil-military relations and military justice; foreign military interaction involving a wide range of military-to-military contacts with other states; foreign military financing in the form of grants and loans; joint combined exchange training of special forces; military sales, namely government-to-government sales of weapons; programmes that allow the transfer of weapons or training to other states in emergency circumstances or to dispose of surplus military equipment;

and the enhancement of the ability of other states to contribute to international peacekeeping missions.⁵ On the other hand, India also has very wide ranging international defence and military cooperation programmes. Defence diplomacy has been used as an effective tool of foreign policy and forms one of India's main forms of engagement with many countries such as Russia, Singapore, UK, USA, France, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Mauritius, Myanmar, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, South Africa, Tajikistan, Oman and Bhutan. India's international military cooperation arrangements include formal defence arrangements which could be bilateral or multilateral. Military to military activities include high level visits, attending courses at military training institutions, defence and military expert exchanges, joint exercises, defence equipment and technology-transfers, military assistance programmes, sports and adventure activity and cooperation in UN peace keeping operations.⁶ Obviously the levels of military cooperation with each and every country cannot be at the same level. However, these are determined by national interests and foreign policy goals and priorities. Therefore, the areas in which the two nations can collaborate are many. In fact, the US and India conduct a number of activities under defence diplomacy to achieve their foreign and security policy objectives.

In this paper, I propose to analyse the role of defence diplomacy in the US-India strategic relationship. The key questions that I have tried to answer are: What is the present status of the US-India defence cooperation and to examine what has been achieved in recent years through the defence diplomacy? What are the challenges and problems that they are likely to face in further strengthening bilateral relationship? And what is the future of this relationship and how will defence diplomacy address their common challenges and concerns? The main argument is that given the huge potential that the Indian defence market holds, the common security challenges that the two countries face and the common values, interests and visions that they share, defence diplomacy can play an important role in further strengthening this burgeoning strategic relationship.

Defence Cooperation

Defence cooperation is an important part of defence diplomacy. In fact, it is often and more aptly referred to as 'defence diplomacy', which reflects the linkages between defence cooperation, and the achievement of foreign and security policy goals. While defence diplomacy, in a broader context, is defined as the use of armed

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forces in operations other than war and building on their trained expertise and discipline to achieve national and foreign objectives abroad. More inclusively, it can relate to the peace time use of armed forces and related infrastructure,

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primarily defence ministries, as a tool of foreign and security policy and more specifically to military cooperation and assistance.⁷ On the other hand, defence cooperation is defined as “any arrangement between two or more nations where their armed forces work together to achieve mutual aims and objectives.”⁸ It aims at exchanges and liaison visits, individual and joint training, joint military exercises, common doctrine and equipment procurement. Its broad objectives are: (i) To promote intra and extra regional peace and stability through dialogue and cooperation; (ii) To promote mutual understanding on defence and security challenges; (iii) To enhance transparency and openness; and (iv) To imbibe ‘best practices’ by observing specific aspects of functioning of the militaries of more advanced countries. It is more effective when forces have inter-operable systems and equipments, which facilitate functional cooperation. This can further be optimised by the new innovations in a rapidly

changing operational environment through joint development and production of military equipment. Defence diplomacy, thus, not only promotes interoperability between the armed forces and good defence relations among the participating countries but, in a wider context, creates mutual confidence and trust between the countries at large.⁹

In recent years, the US-India defence relationship is developing in keeping with India’s emergence as a regional power, a potential market, and its importance in maintaining a stable balance of power in Asia. The relationship is helping the two in combating international terrorism, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), ensuring security of resources such as energy and water, illegal migrations, human rights abuses, piracy, drug trafficking and gun running, climate change, and environmental degradation. Grounded in these shared interests and challenges, the US-India defence relationship has grown from solely military-to-military links into a mature partnership that encompasses dialogues, exercises, defence sales, professional

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military education exchanges, and practical cooperation.¹⁰ Both the Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh and the US president Barack Obama agree that the United States' and India's converging security interests and shared values make the countries natural partners.¹¹ Within the ambit of defence cooperation, the US-India defence diplomacy includes a broad range of activities. Some of these activities are discussed below:

