

History of Cold War Estrangement to Strategic Partnership and the Evolution of India–US Defence Cooperation

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Indo-US relations witnessed considerable swings during the first five decades post India's independence, shaped by geopolitical challenges and Cold War dynamics. Defence cooperation between the two nations began in 1962, when India, confronting conflict with China, sought assistance from President Kennedy. However, a deep rift developed as the US aligned with Pakistan during the 1971 Indo-Pak War and deteriorated further after India's nuclear tests. Despite these setbacks, the turn of the 21st century marked a shift towards engagement, leading to a steady progression towards a strategic partnership. Over time, mutual interests, regional security concerns, and India's growing global stature contributed to strengthening defence cooperation. The world has transitioned into a new era of strategic rivalry, where the China factor is driving India and the United States towards closer cooperation. This article explores the historical evolution of Indo-US defence relations, analysing the transition from Cold War estrangement to strategic partnership.

Keywords: Cold War Estrangement, Chinese Aggression 1962, Indo-Pak War 1971, NPT, Engagement and Defence Collaboration, Strategic Partnership

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‘The hinge of fate in Asia rests with India’

Senator John F. Kennedy, 1959

INTRODUCTION

The United States supported India’s quest for freedom and occasionally provided India economic aid after she achieved independence, but in the whirlpool of geopolitical challenges during the Cold War era, the relationship between India and the United States of America remained mostly cold, tepid or at best lukewarm, mired in intermittent problems and conflicts. Cold War polarisation of the world into two blocs shaped the worldviews of that era. America viewed countries not in their camp with suspicion. Strong relations between two countries never develop in a vacuum. Assertion of commonality of ideologies, building positive perceptions about each other, and convergence of interests generating trust quotient takes the relationship forward. Indo-US relations during the first five decades since 1947 traversed through many peaks, troughs and platitudes, passing through the testing times. This article traces the history of *estrangement* to *strategic partnership* between India and the United States of America, with special reference to defence cooperation post-1962 Indo-China war.

The history of Indo-US defence cooperation traces its roots to 1962 when India was at war with China and Jawaharlal Nehru sought help from President Kennedy. Besides supplying transport aircraft, weapons and equipment, the United States offered a credit amounting to US\$ 500 million, which did not materialise because, with the outbreak of the Indo-Pak War in 1965, America temporarily snapped defence ties with both India and Pakistan. Indo-US relationship in the cold war era went through much turmoil, traversing through the worst patch during the Indo-Pak War of 1971, with another blow after the 1974 Pokhran nuclear blasts, to mention a few. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of terrorism, economic reforms in India in the 1990s, India’s general prosperity from PL 480 era to become the fifth largest economy, her scientific progress in nuclear and space technology, and her strong, battle-hardened fourth largest armed forces with an exemplary record in UN peacekeeping operations since the Korean War, helped shape the new world order. India emerged as a nation of substance, a regional power to reckon with, who can play a global role as well. Under this tectonic shift in the last 20 years, India and the US have forged ahead to become strategic partners, where defence cooperation between the two is playing a vital and visible role in strengthening the relationship.

Understandably, both the countries have complex interplay of interests and conflicts, where their economic agenda and security concerns will play major roles in making the strategic relationship strong and long-lasting.

BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIA–UNITED STATES TIES PRIOR TO 1947

Three years after independence of America, on the advice of Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson (later the third President of America), President George Washington, on 19 November 1792, appointed Benjamin Joy as Consul of Kolkata, marking it as the first diplomatic mission of America in the world. However, the British East India Company, rulers of Kolkata, did not allow the Consul to conduct diplomatic activities. Some trading and philanthropic activities were, however, permitted. Consequently, for the next 150 years, US missionaries involved in health and educational activities remained the primary link between the two countries. Perceptions about each other were hazy and at times biased because of limited interactions and limited literature on India in the 19th and early 20th centuries. A few books available depicted India as a country of teeming, impoverished populations, snake charmers and naked sadhus, conveying a negative image of India. Mark Twain was possibly one of those rare authors who travelled to India extensively, understood, appreciated and wrote about India's ancient greatness and contribution to the world in his 1897 book *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World*.

Though under a British regime, New Delhi, for the first time in 1941, established direct diplomatic relations with Washington. India's Viceroy appointed Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai as Agent General in Washington. Reciprocally, President Roosevelt appointed Thomas Wilson as Washington's Commissioner in New Delhi. This was also the year when the US seriously considered India because Roosevelt, against the backdrop of World War II, envisaged the strategic importance of Indian territory and Indian soldiers towards the war effort for the allies. The year 1941 stands out as the pivotal year from which the journey of Indo-US relations began.¹ American interest in India continued to grow more after Japan attacked Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. In March 1942, President Roosevelt assigned Colonel Louis Johnson to New Delhi to help Britain and India reach a political settlement when the Cripps Mission was about to fail. With the concurrence of Sir Stafford Cripps, he redrafted the defence proposals, entailing full control of India by Britain but with a better Indian role. His formula was appreciated by the Congress party and Cripps, but Linlithgow, Viceroy of India, had a

different view and convinced Churchill to negate the proposal. Roosevelt was concerned about colonisation of India by a handful of whites and voiced his support for Indian Independence.² In April 1942, the Government of the United States established an Office of the War Information (OWI) in New Delhi, headed by Henry Francis Grady. During World War II, 2.4 lakh GI soldiers were stationed in India, primarily in Bengal and Assam, as part of China–Burma–India Theatre (CBI), commanded by Lt Gen Joseph Warren Stilwell, with headquarters in New Delhi.

INDO-US RELATIONS—COLD WAR ERA ESTRANGEMENT

After limited interactions for a long time, India's independence gave an opportunity to both the countries to look at each other with greater attention. In 1949, the Boston-based weekly *Christian Science Monitor* wrote, 'Until the sudden emergence of the U.S. as a leader of democracies and the unexpected assumption of a world role, few Americans knew very much or cared about India. Now India suddenly has sailed into their ken. Similarly, far off India, with teeming millions, is discovering the United States'.³

First difference in bilateral relations with India occurred on the issue of Jinnah's unfinished agenda of the partition of India over Pakistan's claim on the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan's aggression to wrest Kashmir forcefully led the two newly independent countries to war. Although on 1 January 1948, Nehru approached the UN to resolve the impasse, he was irked over UN for not condemning Pakistan's act of aggression. Meanwhile the US and the UK introduced Resolution No. 47/1948 in the UN Security Council for setting up a UN Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP). For the next two years, India's rigid stance on withdrawal of Pakistani troops as a precondition for holding plebiscite, and the prolonged and unsuccessful negotiations by the three successive UN representatives, greatly irritated the US. Increasingly annoyed by the continuous US pressure in favour of UNCIP and blaming India of lacking sincerity, Nehru, on 15 August 1949, told the US Ambassador in India, Loy Henderson, that he was tired of receiving moral advice from the US. To add fuel to the fire, just ten days later, on 25 August, President Truman sent a message urging Nehru to resolve the impasse by accepting arbitration on Kashmir, which was rejected. Amidst these events, Nehru undertook a three-week long visit to the US in October–November 1949. Though he was well received and was impressed by the progress America as a country had made, his official interactions with the US authorities did not generate mutual warmth. Secretary of State Dean Acheson felt Nehru was the

most difficult person he had ever met.⁴ US leaders were perplexed and taken aback on Nehru's suggestion to be more reasonable with the Russians and to recognise Communist China. A couple of months after the visit, Nehru wrote to Dr S. Radhakrishnan, India's envoy to Moscow, '... they expected something more than gratitude and good and that more I could not supply them'.⁵ The American leadership found the Indian Prime Minister Nehru to be rigid and nebulous. Nehru, in turn, found both President Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson to be supercilious. Regarding the US stance on Kashmir, Nehru wrote to the Indian Ambassador in Washington, G. L. Mehta, '...we consider their attitude in this matter completely wrong and unfriendly to India and that comes in the way of the development of cordial relations between India and America, that we all of us desire more than anything else'.⁶

