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India-US Relations: From Distant Partners to an Alliance

Vinay Kaura

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ABSTRACT: The article discusses the status of the strategic relationship between India and the United States. It emphasizes the need for India to collaborate closely with the United States and its allies in order to cope with issues resulting from China's rise.

During the Cold War, India and the United States seldom found common areas for collaboration. New Delhi's nonaligned and anti-imperialistic rhetoric irritated America's foreign policy establishment. Since the end of the Cold War, the countries' interests on several issues have converged, and Indian prime ministers, crossing party affiliations, have been inclined to strengthen strategic ties with the United States. Convinced a strong partnership with the United States is in India's long-term strategic interests, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has renewed efforts to expand Indian foreign policy.¹

After taking office, Modi promptly resolved to replace the reactive diplomacy that previously characterized India's foreign policy with a flexible negotiating strategy that values positive outcomes. Positioning New Delhi to take the lead in bilateral engagements with the United States, he invited US President Barack Obama to be the chief guest of the Republic Day parade in 2015.² Since no US official had ever been afforded this honor, the gesture had huge symbolic significance. In an address to a joint session of the US Congress in June 2016, Modi also declared India-US ties had "overcome the hesitations of history."³

From almost negligible defense ties during the Cold War to a contemporary defense partnership, India and the United States have come a long way. After more than a decade of talks, India acceded to the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with the United States. This accord was highly criticized in India for compromising the nation's strategic autonomy and nonaligned stance, but it allows for reciprocal use of military resources. By signing this exchange agreement and refraining from similar agreements with other nations, India moved toward closer security cooperation with the United States. As a result, negotiations

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1 Sumit Ganguly, "Has Modi Truly Changed India's Foreign Policy?," *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 131–43.

2 C Raja Mohan, *Modi's World: Expanding India's Sphere of Influence* (Noida, India: Harper Collins, 2015), 131; and John McCain, "The Pivot to India," *Foreign Policy*, September 29, 2014; and Jim Garamone, "Panetta Says U.S.-India Relations Must Deepen, Grow for Peace," US Department of Defense, June 6, 2012.

3 Press Trust of India (PTI), "'Modi Doctrine' Overcomes Hesitations of History: U.S.," *Hindu*, June 11, 2016.

on two other important Indo-US initiatives—the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for geospatial intelligence—commenced.⁴ As a consequence, America became India's second largest arms supplier.⁵

This new relationship departs from India's basic foreign policy of strategic autonomy. To the anxiety of China, the relationship continues to grow under the administration of President Donald Trump, which has given more attention to the "Indo-Pacific" region and accorded India a greater strategic security role there. The United States also supports India's position on China's ambitious One Belt, One Road initiative, that is, "made in China, made for China."⁶

Identifying China as a major challenge to American economic prosperity and global primacy, Trump's national security strategy (NSS) describes China as a "revisionist power" trying to "shift regional balances of power in [its] favor." Furthermore, the United States supports "India's emergence as a leading global power" by promoting a convergence of regional interests and encouraging "quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India."⁷ Renaming the US Pacific Command to the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) further symbolizes the growing importance of the Indian Ocean in US strategy.

This elevation of India's status reflects Trump's willingness to build on Indo-US advances over the last two decades, and his vision of "a larger role for [New] Delhi in stabilizing the Indo-Pacific."⁸ As Manoj Joshi observes, "Like it or not, or hide it or not, the term [Indo-Pacific] now seems to be a means of including India in the military calculations of US strategy in the Pacific."⁹

India's Challenge

Extensive and rapid economic advances over the last few decades have enabled China to boost its military expenditures and capabilities as well as to constrain the actions of other nations. Always seeking to undermine India's influence, Beijing looks at New Delhi's growing links with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations with concern and its ties with Washington and Tokyo with great suspicion.¹⁰ To contain its

4 "India & US Sign COMCASA, Pompeo Says No Decision on S400," *Economic Times* (Mumbai), September 6, 2018.

5 Ajai Shukla, "Key Defence Agreement with the US Finally within Reach," *Business Standard*, June 23, 2018; and "U.S. Officials Seek To Boost Arms Sales to India," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, September 6, 2018.

6 PTI, "US Terms BRI 'Made in China, for China,' Asks Beijing 'To Adopt 'Inclusive' Approach to its Overseas Infrastructure Projects," *Firstpost*, July 30, 2018.