Defence Trade

The US-India defence trade is unique considering the successful purchase of *INS Jalashwa*, 8 Boeing P8-I multi-mission maritime aircraft, six C130J Super Hercules aircraft for special forces, three Boeing 737 business jets and 10 Boeing C-17 Globemaster heavy military transport aircraft.¹² President Barack Obama, during his recent visit to India, welcomed India's decision to purchase US high-technology defence items, which the joint statement said "reflects our strengthening bilateral defence relations and will contribute to creating jobs in the United States."¹³ The two countries signed about 20 trade deals worth \$ 10 billion which President Obama believed would not only create fifty thousand jobs in the US but would also advance US-India relations.¹⁴ Mr. John Schlosser, formerly of the US state department, said that purchasing defence equipment from the US companies does make the relationship stronger owing to the informal and institutional ties which US private companies have with the government.¹⁵

India's military purchases since 1999 have been worth \$25 billion and the country is likely to spend another \$30 billion dollars by 2012, making it one of the biggest military buyers among developing countries.¹⁶ According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), India's defence purchases are projected to double to more than £15 billion by 2012, climbing to £40 billion by 2022.¹⁷ According to a recent KPMG-CII report, India is likely to spend up to \$100 billion on the purchase of military equipment over the next 10 years.¹⁸

Besides, India is planning to acquire or manufacture 126 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) fighter aircraft worth \$12 billion, almost 1,500 155 mm howitzers, about 250 light helicopters, four more P8I Poseidon maritime reconnaissance aircraft, six more C-17s and many other items of defence equipment. This statistic makes it patently apparent that India sees defence diplomacy as an increasingly key variable in its foreign policy planning. Moreover, the major US defence and aerospace companies including Boeing, Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems etc. are hopeful of winning keen contests for high profile Indian defence deals worth close to \$30 billion.

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At present, five nations and six companies are in competition for the 126 MMRCA fighter aircraft deal. On offer are Lockheed Martin's F-16 and Boeing's F/A-Super 18 Hornet, both from the US; the Russian Mig-35; Sweden's Saab Gripen; European consortium EADS's Eurofighter Typhoon; and France's Dassault Rafale.¹⁹ The winner in these big deals will indicate India's strategic vision in the decades to come. However, the decision over the MMRCA as well as other big-ticket defence items should be based on a projection of India's place in the world over the next twenty years and the reliability of its friendships with key countries. At present, the majority of India's defence acquisitions are from Russia. So there is need to diversify India's defence purchases. In fact, in the decade after the nuclear tests, as India slowly emerged from the US-sponsored sanctions regime, US defence companies began to earnestly lobby to sell high-technology as well as large platforms to India. Meanwhile, the US administration has opened up a new chapter in training and defence exercises to which India responded enthusiastically. Hence, as the Indo-US nuclear deal begins to mature, the Indian defence establishment has begun purchasing defence equipment from the US.

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Dual-Use Technology Transfer

India regards technology transfer as the "acid test" of US commitment and a "touchstone" for forging a long and stable US-India strategic relationship. India has been looking for advanced technologies for its defence modernisation and especially for its domestic economic development purposes. However, the US-India cooperation in the area of dual-use technology has over time stumbled over various issues including leakage of technology transfer or over the issue of maintaining exclusive control over the area where dual-use technology was to be used. This was because of US export control policies and its support to various international regimes of technology controls, i.e. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) etc.

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President Obama's visit to India has had a positive impact on the US-India technological relations. One example is the US decision to take the state-owned Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and four of its subsidiaries and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and its

subsidiaries off its Entities List. Even the state-owned Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) with its four subsidiaries has been taken off the Entities List.²⁰ The removal of the embargo on the transfer of dual-use technology and hi-tech items to organisations like ISRO, DRDO, and BDL will significantly boost the technology infusion into India's military-industrial complex and could provide an impetus to self reliance in the defence sector. Though some technical issues remain, but this is a positive development in the bilateral relations.