In 1949, India needed a million tons of wheat to avert a famine-like situation. Though President Truman favoured it, a section of the US Congress was not because of anti-India feelings. Deeply disappointed, on 1 May, Nehru's statement on All-India Radio that India was not ready to barter her freedom of action and self-respect for the much-needed food angered the law-makers in Washington. However, ten days later, in his next statement in the Indian Parliament, he thanked Washington for the proposed food aid but said that India would prefer a long-term loan instead of free aid. This cooled down the situation in Washington, and US\$ 190 million worth of wheat was approved in June 1951, but food shipments were delayed. People in India were dismayed at the obstructionist attitude of the American legislators. Under the PL 480 scheme, the US government's decision to dump surplus 500 million tons foodgrains (worth US\$ 360 million) in return for blocked rupees was signed in August 1956. Even this aid came after much rancour by the legislators, earning much distaste in India. In 1956, on the issue of the Suez crisis, India supported the United States, and relations improved during Eisenhower's second term. US economic assistance to India surged from about US\$ 400 million in 1957 to US\$ 822 million in 1960. Eisenhower and Indian Agriculture Minister S.K. Patil signed a US\$ 1,276 million PL 480 food package. In 1959, for the Indus water dams and irrigation works, a project estimated at US\$ 1 billion by the World Bank, the US funded more than half the amount.⁷

During the presidency of Eisenhower's successor John F. Kennedy, Indo-US relations further improved. Kennedy appointing J.K. Galbraith as America's Ambassador to India was helpful. Tarapur nuclear power plant was constructed with US assistance during this time. The Rockefeller

Foundation of the US sent Norman Borlaug to India in 1963, who, together with Dr Swaminathan, initiated India's Green Revolution towards the end of the 1960s, auguring well for food sufficiency. The unfortunate assassination of Kennedy changed the equation. In 1966, due to severe drought, India was once again facing a famine-like situation. President Johnson sent foodgrains under the PL-480 scheme in tranches, and the delays created a 'ship-to-mouth' situation. This attitude of Johnson offended India once again, and the aid programme, instead of creating goodwill, caused much bitterness. India's Agriculture Minister, C. Subrahmaniam, commented, 'United States gives but does not give gracefully'.⁸ India's response to the Vietnam also annoyed Johnson. It seemed that the US's niggardly attitude towards food aid to India was a *quid pro quo*, motivated, by spite, to punish India for opposing the US war in Vietnam. The Lyndon Johnson era saw a decline in Indo-US relations.

The Cold War was no longer 'cold' after the North Korean attack on South Korea on 25 June 1950. Nehru, assisted by a select group of Indian envoys, made an effort to broker peace and offered a proposal that, in return for talks on Korea, the Soviets would return to the Security Council and the Chinese Communists would occupy the UN seat of the Chinese Nationalists. President Truman flatly refused the proposal, and this disappointed the Indian leadership. Indian media came down heavily on Washington for thwarting the peace proposal. In early 1951, another friction happened when India was pushing for a Korean ceasefire resolution, while the US was also making efforts for a UN resolution condemning the Chinese Communists. While the Indian ceasefire proposal was passed in the General Assembly after the US accepted it reluctantly, China rejected the US-backed resolution, though it was passed by a resounding vote of 50–7–8 majority. India and Myanmar were the only two countries to join the communists in opposing this resolution. For some time, the relationship turned sour. Hopes for cordial relations rekindled after Roosevelt's visit to New Delhi in the summer of 1952, as he was keen for a settlement. Another discord between Washington and New Delhi happened when Secretary of State John Foster Dulles negotiated a peace treaty with Japan. Nehru was unhappy and refused to sign the peace treaty because of the exclusion of China and Soviet Russia. Nehru was also in disagreement on the security arrangements between Japan and the United States. Washington was appalled. Nehru's obsession with Communist China and Soviet Russia perplexed Washington.⁹

Neither Truman nor Eisenhower liked Nehru's non-alignment policy and his soft corner for Fabian socialism. The United States was concerned

about Soviet expansion and needed a military alliance in South Asia and chose Pakistan. In the 1950s, when the US started supplying arms to Pakistan, India feared that these arms will be used against India more than anyone else. India's apprehension came true in the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak Wars. Relations soured, but instead of outright enmity, they remained estranged until the US sided with Pakistan during the 1971 Indo-Pak War, continuing arms supplies even as war loomed large in South Asia. On 25 March 1971, the Pakistani army commenced Operation Searchlight against the unarmed civilians of East Pakistan. Its brutality shocked the world, but President Nixon and his National Security Adviser Kissinger were unconcerned despite US media and many senators condemning the genocide. They were secretly planning rapprochement with China, a shift from the policy of containment. In early July 1971, Kissinger made a hyphenated visit to New Delhi and Rawalpindi. Besides telling Indira Gandhi to avoid war at any cost, he also gave a veiled warning that if conflicts happen, major powers may intervene. From Rawalpindi, Kissinger covertly visited Beijing and met Chou En Lai. Pakistan played the role of a conduit.¹⁰ Strangely, in less than two decades after the Korean War, where the US lost 36,000 soldiers and China about 2.4 lakh, including Mao Tse Tung's son, a MIG fighter pilot, their diplomacy took a different turn. Relations amongst nations are never static.

In the eyes of India, an estranged friend, the US, became a foe for siding with Pakistan all through the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. This was due to its role in the UN's disregard for the genocide-like pogrom of the Pakistani army in East Pakistan, and its failure to acknowledge India's difficulties in handling the influx of East Pakistani refugees. The US also coaxed China to open a front in Sikkim to scare India. Finally, US's gunboat diplomacy of moving the biggest nuclear-armed aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* to the Bay of Bengal towards the end of Indo-Pakistan War as a last ditch attempt to showcase its loyalty towards its client state Pakistan, as well as to let China know that the US stands by its friends, soured the relations between the two countries that hit rock bottom, pushing it to its lowest point in the history of Indo-US relations in the last 77 years. After the Indo-Pakistan War in 1971, US retaliated by cutting back US\$ 82 million economic aid to India. The legacy of Richard Nixon and the *Enterprise* remained etched in the Indian mind for a long time.