7 Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, December 2017), 25, 46.

8 C. Raja Mohan, "How India Can Negotiate Trump's World," *Indian Express*, December 25, 2017.

9 Manoj Joshi, "Why India Should Be Wary of the Quad," *Wire*, November 13, 2017.

10 Jayanna Krupakar, "China's Naval Base(s) in the Indian Ocean—Signs of a Maritime Grand Strategy?," *Strategic Analysis* 41, no. 3 (2017): 207–22; Shishir Upadhyaya, "Expansion of Chinese Maritime Power in the Indian Ocean: Implications for India," *Defence Studies* 17, no. 1 (2017): 63–83; and Abhijit Singh, "Deciphering China's Submarine Deployments in the Indian Ocean Region," *IDSA*, July 8, 2015.

longtime regional rival, Beijing has not only modernized its army, navy, air force, and nuclear forces but also equipped Pakistan with a missile arsenal that includes plutonium-based tactical nuclear weapons.¹¹ China reportedly became the first country to sell Pakistan sensitive equipment when it provided a powerful tracking system that could accelerate the development of multiwarhead missiles.¹²

These capabilities undermine the current military balance along the border.¹³ The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—an important node in the One Belt, One Road chain—passes through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), a territory claimed by India. According to Indian intelligence agencies, China has extended its military footprint in PoK to around 25 percent while “undertaking strategic infrastructure projects in Gilgit, Baltistan, and Satpara. . . . by deploying technicians, engineers, and PLA troops.”¹⁴ The PLA was also “digging tunnels in Leepa Valley, located in PoK, with a goal to building an all-weather road as an alternate route to reach Karakoram Highway.”¹⁵

China continues to invest substantially in a number of ports such as Kyaukpyu in Myanmar; Chittagong in Bangladesh; Hambantota in Sri Lanka; and most important, Gwadar in Pakistan. Coupled with ambitious One Belt, One Road infrastructure projects in many South Asian countries, Beijing is developing unhindered access towards the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean. Under Xi’s supervision, the Chinese military is becoming more agile and battle ready. Having built its second aircraft carrier and making efforts to advance other maritime systems, China will have a blue water navy in coming years.¹⁶ This level of readiness contrasts with India’s lack of preparedness to fight simultaneous land wars with Pakistan and China. While testifying before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, the Indian Army’s vice chief noted 65 percent of the army arsenal is obsolete, adding, “the force lacks the artillery, missiles and helicopters that will enable it to fight on two fronts.”¹⁷

11 T. V. Paul, “Chinese-Pakistani Nuclear/Missile Ties and Balance of Power Politics,” *Nonproliferation Review* 10, no. 2 (2003): 21–29; and Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia’s New Geopolitics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

12 Stephen Chen “China Provides Tracking System for Pakistan’s Missile Programme,” *South China Morning Post*, March 22, 2018.

13 Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia (Indian Army Retired), *China’s Infrastructure in Tibet and POK Implications and Options for India* (New Delhi: Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, 2016); and Khawar Ghuman, “PML-N Unwilling to Share CPEC Control?,” *Dawn*, July 18, 2016; and Devika Bhattacharya, “CPEC Funds Halted: China Wants Pakistan Army To Take Over Projects?,” *Times of India*, December 9, 2017.

14 Rajnish Sharma, “China Extends Its Footprint to 25 Percent of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir,” *Deccan Chronicle*, June 2, 2016.

15 PTI, “Chinese Army Troops Spotted along LoC in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir,” *Hindustan Times*, March 13, 2016.

16 Minnie Chan, “China Has Started Building Its Third Aircraft Carrier, Military Sources Say,” *South China Morning Post*, January 5, 2018; and Guo Yuandan and Bai Tiantian, “China Eyes Nuclear-Powered Carriers: Defense Firm,” *Global Times*, February 28, 2018.

17 Sandeep Unnithan, “Budget Squeeze Threatens Indian Army’s Preparedness for Possible Two-Front War,” *India Today*, May 3, 2018.

With an intractable border dispute, the contentious issue of Tibet, bitter memories of the Sino-Indian War of 1962, Beijing's growing influence among Indian neighborhoods, China's rising assertiveness in the Indian Ocean, and Chinese attempts to build an alternative international system to oppose the United States, a "reset" between India and China seems difficult to imagine.¹⁸ Persistent Chinese opposition to India's aspirations to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and efforts to become a permanent member on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) combined with protecting Pakistan from charges of sponsoring terrorism and of CPEC expansion in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir makes the Sino-Indian relationship much more complex and difficult to manage.