The US president also supported India's membership to global non-proliferation regimes like Wassenaar Arrangement, the Australia Group and the NSG. Besides, India will be getting off the country classification list and will not be clubbed with Pakistan and North Korea but will be part of the group consisting of US allies like Japan and UK. This will help India to access critical technology, software and sensitive equipment from all countries.²¹ Moreover, during the first US-India strategic dialogue which was held in Washington DC in June 2009, US secretary of state Hillary Clinton and India's external affairs minister S.M. Krishna in their joint statement "underlined the importance of facilitating co-operation in strategic and high technology sectors" through the High Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG) as a key instrument to achieve the full potential of the strategic partnership. They "confirmed the shared objective of a strong 21st century partnership in high technology".²² They also committed to approach the issue of export controls in the spirit of the strategic partnership between the two countries. These recent developments signify the substantive progress made in the area of dual-use technology cooperation between the two countries.

Joint Research and Development

In the field of research and development, the dual-use technology issue always remained the "litmus test" by which healthy relations could be measured. So the recent removal of Indian organisations like ISRO and DRDO from US Entity Lists will facilitate

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possible cooperation between the two countries in this sector. India expects that the US defence industry will be able to transfer some latest technologies and help it establish the much-needed military-industrial complex. It wants to move away from a buyer-seller relationship towards transfer of technology and joint development, joint production and joint marketing of latest weapons and technology.

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India is seeking to build its own indigenous defence industry, and is looking for the best technologies to use in its defence sector. The recent reform in India's defence research, development, planning, procurements, defence finance and foreign direct investments (FDI) and off-setting is a clear indicator of what Indian defence policy makers want in the field of defence modernisation and industrialisation. Reports indicate that 15 per cent of Indian military equipment is state-of-the-art, 35 per cent mature, and 50 per cent obsolete. India currently procures approximately 70 per cent of its equipment from abroad, but aims to reverse this balance to manufacture 70 per cent or more of its defence equipment at home.²³ Defence minister, A.K. Antony while releasing India's first Defence Production Policy (DPP) in New Delhi in January 2011 said that "the policy aims to achieve maximum synergy among the armed forces, DPSUs, OFBs, Indian industry and research and development institutions."²⁴ This is a major opportunity to build an industrial infrastructure that will be able to quantitatively, technologically, and qualitatively support the requirements of India's armed forces in terms of weapons systems, platforms, upgradation and overhaul. It is also a great opportunity for long term defence cooperation and strategic partnership between the US and Indian research, development, and manufacturing establishments.

Joint Military Exercise

The US-India military exchanges have reached an all time high considering the number of joint military exercises held in recent times. While the US and Indian armies planned to undertake nine joint exercises in India in 2010, the air forces

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and the navies of both the nations are also planning similar programmes for the year 2010-11.²⁵ India conducts the maximum number of joint military exercises with the US, and their growing strategic partnership is taking these operations to highly advanced level. In the last decade, India and the US have held over 60 exercises. While India is keen to gain the practical experience of learning through military war games, the US is also interested in learning from the Indian expertise in various fields as improvised explosive devices (IED) detection, counter-insurgency and mountain and jungle warfare skills.

In November 2010, the US and Indian troops held annual joint military exercises involving airborne specialist operations in sub-zero temperatures at joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska. At the same time, Indian and American Special Forces also engaged in the "Vajra Prahar" counter-terrorism exercise at the Belgaum commando school in

Karnataka, India. The US army itself viewed “Yudh Abhyas” (war games) as “a challenge, something unique and definitely a lesson in patience with the language barrier,” as it involves training foreign troops in American operational doctrines.²⁶ During the exercise, training included instruction on various US army weapons systems, evaluating and evacuating a casualty, and hands-on training with the engagement skills trainer. The weapons training included hands-on instruction on the M-4 carbine with which the Indian troops later performed live-fire training. The US soldiers and their Indian counterparts also took part in cultural exchanges to improve partnership readiness and cooperation between the two armies. The exercise further aimed at sharing peace-keeping experiences with focus on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism in a semi-urban scenario.

Yudh Abhyas is a regularly-scheduled, conventional-forces training exercise, sponsored by US army (Pacific) and the Indian army. The exercise is designed to promote cooperation between the two militaries to promote interoperability through the combined military decision-making process, through battle tracking and manoeuvring forces, and exchange of tactics, techniques and procedures. Continued robust exercises and exchanges will expand contacts between the US and Indian militaries.