If the US was irked with India over getting closer to Soviet Russia, India was equally sceptical of the Pakistan-China-America axis. In 1981, the US supplied Pakistan 40 F-16 premier fighter aircraft, upgraded M-48 tanks,

modern artillery, and several warships, which were a direct threat to India's security. Military assistance continued for many more years. '...it was strange to democratic Indians that the United States was friendly towards Pakistani military dictators, hostile to India, and friendly to communist China, another hostile neighbour of India, but wanted to contain the Soviet Union, a friend to India'.¹¹ Both the countries became suspicious of each other. The Pentagon went a step further, branding India as hegemon in South Asia.

Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

After China exploded a nuclear weapon in 1964, to prevent India from becoming the sixth nuclear power, America tried hard to implement the non-proliferation regime and to impose international control. India felt the NPT was an unfair and unequal arrangement between the nuclear haves and have-nots and pressed for a UN-sponsored guarantee against the Chinese nuclear threat, which was not assured. On this burning issue, India's Ambassador B.K. Nehru remarked, 'It is all very well to ask a [person not to defend himself but then somebody else has got to take on that defence]'.¹² On 18 May 1974, India exploded an underground nuclear device at Pokhran in the deserts of Rajasthan, which caught the US government by surprise. India's nuclear test damaged its standing in the US amongst its traditional liberal supporters, though towards the end of the 1970s, Jimmy Carter tried to resolve the issues, albeit unsuccessfully. For the next eight years, the question of licensing enriched uranium for Tarapur remained a problematic issue. Reopening an old wound, on request from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the US lifted the arms embargo on Pakistan in February 1975, which drew a sharp reaction in India. Bilateral relations sustained grievous damage in the 1970s. After India's nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998, invoking the Glenn Amendment of 1977, the US retaliated severely by terminating defence sales, trade, and foreign assistance, as also stopping credit guarantees and bank loans from financial institutions, such as Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the US Export-Import Bank, besides prohibiting exports of licensed goods and technology. In the aftermath of May 1998 nuclear tests by India, the US, besides applying sanctions, led a coalition of countries pressuring India to sign the NPT and decommission its nuclear weapons, though nothing came out of it as India stood firm. Ironically, these sanctions boomeranged on big US companies doing business with India, which incurred heavy losses. For the betterment of both the countries, the anger quickly subsided.

FROM ESTRANGEMENT TO ENGAGEMENT: THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW RELATIONSHIP

In 1981, when Tarapur negotiations on the supply of nuclear fuel seemed to be heading towards failure, India stepped back at the threshold and opted for a compromise solution. Negotiations began, and the US gave up its longstanding demand for perpetual safeguards. It agreed to the proposal that beyond the expiration of the contract in 1993, France would replace the US, and continue to supply nuclear fuel to India. After a gap of 11 years, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made an official visit to the US. Prior to her departure, she told the press that, '...I shall like to convince people that you can have friendship even if you do not agree on all the matters...our friendship with the Soviets does not prevent us from becoming friend with US or China'.¹³ US relations with India slowly improved in the 1980s, but mistrust of the past remained. In India, many economists, security experts, strategists like Dr K. Subrahmanyam, and foreign policy specialists were in favour of establishing cordial relations with the US. The Indian diaspora in the US, a rapidly growing community, strongly supported this view. Salient activities and events that set off the process of changing the mindset and having a fresh look at each other are:¹⁴

1. *Economic reforms*: In the early 1990s, India's economic reforms opened the possibility of a new era of market-driven economy and foreign investment opportunities. After half a century, it was a paradigm shift, which augured well for both the countries. There has been quantum jump in bilateral trade from US\$ 5.6 billion in 1990 to US\$ 128.55 billion in FY 2022–23.
2. *Aftermath of Pokhran II*: As part of the self-reliance of its nuclear weapons programme, India conducted five nuclear tests in May 1998. The US retaliated with a range of economic and technological sanctions, besides leading a coalition of countries pressuring India to sign the NPT. Thankfully, for India these sanctions did not cause much damage. Realising the ineffectiveness of the plethora of sanctions, America, under Clinton, recharted its diplomatic path.
3. *US role during 1999 Kargil War*: Despite scepticism, the India–Pakistan conflict compelled the US to pitch in to forestall any possible nuclear war. Washington was unsure of New Delhi's reaction, but India's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee welcomed President Clinton's effort in preventing a war.
4. *Clinton's India visit in 2000*: Relations between the two countries started warming up after thorough discussions between a bilateral

group led, respectively, by Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbott, US Deputy Secretary of State. After a gap of almost 25 years, since the last US President's visit to India, Bill Clinton visited India in early 2000. For the first time, a US President undertook a de-hyphenated visit, decoupling India and Pakistan. Clinton spent five days in India, as compared with a few hours in Pakistan and a day in Bangladesh. It took many decades for the US to understand that the usual hyphenation of visitors like Presidents and other high-level dignitaries from the US practiced so far, coupling India and Pakistan, two avowed competitors, was irksome to India, impeding the generation of goodwill. Politically, it was a successful visit, however, there were no tangible path-breaking accords or waiver of sanctions initiated after the Pokhran blasts, though the President was empowered to do so by the US Congress.

5. *Terrorist attack on the US World Trade Centre and Pentagon buildings (9/11)*: Early morning on 11 September 2001, when America suffered a heavy blow due to four coordinated al-Qaeda terrorist attacks, former New York Senator, also a former US Ambassador to India, Patrick Moynihan said, 'As America reacts to the mass murder of 9/11 and prepares for more, it would do well to consider how much terror India endured in the second half of the last century'.¹⁵ Washington sought cooperation from the countries to come together to fight terrorism. India, facing this menace for a long time, became a natural choice in their mission to eliminate terrorism. Sanctions on technology and munitions imposed after the nuclear tests were lifted for both India as well as Pakistan, besides relaxing the stringent licensing process. In November 2001, during the visit of Atal Bihari Vajpayee to the United States, a range of bilateral issues of common interest covering technology, commerce, transfer of dual-use military items, space, etc., were discussed, indicating a qualitative positive movement towards a cordial relationship. Towards the later part of 2001, based on the technological and industrial capability, besides research and development ability, India was designated as a 'Friendly Foreign Country' (FFC), a status that continues till date. A year later, in November 2002, the India-US High Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG) was formed, which has matured over the years.
6. *A step towards strategic partnership*: A great transformation in relations commenced after the meeting between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and President Bush in January 2004. A major leap was taken, entailing the Next Steps in the Strategic Partnership (NSSP). Both

leaders agreed to expand cooperation in civilian nuclear activities, space programmes and high-technology trade, and agreed to commence discussions on missile defence. As a good-will measure, the US relaxed licensing norms for India and removed stringent mandatory import certification for exports to Government of India entities.

7. *Paradigm Shift in Indo-US Relations:* In 2005, President Bush, after taking due consideration, including military implications, announced that the US policy framework would be aimed at 'helping India become a major world power in the 21st century'.¹⁶ Statement of 18 July 2005, issued jointly by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President George W. Bush, indicated a milestone change in the Indo-US relations, encompassing cooperation in a variety of activities in addition to launching new initiatives, such as a CEOs Forum and US–India Global Democracy platform.
8. *A defining moment:* In 2008, after getting clearance from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Nuclear Suppliers Group of nations, and after garnering support of legislatures, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee signed the Civil Nuclear Agreement on 10 October 2008. President Bush signed the 123 Agreement, valid for 40 years. With this, the two countries sealed their strategic partnership, and their bonding grew successively year after year. Successive events helped India and the US to build a strong defence and security cooperation. Vibrant people-to-people interactions between the two countries took the relationship even deeper, extending beyond the government spectrum.