In July 2017, China violated a border agreement with Bhutan on the Doklam plateau between India, China, and Bhutan. Although China withdrew, the incursion raised uncomfortable questions about India's security vulnerabilities. It also caused India to reconsider its China policy, and the Modi government made some positive gestures towards China. Notably, India reverted to its traditional position on the status of the Dalai Lama, denying any official connection with him or the exiled Tibetan government in India.¹⁹ It also did not invite the Royal Australian Navy to join the Malabar naval exercise.

Modi and Xi subsequently held their first ever informal summit in Wuhan, China, on April 27 and 28, 2018. The joint commitment to maintain peace and tranquility over the border and the direction for their respective militaries to observe restraint and to strengthen communications were noteworthy. The Wuhan consensus may be a welcome development, giving India "a brief breathing space" in the short term.²⁰ But the only effective instrument for managing India's relations with China is developing significant and sustained economic and security capabilities in close cooperation with the United States.

America's Views

In the context of China's unprecedented rise and its challenge to America's preeminence in Asia, the United States adopted the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. If the "concept of the Indo-Pacific just reconfirms the reality that the United States may no longer be able to maintain the strategic status quo in the Pacific and Indian Oceans," it also indicates "more like-minded countries are willing to exert collective efforts to supplement the US missions in this" vital region.²¹

The United States views India as an effective regional counterweight to China's economic and military might. The Atlantic Council sees

18 "India's Grand Illusion of a 'Reset' with China," *LiveMint*, April 17, 2018; and Ivan Lidarev, "Is a China-India 'Reset' in the Cards?," *Diplomat*, June 8, 2018.

19 Abantika Ghosh, "Govt Sends Out Note: Very Sensitive Time for Ties with China, So Skip Dalai Lama Events," *Indian Express*, March 2, 2018.

20 Shyam Saran, "The Modi-Xi Wuhan Summit Fixed the Growing Power Imbalance between India and China—Somewhat," *Scroll*, May 16, 2018.

21 Kuni Miyake, "The 'Indo-Pacific' Is Nothing New," *Japan Times*, June 4, 2018.

India as a “key piece in the jigsaw,” asking the Trump administration to make sure “it is not merely a regional prop to balance Beijing’s power in the region, but a top priority for US foreign policy.”²² This Indo-Pacific vision builds on the Bush administration’s efforts to establish stronger India-US ties while connecting India to the Pacific Ocean through closer relations with Japan.²³ Later, President Obama’s Rebalance strategy pivoted towards the Asia-Pacific.

The United States increasingly fears a future of diminished international influence; hence, Washington is willing to take risks. The Trump administration has elevated the single strategic space formed by the Indian and Pacific Oceans to a top-level regional priority. While the *National Security Strategy* calls American allies and partners to collaborate, including boosting “quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India,” the strategy also welcomes India’s rise as a global power and emphasizes expanding defense ties with New Delhi.²⁴

Due to the current administration’s emphasis on the return of great-power competition between the United States, Russia, and China, Beijing essentially views the Indo-Pacific strategy as a means of perpetuating US dominance in the region while confining China to the sidelines of a newly reinforced American sphere of influence. Despite the rhetoric, there have been few details to explain how the new strategy is going to be operationalized beyond the reemergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). Similarly, US officials frequently acknowledge the value of investing in connectivity and infrastructure to build an Indo-Pacific community. But Washington’s efforts are hindered by the president’s economic policies.

India’s Vision

Modi’s speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on June 1, 2018, signaled India’s willingness to embrace greater responsibility in anchoring a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. Stressing that India’s partnerships are not alliances of containment, Modi said “engagement in the Indo-Pacific region—from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas—will be inclusive.” Simultaneously, in an indirect reference to the One Belt, One Road model of “debt-trap” diplomacy, Modi called for connectivity initiatives in the region that “empower nations, not place them under an impossible debt burden. They must promote trade, not strategic competition.” The region can only prosper, he said, “if we do not return to the age of great-power rivalries.” Although he did not mention the Quad, Modi expressed a willingness to work with partners “in formats of three or more.”²⁵

22 Manish Tewari and Bharath Gopalswamy, *Transforming India from a Balancing to Leading Power* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council South Asia Center, 2017).