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Cooperation on Counterterrorism

Another crucial area of cooperation between the two countries includes enhanced military cooperation on counterterrorism. The United States and India have

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to share experience, exchange information, and coordinate approaches and action.²⁷ This joint working group is also a part of the wide ranging architecture of institutional dialogue established by the two sides during the visit of President Bill Clinton to India in March 2000. While much of the groundwork for strengthening institutional cooperation in counterterrorism had already been done before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, these strikes led to two important new initiatives. The first was the establishment of the US-India cyber security forum, which held its first meeting in New Delhi in April 2002, and the second in Washington, D.C. in November 2004. Whereas the JWG consists exclusively of governmental experts in various aspects of counterterrorism with no involvement of non-governmental experts, the cyber security forum brings together both government and industry representatives from each country to identify areas for collaboration such as combating cyber-crime, cyber security research and development, information incident management and response.

The second new post-9/11 initiative was to expand the scope of the India-US Defence Policy Group (DPG), set up during the Clinton administration to cover military-to-military cooperation in counterterrorism. A joint statement issued in December 2001, at the end of the third meeting of the DPG held in New Delhi said that, "A strengthened bilateral relationship will assist both countries to counter threats such as the spread of weapons of mass destruction, international terrorism, narcotic trafficking and piracy..." Noting that both India and the United States have been targets of terrorism, the two sides agreed to include counter-terrorism to their defence cooperation and expand mutual support in this area.²⁸

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leaders of the two countries also issued a number of policy statements, jointly and individually, on the scope of counterterrorism cooperation. In the July 18, joint statement, President George Bush and Prime Minister Singh resolved to "combat terrorism relentlessly" through "vigorous counterterrorism cooperation".²⁹ The June 28 defence pact called for strengthening the capabilities of the US and India militaries to "promote security and defeat terrorism".³⁰ Prime Minister Singh and President Obama in their joint statement signed in New Delhi on November 8, 2010, condemned "terrorism in all its forms", and agreed that "all terrorist networks, including Lashkar e-Taiba, must be defeated."³¹ The two leaders also decided to further strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation and to begin a homeland security dialogue. In last one decade,

the US and India have, thus, come a long way in expanding their cooperation and dialogue on counterterrorism.

Military Education and Training

A key element of the US engagement process through defence diplomacy is the enlarged International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme. The IMET programme is an instrument of US national security and foreign policy and a key component of US security assistance that provides training on a grant basis to students from allied and friendly nations. The United States IMET assistance to India has gone up from \$0.5 million in 2001 to \$1.364 million in 2009. Below is the account levels for IMET for fiscal years 2006-2011, including 2006-2009 (actual - funding actually provided in fiscal years 2006-2009, including supplemental funding), 2010 (estimate-funding allocations for the 2010 fiscal year) and 2011 (requested-funding requested under the president’s fiscal year 2011 budget).

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Table A: US International Military Education and Training Assistance to India (Million \$)

Countries/ Accounts	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Actual	FY 2008 Actual	FY 2009 Actual	FY 2010 Estimate	FY 2011 Request
India	1,272	1,501	1,345	1,364	1,200	1,400

Source: US Department of State, International Military Education and Training Account Summary, as of 23 June 2010, at <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14562.htm>

In essence, the IMET, whose estimated allocation for India was \$1.2 million in 2010, allows its personnel to attend courses from the 2000 offered annually at some 150 US military schools, receive observer or on-the-job training in addition to orientation tours. In comparison, Pakistan’s IMET allocation has more than doubled from \$2.03 million in 2006 to \$5 million in 2010. Moreover, in October 2010, the US announced to a whopping \$2.29 billion in new military aid to Pakistan to bolster its army’s anti-terror capabilities, notwithstanding India’s concerns that Islamabad has been diverting much of this assistance against it. Two billion of this amount is under the foreign military financing programme and \$29 million is being given under IMET funding. Defence Minister, A. K. Antony, during his recent visit to US for talks with his US counterpart Robert Gates and secretary of state,

Hilary Clinton, had conveyed India's concerns about supply of US arms to Pakistan under military aid to that country, stating that "We feel that even though the US is giving arms to Pakistan to fight terrorism, our practical experience is (that) it is always being misused. They are diverting a portion against India."³² In spite of these concerns, symbiotic military and strategic relations between the two countries have significantly improved. Patronage once again has delivered dividends.