HISTORIC JOURNEY OF INDO-US DEFENCE COOPERATION

From Independence to 1962 Indo-China War

Following the first Indo-Pak war in Kashmir, President Truman imposed an embargo on the export of arms to both India and Pakistan, which was lifted after the ceasefire agreement in January 1949. In 1952, New Delhi approached Washington for tanks and aircraft to modernise its armed forces. While the request for 200 Sherman tanks costing US\$ 19 million was approved, but the request for 200 jet aircraft worth US\$ 150 million was not granted. Ultimately, a compromise was reached, and the sale of less expensive 54 C-119 transport aircraft were approved. The aircraft were extensively used for supply of operational logistics in both the 1962 Indo-China War and in the 1971 Indo-Pak War. During the Bangladesh Liberation War, the aircraft

were used for the famous para dropping in Tangail and later for transporting prisoners of war to various camps within India. Till the beginning of the 1960s, India, through Mutual Defence Assistance Programme, received military equipment as aid to defend itself against China. In 1962, when China attacked India, Nehru frantically sent requests to Kennedy for arms assistance, including fighter aircraft, which infuriated Pakistan. Trying to maintain a balance between India and Pakistan, America did not supply fighter aircraft to India, but sent light arms, ammunition, spare parts for the transport aircraft and communication equipment. On the recommendation of Galbraith, Kennedy sent the aircraft carrier task force, *USS Enterprise*, to the Bay of Bengal to show solidarity and support to India against Communist China's aggression. Ironically, nine years later, in December 1971, during the Bangladesh Liberation War, another US President, Richard Nixon, sent the same aircraft carrier to the Bay of Bengal to threaten India and to protect its client state, Pakistan.

Indo-US Defence Cooperation Post 1962 Indo-China War

After the Indo-China War of 1962, Nehru was worried about possible future air attacks by China on cities like Kolkata and New Delhi. India's Foreign Secretary, M.J. Desai, suggested an 'air defence umbrella' under which the West, besides supplying radars and communication equipment, would, if necessary, fly in Allied aircraft to defend India. The US Air Force, and those of Commonwealth countries like the UK and Australia, and the Indian Air Force would participate in a joint air defence exercise, named Exercise SHIKSHA, marking the first joint training between the IAF and the USAF. However, the idea of an air defence umbrella was dropped.¹⁷

Defence cooperation between the two countries restarted in the 1990s when Lt Gen Kicklighter, Commander of the US Pacific Command, on his mission to explore possible Indo-US defence cooperation, visited New Delhi.¹⁸ Lt Gen S.F. Rodrigues, Vice Chief of the Indian Army (later Army Chief), asked Kicklighter to offer a concrete proposal to take the agenda forward. On his next visit, Kicklighter presented an outline framework, which was then worked on. In January 1995, US Defence Secretary, William Perry and S.B. Chavan, Defence Minister of India, signed the US-India Pact on Military Cooperation, the first formal bilateral document towards defence cooperation, 'marking a break with the estrangements of the cold-war era as a move towards enhanced stability in South Asia'.¹⁹ This 'Agreed Minute on the Defence Relations' laid the first foundation stone in building defence ties between the two countries. Except for a few years after Pokhran II, meetings

of the Defence Policy Group (DPG) have been held regularly. The 17th DPG meeting took place in Washington, DC, on 17 May 2023, co-chaired by Defence Secretary of India Giridhar Aramane and Dr Colin Kahl, Under Secretary of Defence for the United States. The framework entails closer cooperation between both civilian and uniformed leadership in the areas of defence research and defence production. To ensure coordination and further progress, an annual strategic dialogue was also set up.

Condoleezza Rice in January 2000, said, 'The United States should pay closer attention to India's role in the regional balance...India is not a great power yet, but it has the potential to emerge as one'.²⁰ On 7 February 2004, an agreement on 'Exchange of Research and Development Information' was signed by Donald H. Ramsfield, US Secretary of Defence and George Fernandes, India's Defence Minister. During her maiden visit to New Delhi in March 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice conveyed the US desire to broaden the strategic relationship with India. A future cooperation programme for the next ten years across multiple areas was considered. On 28 June 2005, in Washington, DC, Defence Ministers Donald Rumsfeld of the US and Pranab Mukherjee of India signed a New Framework for Defence Relations. A summarised version of the document would read:²¹

In pursuit of this shared vision of an expanded and deeper US-India strategic relationship, our defence establishment shall: conduct joint and combined exercises and exchanges, collaboration in multinational operations, strengthen militaries to defeat terrorism, promote regional and global peace, combat proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, defence trade and technology transfer, including coproduction, collaborate in missile defence, disaster management, capacity building for peacekeeping operations, exchange of intelligence, continue strategic-level discussions between the two defence ministries etc.

A long and ambitious all-encompassing list, Indo-US defence cooperation took a further leap. A Joint Working Group was created to take the objectives forward. Furthermore, on completion of ten years, the New Framework for Defence Relations was extended for a further ten years on 3 June 2015, as per the agreement signed in New Delhi by Manohar Parrikar, Defence Minister of India, and US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter, for enhancing defence ties.

Counterterrorism Operations

After the 9/11 attacks in New York City, the first Indo-US bilateral discussion on counterterrorism was held in 2000. In the same year, when the

US attacked Afghanistan in their 'global war on terror' campaign, the Indian Navy facilitated safe movement of US vessels, by providing escort through the Strait of Malacca. However, then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government did not accede to the request of the US government to send troops. In the aftermath of the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, cooperation between the two countries deepened culminating in the signing of the Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative (CCI) in July 2010.

Indo-US strategic ties were fashioned in July 2005 when President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met and reached an agreement on the nuclear deal that led to the removal of NPT sanctions imposed on India. In 2006, the Indo-US Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation was signed as part of maritime strategy 'to ensure a secure maritime domain'.²² Over the years, it shaped India's projection of maritime power. The US–India Strategic Dialogue was launched on 20 July 2009. After a series of discussions at the reciprocal officials-level, a joint meeting, co-chaired by the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and India's Minister of External Affairs S.M. Krishna, was held in Washington, DC on 3 June 2010 along with high-level representatives from both the countries. US President Barack Obama during his address at this meeting emphasised his commitment to strengthen US–India partnership.²³ The meeting was a precursor to US President Obama's first visit to India in November, 2010. On arrival in India, Obama said, 'The partnership between the United States and India will be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century'.²⁴ In a joint statement issued in New Delhi, both the US President and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, 'The two Governments resolved to further strengthen defence cooperation, including through security dialogue, exercises, and promoting trade and collaboration in defence equipment and technology'.²⁵

During this visit, exemptions for India on US Export Regulations and International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) were announced. President Obama welcomed India's decision to purchase high technology defence equipment from the US.²⁶ Another milestone in the Indo-US defence cooperation was reached in 2012, when 'Defence Trade and Technology (DTTI)' was rolled out to facilitate co-production/co-development of defence items, though there was no treaty per se. In September 2013, India and United States made a 'Joint Declaration on Defence Cooperation and Engagement', a further boost to the existing defence cooperation, which placed India at a level equal to that of the closest partners of the US.

In ensuring a balance of power, the Obama administration considered an Asia's pivot, with India as an apt counter-balance to China. Obama

was the chief guest at India's 66th Republic Day Parade in 2015. During his three-day visit to India, a few landmark agreements towards stronger defence cooperation were signed. The existing 'Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship' was extended, alongside the signing of the 'Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region'. DTTI projects on mobile electric hybrid power sources and chemical and biological weapons were also signed. DTTI gained legal recognition during the joint announcement by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 6 June 2016. India was recognised as a Major Defence Partner, and the DTTI was institutionalised as an outcome of this recognition to facilitate 'defence trade and technology sharing between the United States and India...to a level commensurate with the closest allies and partners of the United States.' President Obama guaranteed US government's support to the Government of India's 'Make in India' initiative and appreciated setting up of new DTTI working groups, encompassing land, naval, air and other weapons systems, beside 'Information Exchange Annex' under the Joint Working Group on Aircraft Carrier Technology Cooperation.²⁷ America's distinct recognition of India as a Major Defence Partner got a further boost on 30 July 2018, elevating India to Tier-1 of the Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) system. This step allowed US companies to export high-tech dual technology items to India. Without joining NATO, its elevation to STA-1 put India in the same tier as NATO allies in the context of high-tech sales.²⁸

During the process of defence cooperation dialogues as early as 2002, US urged India to sign four foundational agreements as under:²⁹

1. General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), to ensure secrecy in communications between the two countries.
2. Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), a reciprocal agreement, allowing both countries for military refuelling and refilling of items related to operational logistics on either sides.
3. Communication and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA).
4. Basic Exchange Cooperation Agreement (BECA), which encompasses information sharing in space and undersea domain.

On 17 January 2002, India signed only one agreement, GSOMIA. For the other three agreements, India waited for many years for understanding and confidence building and signed them in tranches and only after India-specific modifications were agreed upon. For example, LEMOA is an India-

specific agreement, unlike Logistic Support Agreement (LSA), which the US has signed with other countries. Similarly, Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) was modified to Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA). LEMOA was signed on 29 August 2016, CISMOA was signed in 2018, and BECA in October 2020.

India's procurement of S-400 surface-to-air missile system from Russia faced a hurdle due to the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAASTA) of 2017. However, India's firm stance on the issue, and keeping in view the larger strategic interest that the procurement will have for India's capability against China, the United States granted a waiver to India in 2019.

2 PLUS 2 DIALOGUE

Commenced in 2018, it is a ministerial-level summit, where Ministers of Defence and External Affairs from India meet annually with their US counterparts, Secretary of Defence and Secretary of State, alternately in India and the US. The fifth 2 plus 2 Dialogue took place in November 2024 in New Delhi. India's Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, and India's Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, along with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, participated. The central agenda of the fifth meeting was to ensure 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'. Both the countries reaffirmed their commitments and finalised the following aspects:³⁰

1. Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) for reinforcing uninterrupted supply chains for both the partners.
2. Roadmap for Indo-US Defence Industrial Cooperation for seamless cooperation and coproduction of defence equipment.
3. Commencement of joint production of armoured infantry vehicles.

Narendra Modi and Joe Biden, during a meeting in Tokyo in 2022, announced an 'Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technologies'. Thereafter, National Security Advisors of both the countries met to finalise the shape of an innovation bridge connecting Indian and American defence start-ups. Formally, during Modi's visit to the US in June 2023, iCET was launched in Washington, DC, aiming at strategic technology partnership and cooperation between the industries and institutions, not limited to government establishments. As a follow-up of the 2 plus 2 discussions in

2022, in May 2023, New Delhi and Washington held the first 'Advanced Domain Defence Dialogue', where the role of AI in defence domains was deliberated upon. The 2nd edition of this annual dialogue was held in May 2024 in Washington, DC. The discussions revolved around exploring feasibility of cooperation in space domain. Indo-US Strategic Trade Dialogue was held in Washington in June 2023 to initiate the development of trade in 'Critical Technology Domain', such as semiconductors, quantum technology, Artificial Intelligence, space, telecom, biotechnology and others. Vinay Mohan Kwarta, Foreign Secretary of India, and Alan Estevez, a senior official of US Department of Commerce, led the respective delegations.

INDIA JOINS COMBINED MARITIME FORCES (CMF)

In November 2023, India became a member of the US-led multinational Combined Maritime Force (CMF), in a path-breaking step towards Indo-US defence cooperation, where the Indian Navy will operate as part of the multinational task force of 42 nations headed by a US Navy Vice Admiral. It has five combat task forces (CTF), one of which will have a co-lead by a senior Indian Navy officer. Joining the CTF will accrue better interoperability with the navy of the United States and navies of other member countries. US and India will be able to jointly identify the areas of operation requiring surveillance. Under this maritime force, *INS Talwar*, an Indian Naval ship operating in support of the Canadian-led Combined Task Force (CTF) 150, successfully carried out interdiction of illegal drugs, seizing 940 kg of illicit narcotics in the Arabian Sea on 13 April 2024.

TRAINING, EXERCISES AND SEMINARS

On a reciprocal basis for many years, there have been professional military education exchanges. Defence officers from the US attended Defence Services Staff College Course in Wellington (Tamil Nadu) and the National Defence College course in New Delhi. Similarly, Indian armed forces officers attended US Command and General Staff College, the United States Army War College, the Institute for Asia-Pacific Security Studies in Hawaii and other training programmes. In January 1993, India and the US co-hosted a week-long Pacific Armies Seminar (PAM) in New Delhi, where senior commanders of the Pacific Armies and a few Foreign and Defence Ministry officials participated. On invitation from the US, India sent an army officer

to join the UN–US co-sponsored seminar game on ‘End State–Exit Strategy’ held in Manila in 2003.³¹ Occasionally, American officers come for training in the Indian Army’s High Altitude Warfare School (HAWS) in Gulmarg (J&K), a world-renowned school of its kind. For better understanding of the capabilities of the armed forces and for enhancing inter-operability and to share idea and best practices, bilateral and multilateral joint training and exercises are held by the armed forces of the two countries. These are conducted mostly at Army to Army level, Navy to Navy level, Air Force to Air Force level and occasionally at Tri-Service level. Details of the exercises are summarised next.³²

BILATERAL ARMY EXERCISES

Yudh Abhyas

It is the largest annual joint training exercise for war conducted by the Indian Army and the US Army since its inception in 2002. Usually, the training is held for a fortnight, rotationally between the two countries, covering all types of terrain. Yudh Abhyas-1 was held in Agra in May 2002. In Yudh Abhayas-18 held at Bakloh in Himachal Pradesh, female soldiers from both the countries took part for the first time. Yudh Abhayas-19 was held in Fort Wainwright, Alaska, in the period of September–October 2023.