US Support for India's Membership in UNSC and UN Peacekeeping

The US President Obama and Prime Minister Singh in their joint statement noted that "India and the United States, as global leaders, will partner for global security, especially as India serves on the security council over the next two years" starting from January 1, 2011. They agreed that "their delegations in New York will intensify their engagement and work together to ensure that the council continues to effectively play the role envisioned for it in the United Nations Charter". They also agreed "to hold regular consultations on UN matters, including on the long-term sustainability of UN peacekeeping operations."³³ President Obama's support to India's inclusion in the UN security council is also an important manifestation of the high priority that the Obama administration attaches to India.

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The Indian military has been a very active participant in UN peacekeeping operations since independence. India was one of the founding members of the UN and has consistently shown great interest in and commitment to the initiatives of the world body towards maintaining global peace and security. The first deployment started in 1950's, when India sent troops to Korea in 1953-54. Since then it has participated over forty UN peacekeeping missions. Its troops have taken part in some of the most difficult operations, and their professional excellence has won them universal admiration. Its forces have demonstrated their unique capacity of sustaining large troop commitments over prolonged periods. It has considerable experience in de-mining activities and has made a significant contribution to de-mining work in various peacekeeping missions. It has also provided opportunities for training to military officers from different countries.³⁴ In addition, it established the Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK) in New Delhi in September 2000, to provide a level of training equal to the level of commitment. This well respected training institution fulfils the training and concept-related requirements of India's UN peacekeeping obligations, while enabling future peacekeepers to benefit from India's vast peacekeeping experience. India's unique combination of being

the largest democracy in the world with a strong tradition of respect for rule of law and the successful experience in post-colonial nation-state building makes it particularly relevant in the context of twenty-first century peace-building.

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India's large contribution to UN peacekeeping operations over the past few decades has also contributed towards further improving defence cooperation with a large number of countries, especially with the US. The US has an elaborate training programme and funding for training other nations in peace keeping operations under the Global Peace Operation Initiative (GPOI). The US funds for UN training and simulation facilities in target countries. Though India chose not to join GPOI as a partner, but Indian personnel have participated in some GPOI training events through the use of non-GPOI funds.³⁵ India's defence cooperation also leads to optimising of UN peacekeeping as well as disaster management. However, much more can still be done in this field to further advance foreign and security policy objectives of the two nations.

Cooperation in Humanitarian and Emergency Situations

The United States and India can build on the successful humanitarian crisis cooperation demonstrated in their joint response to the 2004 Asian tsunami. In the intervening years, joint naval exercises have served to further consolidate the ability of their navies to work together, along with others in Asia, and this should clearly continue. A much more engaged maritime and humanitarian cooperation will unfold as India modernises its naval capabilities.

India's decision to purchase maritime surveillance aircraft from an American supplier (Boeing) will give it stronger warning capabilities in its own region, and the prospect of more extensive Indian defence procurement from US suppliers would further enhance US' ability to coordinate response.³⁶ Moreover, unlike the past, India has become a donor nation. India does have its own developmental needs, but in recent years it has made important direct contributions to other countries (such as Afghanistan) facing situations of scarcity. And in 2008, the Indian government granted an export exemption that allowed the World Food Programme to purchase Indian rice for provision to 22 countries with severe needs (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Haiti, among others). So close coordination between the US and India, especially in cases where India offers substantially more cost-effective means for providing assistance, mark the beginning of new kinds of humanitarian cooperation.³⁷ Furthermore, while US army and disaster relief personnel cooperated with India in the aftermath of tsunami disaster in

December 2004, India reciprocated by airlifting supplies to victims of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.³⁸

The US undersecretary of defence for policy Michele Flournoy in her speech at the Asia Society in July 2010 stressed that “We will continue to build on our experience working together on disaster assistance and humanitarian relief, and develop procedures to facilitate more seamless cooperation in future contingencies.”³⁹