Exercise Vajra Prahar

After an initial joint training in jungle warfare, Vajra Prahar, at the Indian Army’s Counter-Insurgency and Jungle-Warfare School (CIJW) in Vairengte, Mizoram, in 1993, many US army personnel were subsequently trained at the CIJW School. Later, it was decided to conduct a three-week bilateral joint exercise for the special forces annually to hone skills and jointness in anti-terrorist and anti-hijacking airborne operations, held at alternate locations. The first edition of this exercise was conducted in Belgaum in 2010, and its 14th edition, VAJRA PRAHAR-2023, was held in India from November to December in Umroi Cantonment near Shillong (Meghalaya).

BILATERAL/MULTILATERAL NAVAL EXERCISES

Exercise Sangam

A bilateral joint naval special forces exercise commenced in 1994, where the Indian Navy’s commando group MARCOS and the US Navy SEALs

train together in counter-terrorism, rescue mission and emergency response operations. Its 8th edition was held in Goa from 23 October to 10 November 2023.

Exercise Malabar

Commenced as a bilateral naval exercise between Indian Navy and US Navy in 1992 conducted at Malabar Coast, the US called off the joint training as retaliation post India's 1998 Pokhran II nuclear test. The exercise recommenced in 2002 and gradually increased its scope and sophistication after aircraft carriers joined the exercise fleet, and later training was further scaled up with war gaming. With Japan joining in 2014, it became a trilateral exercise and, subsequently, when Australia joined in 2020, it took the form of a quadrilateral exercise. Now, the exercise is held annually in various alternate locations in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. For the first time, the 2023 exercise was hosted by Australia and was conducted off Australia's east coast in August 2023. India hosted its 28th iteration in October 2024 in the Bay of Bengal.

Milan

At the initiative of Indian Navy, this biennial multilateral naval exercise commenced in 1995 and was held in the Andamans to make it a regional-level confidence-building measure amongst the navies of the ASEAN countries. Over the years, though, its focus remained region-centric, but its scope and number of participants increased phenomenally, and the venue was changed to Vishakhapatnam for doing drills in the Bay of Bengal. The 12th edition of Milan was held in February 2024, in which navies of more than 50 countries participated. This is the second time the US Navy participated in this exercise.

RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific)

The world's largest US-initiated biennial multilateral naval exercise commenced in 1971; India has been participating since 2012. Its 28th edition, RIMPAC-2024, was held in and around the Hawaiian Islands from 26 June to 2 August in three phases. About 29 nations, 40 surface ships, three submarines, and about 25,000 personnel participated in this exercise. India's indigenously designed and built multi-role stealth frigate *INS Shivalik* and Indian Navy's P8I aircraft participated in this exercise at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, 9,000 nautical miles away, proving Indian Navy's global reach.³³

Cutlass Express

It is the US Africa Command (USAFCOM/US 6th Fleet)-sponsored multinational maritime exercise conducted in the East African coast and the western Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy for the first time joined this exercise in 2019. It is a unique naval exercise, the primary objective of which is to achieve collaboration amongst navies of the countries affected by illicit sea activities, such as piracy, narcotics trafficking, etc., and coordinate action against these activities, ensuring maritime safety and security by doing drills, such as maritime interdictions and board and search operations. Sixteen friendly foreign navies, including India's *INS Tir*, participated in the '2024 – Exercise Cutlass Express' held at Port Victoria, Seychelles from 26 February to 8 March 2024.

Sea Dragon

This annual multinational naval exercise focuses on anti-submarine warfare (ASW), hosted by the US Navy's (USN) 7th fleet. It began in 2019 as a bilateral exercise between US Navy (USN) and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). However, with every edition, there was addition of participants. In recognition of the strategic importance of Indo-Pacific Ocean, Quad was included in 2021. The two-week exercise Sea Dragon 2024 was held in Guam (USA) from 9 January to 24 January. Indian Navy's P-8I participated in this significant airborne anti-submarine warfare training exercise.³⁴

Le Perouse

Named after French naval commander and explorer, Le Perouse is a French-led two-day maritime exercise of seven navies, consisting of Quad countries, France, Canada and the UK. It was held in March 2023, in which Indian Navy's *INS Sahyadri* (stealth frigate), *INS Jyoti* (tanker) and a P-8I aircraft (maritime patrolling and recce) participated.

BILATERAL/MULTILATERAL AIR FORCE EXERCISES

Cope India

The first bilateral exercise between Indian and United States Air Force was held at Gwalior Air Force Station in 2004. After being discontinued from 2010 to 2018, the exercise recommenced in 2019. In 2024, it was held at air force stations in Kalaikunda, Panagarh and Agra from 10 April to 21 April.

Japanese airmen participated in observer's role, along with two C-130J Super Hercules aircraft.

Red Flag

It is a multinational US-sponsored air force exercise in which Indian Air Force participated in 2008, 2016 and in a two-week exercise conducted at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska from 4 June to 14 June 2024. Air Force contingents from the UK, Singapore, the Netherlands and the United States took part in this exercise. IAF contingent flew Rafael aircraft to the transatlantic exercise destination in Alaska region, with logistic support of IAF IL-78 AAR (air to air refuellers) and C-17 Globemaster. The Indian crew were deeply involved in mission planning and mission leading, and their performance was much applauded.³⁵

Pitch Black

Hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force, this multinational air force exercise is being held biennially since the last 43 years, whose scope and number of participants have increased over the years. Pitch Black-2024 was held from 12 July to 2 August 2024 at the Royal Australian Air Force Bases at Darwin, Tinda and Amberley. Twenty nations, including India and the United States, participated in this exercise. The IAF contingent flew Sukhoi MKI aircraft during the exercise.

Ex-Tarang Shakti-2024

For the first time in August 2024, India held air combat exercise where, besides the IAF, air force contingents from seven countries, including the US Air Force, participated. This exercise was conducted in two phases at the air force bases in Sullur (Tamil Nadu) and Jodhpur (Rajasthan).

BILATERAL TRI-SERVICE EXERCISE: TIGER TRIUMPH³⁶

India–United States tri-service amphibious exercise Tiger Triumph was first held in November 2019 near Visakhapatnam and Kakinada in the Bay of Bengal area, focussing on enhancing interoperability during Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). The harbour phase of its 2024 edition was held at Vishakhapatnam from 18 March to 25 March 2024, and the sea phase was conducted onboard *USS Somerset* from 26 March to 30 March 2024.

Table I. Major US Weapon Systems Bought by India from 2008 to 2023³⁷

Weapon System	Type	Numbers	Year of Induction
Lockheed Martin	Transport aircraft	13	2011
Hercules C-130J			
Boeing P81 Poseidon	Antisubmarine Warfare Aircraft	18	2021
Lockheed Martin C-17	Transport Aircraft	11	2013
Globemaster			
BAE M777	155 mm Light Weight Towed Howitzer	145	2013
Boeing AH-64	Attack Helicopter	28	2019
CH-47 Chinook	Transport Helicopter	15	2019-20
Lockheed Martin			
MH-60R	Multirole Helicopter for Navy	24	2022
AH-64E Apache	Multi Mission Role Helicopter for Army	24	2024
Sig Sauer SIG 716	Assault Rifle for Army	72,400	2019
MQ 9B			
Armed Drone	Army, Navy and Air Force	31	Deal in 2023*
Delivery in 2026			
MQ 9B	Navy intelligence acquisition	2	On Lease

ROADMAP FOR INDO-US DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION

As part of DTTI initiative in October 2021, India and the US agreed to co-develop an aerial vehicle. The roadmap for Indo-US Defence Industrial Cooperation was rolled out in June 2023. Potential projects were identified and prioritised, and a mutual agreement was reached at for projects dealing with 'Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), Undersea Domain, Aero Engines, Munitions systems and Mobility'.³⁸ During Prime Minister Modi's visit to the United States in June 2023, an MoU between General Electronics (GE) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for co-production of 99 GE F-414 aero-engines in India was signed. Price negotiation with 80 per cent transfer of technology is in progress. Meanwhile, GE has decided

to make Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) and is looking for a partner in India to make Mk2 engines. Rolls Royce of England and Safran of France are also in the fray to co-develop AMCA Mk2 engine in India.