India as a Net Security Provider in the Indian Ocean Region

Taking note of India’s growing influence in global affairs, US Defence Secretary, Robert Gates said that India is a strategic partner and “a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond” with the growth of its military capabilities.⁴⁰ The *Quadrennial Defence Review* report of 2010 also makes it clear that as the economic power, cultural reach and political influence of India increases, it is assuming a more influential role in global affairs. This growing influence, combined with democratic values it shares with the United States, an open political system, and a commitment to global stability, will present many opportunities for cooperation. The report noted “India has already established its worldwide military influence through counter piracy, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief efforts. As its military capabilities grow, India will contribute to Asia as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond”.⁴¹ On the other hand, the report expressed concerns over the lack of Chinese transparency over its military development.

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As an emerging global economic and trading power, India has a vital stake in maritime security, especially since global mercantile trade now constitutes 41 per cent of the GDP. Of this, 77 per cent of the trade and over 90 per cent by volume is carried by sea. Now, 70 per cent of crude and oil products are being carried through the Indian Ocean. In this regard, the QDR report states that the US has a substantial interest in the stability of the Indian Ocean region as a whole, which will play an ever more important role in the global economy. In addition, “the Indian Ocean provides vital sea lines of communication that are essential to global commerce, international energy security and regional stability. Ensuring open access to the Indian Ocean will require a more integrated approach to the region across military and civilian organisations”.⁴²

India’s navy, however, has backed away from suggestions that it might take a

dominant role in establishing security in the Indian Ocean. According to Indian navy chief Admiral Nirmal Verma, “India has no intention of playing a headmaster’s role in the Indian Ocean Region”.⁴³ India’s foreign secretary, Nirupama Rao also

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underscored the fact by stating that “As the main resident power in the Indian Ocean region, we have a vital stake in the evolution of a stable, open, inclusive and balanced security and cooperation architecture in the region. By definition this would need to be a consensus-based process, where all the stakeholders who have a legitimate presence in the region make their respective contributions to regional security”.⁴⁴ The Indian navy, thus, is seeking a cooperative regional approach to maritime security, as demonstrated by its recent participation in regional naval exercises. The increasing interoperability in India’s military exercises with foreign navies offers its navy an advantage in security operations. These exercises assist in developing skills for joint operations to address problems related to piracy, terrorism, drug trafficking, the smuggling of arms and people

as well as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. Interoperability has also facilitated institutionalised cooperative naval exercises with the navies of the United States and with other countries like Russia, UK.

India’s Role in Afghanistan

Another area of strategic cooperation between the two countries is in Afghanistan. India’s vital contribution in the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan is well known. So far it has provided \$1.3 billion in assistance to Afghanistan. India’s strategic interest in enhancing the security environment inside Afghanistan including the building of the Afghan national army through an intensive training programme was applauded by the then Bush Administration and had synchronised the security objectives of the two countries. President Obama, during his visit to India, removed any doubts that America wants India to stop helping Afghans build the ravaged nation by appreciating its contribution to Afghanistan and welcomed enhanced Indian assistance to help Afghanistan achieve self-sufficiency.⁴⁵ Similarly, India’s offer to be a part of the UN efforts in the rebuilding and

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stabilisation of post-war Iraq and its infrastructure has been favourably received by the Obama administration as the US plans an exit strategy by 2011.⁴⁶ In the same vein, the US undersecretary of defence for policy Michele Flournoy emphasised that “We highly value India’s role – and the sacrifices Indian citizens have made – in building economic and social opportunities in Afghanistan.” She went on to say that “We see India’s continued involvement in Afghanistan’s development as a key part of that country’s future success”.⁴⁷ It is also significant that in the November 8, joint statement, the two leaders agreed to deepen their strategic consultations on Central Asia, West Asia and East Asia with the president going so far as stating that India should not only “look East”, but also “engage the East.” These assertions and statements represent US support for a more activist Indian policy on the regional and global scene and a welcome sign of a more collaborative approach of the US vis-à-vis India on this issue.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