In 2023, Master Ship Repair Agreement (MSRA) has been reached between a private entity of the United States and L&T Kattupalii (Chennai). MSRA agreement has also been reached at by Mazagaon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai and the US Government for US Naval ship repairing. In April 2024, Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) has also entered into a similar MSRA with the US government making it the third port where US ships will carry out repairs.

The India–US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X)

This initiative was launched in June 2023 to synergise activities and programmes of defence environmental network related to defence products and innovation in defence technology. It connects Innovation for Defence Excellence (iDEX) in India and Defence Innovation Unit (DIU) in the US. Since its start, an advisory group has been formed. INDUS-X Mutual Promotion of Advanced Collaborative Technologies (IMPACT), involving innovations in areas like challenging undersea communication network, has been launched, besides holding defence investor–start-up meetings and organising industry–academia interface.

Aero India

A biennial air show since 1996 is held in Bengaluru where many Indian and reputed foreign enterprises show up with their products. During its 14th edition in 2023, United States Air Force's state-of-the-art F-35 stealth fighter jet participated.

CHALLENGES AHEAD³⁹

India is not an ally of United States through any military treaty, unlike other Quad member countries. Nevertheless, India is partnering in security tie-up in the Indo-Pacific Region. This kind of loose arrangement is working because there is convergence of security interests, and going by history, India is unlikely to join a military treaty. India has long had close relations with Russia, as does the US with Pakistan. Both countries need to understand, accept and manoeuvre to avoid clash. India's 2016 designation as a Major Defence Partner of the US does not have any legal binding on the US, whereas their Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status for Pakistan gets

certain special privileges of military and financial grants. To offset this, there is a need to work out an Indo-US Strategic Security Agreement, a bilateral framework between the two defence ministries that will have legal bindings.

Unless cutting-edge technology transfer is shared for the joint production of aero-engines and other defence articles, the mission of co-production is unlikely to be fully successful. Some legal waivers on trade restrictions must be offered as a middle-term via-media solution. Surely, India will look for competitors for the best deal, including the transfer of critical high-end technology, though sellers with similar advanced technology will not easily agree to part with it because niche technology ensures good profit and edge over others. Stringent legal restrictions on transfer of high-end technology may become a hindrance to Indo-US defence cooperation. Passing through the fence of legal scrutiny of The Arms Export Control Act makes the process cumbersome and tiresome. The best option for India is, therefore, to be included in the list of countries acquiescent to Defence Department Regulation—Federal Acquisition Supply Chain Security Act (FSCA)—which could offer opportunities for the Indian government and private entities to be a subsidiary of US defence industry and be part of the global supply chain. India is the world's biggest importer of defence equipment, and US defence industry has increased its market share over the past 15 years. Currently, this is a one-way traffic to India for the US weapon manufactures and sellers, because besides US legal barriers on the import of defence equipment, Indian defence manufacturing is yet to mature. PM Modi has given a clarion call for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', and the results are showing. For meaningful expansion of defence cooperation, New Delhi needs to finalise a Reciprocal Defence Procurement Arrangement with Washington to open the doors of the US market to the Indian manufactures and sellers of defence equipment.

CONCLUSION

In the half-century after independence, the relations between India and the US have been uneven, at times amicable, on occasion animus, but mostly estranged. After the traumatic experience of colonial rule, independent India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, followed the path of non-alignment. President Harry Truman, for some time, suspected Nehru of being a communist. Equally, there was a misperception on India's side too over Pakistan joining the Western military bloc. New Delhi's political circles felt America is an 'evil force who will destabilise the world order'. The US decision to provide military aid to Pakistan through NSC 5409 of

February 1954 infuriated India, angered Nehru and earned condemnation from the Indian media. Nehru's dream of a neutral Asia was shattered. Loathing Nehru, wrote to the Chief Ministers urging them to discourage too many people travelling to the United States and from the US to India, besides issuing a memorandum on 3 May 1954, which stated, 'The fewer persons go from India to America or that come from the United States to India, the better'.⁴⁰ Nehru felt the US armament aid to Pakistan was forcing an arms race in the subcontinent, burdening India to increase its defence expenditure. India's permanent representative to the UN Krishna Menon's stance on Communist China and Soviet Russia and acerbic attacks on the US and vituperation created a negative image in the US. President Eisenhower described Menon as a 'menace and a boor'.⁴¹ Menon's counterpart in America was Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who, through his bizarre logic on morality, condemned India's non-alignment as 'an immoral concept', became an architect of US arms support to Pakistan, and advocated the Portuguese position on Goa. Dulles became India's *bête noire*. To Nehru, Dulles was a 'closed head'.⁴² Conflicting perceptions created negative vibes.

History suggests that uneven Indo-US relations during the Cold War era emanated from the root cause of 'clash over national security', beside misperceptions and ideological differences. Major issues that caused the cleavage are mentioned below:⁴³

1. *Political ideology*: India believed in international neutrality, led by Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which led the US to perceive India as anti-US. India, on her part, thought the US, with its money and military power, was out to create rifts and disturb global peace because the US, as part of its global strategy, kept its foreign policy hinged on fighting communism and containing Soviet Russia. The worldviews between the two differed. Both failed to appreciate what University of Chicago Professor Marshall Sahlins said: 'the world is under no obligation to conform to the logic by which some people conceive it'.
2. *Pakistan factor*: America's prolonged hyphenation of the India-Pakistan relationship in South Asia caused much irritation in India. Pakistan's joining the US-led military bloc and America's supply of arms to Pakistan continuously for six decades became a perpetual cause of friction because Pakistan's guns pointed more towards India than Afghanistan. Pakistan's influence on various US administrations was visible from the Kashmir issue to the Bangladesh Liberation War and beyond. United States enlisting Pakistan in the US camp developed into baneful consequences, denting Indo-US relations. In the eyes of the US, Pakistan grew and

became its brother in arms, whereas India fell and became distant and a disliked cousin.

3. *Nuclear proliferation*: India not signing the NPT angered the United States. After India's nuclear tests, US imposed stringent sanctions against India as it was apprehensive of India turning into a nuclear trigger-happy nation. The US angst-ridden, suspicious outlook further alienated the two countries.
4. *Business and economy*: The US never appreciated Government of India's economic policy set in motion by the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, imposing restrictions on foreign investment and foreign trade. Private enterprisers from the US like IBM and Coca-Cola had a serious setback and horrid experience of doing business in India. Only when Prime Minister Narasimha Rao assisted by Dr Manmohan Singh started opening the economy, the ice started melting.