There are several US official statements, including that of President Obama that indicate that India is today an insider in the non-proliferation regime. In fact, there is talk of taking India as a partner in resolving the issues that are plaguing the non-proliferation regime. In their joint statement of November 8, President Obama and Prime Minister Singh “affirmed that their countries’ common ideals, complementary strengths and a shared commitment to a world without nuclear weapons give them a responsibility to forge a strong partnership to lead global efforts for non-proliferation and universal and non-discriminatory global nuclear disarmament in the 21st century.” It may be recalled that though President Bill Clinton had realised the potential of engaging India on this issue through “strategic dialogue” and had begun the process to get India out of the nuclear dog house, it was President George Bush who made it a key foreign policy initiative. India was recognised as a state with nuclear weapons outside the NPT, given an NSG waiver to import nuclear technology and fuel, and allowed to sign an additional protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Under the next steps for strategic partnership of 2004 and the new defence framework agreement of June 2005 signed under the Bush administration, the technology denial regime has been gradually eased and defence cooperation considerably enhanced.

The US-India defence cooperation, therefore, has increased steadily over the last one decade through the medium of defence diplomacy covering a wide range of activities as mentioned above. In further strengthening strategic relationship between the two countries, defence cooperation is a key

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Challenges to Defence Diplomacy

Managing Bilateral Relations

As the United States and India continue to build on their relationship, both countries are facing challenges in managing their relations with regard to the many regional and global security issues that they face. These relate to their policy positions on their relationships with Pakistan, China and Iran. In addition, issues such as climate change, nuclear non-proliferation, international financial crisis, energy and environment are also very important. However, bilateral cooperation on the Indian

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armed forces' structural reform, domestic counter insurgency, personnel acquisition and management reform, among others offers opportunities that might offset the areas of disagreement. India faces a complex strategic environment in the region as well as at home. Indian strategy has responded by showing maximum flexibility in terms of security partners but without compromising of domestic development.⁴⁸ The US and India continue to make enormous strides toward the type of strategic relationship that befits the status of each as a leading democracy but without being in a de facto alliance. Obstacles to closer relations remain, and these difficulties must be managed in order to fulfil the promise inherent in the relationship.

Reliability of Supply and US Export Control Reforms

India's doubts as to the reliability of the US as a supply partner, the United States' reluctance to release certain technology, and worry over the transferability of specifications to less-trusted, third end-users. These doubts have their origin in the United States imposition of sanctions after India's nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998 and have not been entirely removed despite subsequent, positive developments in the bilateral relations. In addition, India has not yet signed the three agreements that the US wants India to sign such as the Logistics

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Support Agreement (LSA), the Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA), and the Geospatial Agreement, each required under US domestic laws in order to transfer sensitive defence technology. India seeks recognition from the US that it is a special partner entitled to receive certain priorities and concessions that are not extended universally. If the US wants its appropriate share of the large economic opportunity presented by India's defence market, it is necessary for the political and bureaucratic leadership of the two countries to remove discretionary barriers and extend administrative and regulatory preferences.

Arms Supply to Pakistan

Since 1954, the US has been providing military assistance to Pakistan to achieve its strategic and foreign policy goals. During the Cold War period, the US was providing military and economic aid to Pakistan to achieve its goal of containing Soviet Union. After September 2001 terrorist attacks, the US has increased its military aid to Pakistan in its fight against terrorism. It is giving F-16 fighters, with advanced all-weather and precision-strike capabilities, P-3C maritime patrol aircraft, with advanced anti-ship and anti-submarine warfare, and a wide array of offensive capabilities like Block-II Harpoon anti-ship missiles, AIM-9M Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, TOW-2A anti-tank guided missiles and the like to Pakistan. All these

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weapon systems and platforms are clearly meant more for conventional wars, not counter-terrorism, unless the Taliban or Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have quietly acquired warships, fighters and tanks and stashed them in their hideouts without the world noticing. But the US remains adamant that the military aid to Pakistan, which crossed the \$11.5 billion mark out of the total aid of \$20.7 billion since September 2001,⁴⁹ is not directed against India. US chairman of the joint chiefs of staff Admiral Mike Mullen said the weapon systems supplied to Pakistan were "specifically" meant for use against terrorism.⁵⁰ However, India wants US to closely monitor its military assistance to Islamabad since a major portion of it is being surreptitiously diverted to bolster Pakistan's conventional military and nuclear

capabilities against India. Pakistan's apparent misuse of US military and economic aid not only raises question marks over the US motives behind this assistance but adversely effects the US-India relations.

Differences on Counterterrorism

Despite the successes achieved through bilateral cooperation on the counterterrorism, at least three areas of divergence still remain. There are differences in defining the threat: the Americans see it as a global challenge; Indians are more preoccupied

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by regional eruptions - in Kashmir, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and occasionally along the Indo-Burma and Indo-Bangladesh borders. There are divergent views on the roots of terrorism, with Indians seeing Pakistan as the root of the problem, not a solution, and the Americans viewing Pakistan as a key ally in their overall war against terror. Pakistan's unequivocal support, at the government level at least, to the United States' war against terrorism was beginning to cast a shadow over recently mended India-US relations. In its avowed war against terrorism the US was not only accepting the support of a state, India has been asking to be declared terrorist, but also appears to have succumbed to Islamabad's blackmail and done a deal behind India's back. That is making the people in New Delhi quite jittery.

In spite of these challenges, however, India, with its stable democratic institutions and strong

credentials on the socio-economic front is being increasingly looked upon as a country which can make significant contributions towards world peace and stability. The proposed areas of cooperation highlight some of the most difficult security challenges as mentioned above facing both the countries, and reinforce the need to work together as India builds its military capabilities. The transformation of defence relationship through the mechanism of defence diplomacy is essential that could help meet these challenges.⁵¹

Conclusion

The US-India strategic relationship is evolving in response to the changing role of India as a regional power, growth of the Indian economy

The US-India strategic relationship is evolving in response to the changing role of India as a regional power, growth of the Indian economy and technology, and its attendant impact on the US regional and global interests.

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The most important strategic convergence is that both nations seek regional stability, support non-proliferation and want to counter international terrorism and religious extremism. In the coming years, defence cooperation will thrive if this remains embedded in the larger context of the bilateral relations and cooperation encompassing political and economic relations. It can be said that defence diplomacy would continue to play a larger role in building trust and confidence between the two nations on a range of issues that the two nations face. Prime Minister Singh and President Obama in their joint statement agreed that:

The transformation in India-US defence cooperation in recent years has strengthened mutual understanding on regional peace and stability, enhanced both countries' respective capacities to meet humanitarian and other challenges such as terrorism and piracy, and contributed to the development of the strategic partnership between India and the United States. The two Governments resolved to further strengthen defence cooperation, including through security dialogue, exercises, and promoting trade and collaboration in defence equipment and technology.

The two leaders also pledged that as strategic partners, India and the United States would continue to consult each other closely on regional and global developments, and remain sensitive to each other's interests.

In recent years, the two countries have made substantial progress in their strategic relationship. The launching of US-India joint working group (JWG) on counterterrorism in 2000, high technology cooperation group (HTCG) in 2002, statement of principles for US-India high technology commerce in 2003, next steps in strategic partnership (NSSP) in 2004, Energy Dialogue in 2005, civil nuclear cooperation in July 2006 are significant achievements to further promote and strengthen

Hence, the strategic partnership agreements signed between the two countries formalised collaboration on the transfer of high technology, civil nuclear energy, economic capacity building, trade and investment, science, education, agriculture, and other areas, all designed to achieve their security and foreign policy interests and further develop US-India strategic relationship.

strategic relations. Moreover, a ten year programme of defence cooperation signed in June 2005 between the two countries encompasses advanced joint exercises and training, expanded defence trade, defence technology transfer, missile defence collaboration, and defence procurement and co-production. In addition, Obama's visit to India further consolidated the US-India strategic relationship and it will gain momentum in the decades ahead. Hence, the strategic partnership agreements signed between the two countries formalised collaboration on the transfer of high technology, civil nuclear energy, economic capacity building, trade and investment, science, education, agriculture, and other areas, all designed to achieve their security and foreign policy interests and further develop US-India strategic relationship.

From a long term perspective, it is imperative that the two countries need to work toward building an architecture for a durable defence relationship while keeping the core national interests intact. If both sides play their diplomatic cards wisely, this strategic relationship could shape the geo-political contours of the 21st century in a manner that enhances peace, stability and prosperity in the world over.



Notes:

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8. See note. 6.
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