In 1993, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Senator of United States, writing on Indo-US estrangement said, 'Whatever injuries we have done India, we never intended them, save possibly in that sclerotic interval in 1971'.⁴⁴ Both the United States and India should mind that opposing each other viscerally should not be a natural option while formulating foreign policy. More than anything else, vast differences in the security perceptions between India and the United States on Kashmir and the Korean War existed because

In Kashmir, where Indian soldiers shed their blood against Pakistan, the US attitude badly upset the government of India. In Korea, where US soldiers shed their blood against North Korean and Chinese Communist forces, between India and the United States the Indian attitude badly upset the US government. ... Fearful of expanded conflict ... the Indians urged moderation and compromise in Korea, ... United States similarly urged moderation and compromise in the case of Kashmir. Neither Washington nor New Delhi won friends in each other's capital by playing the peacemaker.⁴⁵

When the protracted Cold War ended without firing a single bullet, the US started taking India seriously. US perceptions about India's capability in terms of food sufficiency and military prowess, India's economic liberalisation and reforms, her responsible behaviour as a democratic nation, including mature handling of nuclear energy and nuclear war heads, augured well towards building better Indo-US relations. After the Pokhran-II Nuclear Tests, despite strong reactions from Washington and tough sanctions, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government quickly commenced dialogue with the US

and, in 2004, supported Washington on missile defence, a sensitive issue for Moscow. India's large diaspora not only remitted the highest amount of money back home, but also contributed to US policy formulation towards India. Mumbai-born Ashley Tellis, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and adviser to President Bush, worked closely with Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary of State, during the Indo-US nuclear deal.

There are many areas of convergence between Indian national interests and US national interests. However, the baggage of bad memories continued to linger even a few decades after the end of the Cold War. Common interests, which is often talked about, needs careful deliberations, keeping in view the integrated multi-strands approach and how convergence will affect economic activities, security, technology and human development. The US understands that the Indian military has never operated under anyone else's flag other than UN. According to Ashely Tellis:

Non-alignment refrains from cementing strong alliance... India's capacity to lead by example will be largely a function of its material success...and this will not come to pass without strong economic, political, and military ties with key friendly powers, especially the United States. Notably, Washington has already committed itself to buttressing India's rise in the face of the common challenge posed by growing Chinese strength. A sturdy US-Indian strategic partnership thus remains quintessential example of desirable joint for both the countries.⁴⁶

The game-changing nuclear deal started building strategic trust. Strategic partnership can grow with mutual respect for the ideology and political congruence. Indo-US defence relationship has grown into a mature partnership through senior-level dialogues, professional military education exchanges, exercises and defence sales. India, since last 15 years, has bought US weapons amounting to about US\$ 20 billion. Following Russia, America is the second biggest exporter of military equipment to India, though Russia's market share is much higher.

Defence cooperation has resulted in building confidence in military interoperability between the two forces, after years of joint exercises and training. There is also a visible transformation in terms of convergence in the area of defence technology cooperation. The US Navy was impressed with the Indian Navy's professionalism during Tsunami in 2004, and they concluded that the Indian Navy is capable as a provider of security in the Indo-Pacific Ocean region. Based on the international maritime law and

agreed principles, the two navies have been cooperating along with other friendly navies in ensuring maritime security, freedom of navigation and unimpeded commercial activities mainly in the Indian Ocean Region. India and the United States conduct more than 50 military exercises at bilateral and multilateral levels more than any other country.

President Obama, in his dinner reception speech in New Delhi, said, 'Here in the eventide, Indians and Americans, let us know, in the darkness or day, in good times or bad, whenever one of us looks to the other, we will surely say, abide with me'.⁴⁷ Cooperation in the areas of economic activities, technology and security will remain the fundamental focus in the strategic partnership between India and the US. India does not buy those defence equipment from the US that are in Pakistan's inventory. India will vacillate to join a military alliance with the US because of her long stand political ideology. Nevertheless, India's apprehension over strategic partnership has been overcome through extensive consultations on multiple issues. Today, there are more than 50 bilateral dialogue mechanisms between Washington and New Delhi. Defence entrepreneurs of both the countries are collaborating to enhance business. Now, when the world has entered a new phase of strategic competition, the China factor brings India and America closer. China's cyber threat is real to both India and America, which requires greater jointness to thwart China's evil design. In comparison to China and the United States, India faces an asymmetric situation in economic, military and advanced technology fields. India requires support from the United States to balance out this asymmetry against the common adversary, China. Political will and visionary statesmanship can only take the strategic relations forward in the ensuing decades. Former Indian diplomat Sreenivasan wrote, 'Strategic autonomy comes automatically to the powerful. In pursuit of power, selective alignment is more important than non-alignment'.⁴⁸ Is the Indian Navy's joining the Combined Maritime Force in 2023 indicative of a new kind of defence cooperation? While addressing a joint session of US Congress on 23 June 2023, PM Modi said,

We come from different circumstances and history, but we are united by a common vision...When our partnership progresses, economic resilience increases, innovation grows, science flourishes, knowledge advances, humanity benefits, our seas and skies are safer, democracy will shine brighter, and the world will be a better place.⁴⁹

It is encouraging to see that, burying the gloomy past of the Cold War era, India, the biggest democracy, has embraced the United States, the oldest

democracy, and both are walking in tandem. Both have understood, from the point of view of realpolitik, that they cannot be on the same page always on every issue. Pragmatism will help in the growing convergence of strategic outlooks between the two countries. The Mahabharata mentions, 'For a king there is no permanent friend or permanent enemy, as circumstances make friend or enemy'.⁵⁰ Indian leaders are taking Bhishma Pitamaha's advice to King Yudhisthir seriously and managing relations with the United States successfully without being a military ally.

NOTES

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2. Roosevelt told Charles Taussig, adviser to State Department, *FRUS, 1945*, Vol. 1, pp. 121–24, *Memorandum of Conversation with Roosevelt*, 15 March 1945. Quoted in Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies-India and the United States 1941-1991*, n. 1, p. 37.
3. Richard L. Strout, staff correspondent, *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 October 1949.
4. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, Norton & Co., New York, 1969, p. 336; quoted in Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies-India and the United States 1941-1991*, n. 1, p. 70.
5. Letter from Nehru to Radhakrishnan dated 2 February 1950; quoted in Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru, Vol. 2, 1947–1956*, Jonathon Cape, London, 1975, p. 60.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
7. Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies-India and the United States 1941-1991*, n. 1, pp. 1127–50.
8. Agriculture Minister of India, C. Subramaniam, during his interview with US Ambassador of India Dennis Kux made this statement. Kux writes that many Indian observers and few Americans, including Orville Freeman, believed Johnson did it out of spite to punish Mrs Gandhi for her public opposition on Vietnam (Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies-India and the United States 1941-1991*, n. 1, p. 257, to be read with fn 122).
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15. Nirode Mohanty, *Indo-US Relations: Terrorism, Nonproliferations, and Nuclear Energy*, n. 11, p. 21.
16. 'Background Briefing', US Department of State, note 7; quoted in Ashley J. Tellis, 'India as a Nuclear Power', Report, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, p. 12, available at <https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Tellis-India-Global-Power-FINAL.pdf>, accessed on 19 July 2024.
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