23 Brad Glosserman, *The Indo-Pacific: A U.S. Perspective* (Milan, IT: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale [ISPI], June 2018).

24 Trump, *National Security Strategy*.

25 Shri Narendra Modi, “Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue” (speech, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Singapore, June 1, 2018).

Modi's Shangri-La speech was important. It outlined India's Indo-Pacific vision, which extends from the eastern shores of Africa to the western shore of the Americas. It conveyed India's message that the Indo-Pacific approach is broad-based and inclusive to the ASEAN countries. It stressed India's adherence to a rules-based order in the region that is positioned around territorial integrity, indirectly opposing China's confrontational attitude towards territories in the South China Sea. And it highlighted India's long-standing strategic autonomy.

India recognizes military power as merely one aspect of its national strategy or global influence. New Delhi understands security involves much more than the ability to mount an effective military defense. Nor does India believe a national security vision requires exporting its value system or political culture to other countries. Preserving national independence, civilizational heritage, and cultural pride entails sound statecraft that can enlist friends, frustrate enemies, and deflect domestic and foreign challenges to territory, traits, and structures that define the Indian nation. India's strategic vision is unique in the sense that it does not wish the region be divided between rival hegemonies.

With this view, India offers to include all states in securing a free and open Indo-Pacific regardless of political backgrounds and economic strengths.²⁶ At the same time, it also rejects the Chinese proposition to create dependencies through economic statecraft and military coercion reminiscent of the Cold War.

India's approach to the Indo-Pacific is neither one of alignment nor strategic autonomy. It lies in the grey zone between them. It is in the US interest to push India out of this zone by helping it overcome major obstacles: India's commitment to strategic autonomy doubts America's reliability as a strategic partner, emphasizes the need to sustain engagement with Russia, and seeks to avoid the adverse consequences of provoking China. The Modi government has assured Russia that the Indo-Pacific strategy would not compromise the ties between the two countries.²⁷ The reasons are simple: India needs Russia for military equipment such as spare parts and nuclear-powered submarines. Russia wields veto power at the UN Security Council. And India recognizes Russia's growing tilt towards China and Pakistan. Therefore, even at the risk of antagonizing Washington, New Delhi will purchase the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system from Russia.²⁸

Benefits of Balancing

Modi has been cautious with his Indo-Pacific strategy. But he will not be able to convince Beijing that India has given up its efforts to balance or contain China. Whenever the Indo-Pacific concept is discussed, China is not mentioned. Yet the formulation of a free and

26 Samir Saran, "China and SAARC Will Be the Pivots of India's Rise as Global Superpower," *Print*, July 24, 2018.

27 "Sochi Informal Summit: India, Russia in One Mind about Global Uncertainty," *Hindustan Times*, May 23, 2018.

28 Shubhajit Roy, "Simply Put: A Russian Deal, a US Nod," *Indian Express*, July 26, 2018.

open Indo-Pacific suggests an anti-Chinese connotation. The declared objectives of seeking greater freedom and openness—in terms of governance, fundamental rights, and economic transparency—run counter to the Chinese political model.

Beijing is unlikely to back down from its claims to the Indian territory along the border. And there is no indication China will reduce its attempts to contain India.²⁹ Rajesh Rajagopalan, a leading Indian strategist, argued India's hedging approach "will satisfy neither China nor the partners that India hopes to balance China with" and is likely to "be seen in Beijing as conference hall sophistry" that will be ignored against the background of India's balancing efforts. Explaining the downside of this hedging strategy, he believes "India will neither reduce the threat it faces from China nor have the partners it needs to counter this threat."³⁰ If this pattern of strategic ambiguity continues, it could spell the end to any chance of the revival of the Quad. India's strategic reorientation could also mean that the Quad will never materialize in the way it is being conceptualized.

Divergent ideas among the four countries regarding China constitute another big hurdle to the Quad. But even if there is not much formal progress, the parties must work towards better coordination and cooperation on common concerns. Merely opposing China's economic hegemony through multiple plans and initiatives will be futile because of the urgent need to develop infrastructure in many parts of the world. The challenges emerging from China's growing economic and military footprint in the Indo-Pacific can, however, be tackled if India, the United States, Japan, and Australia "combine forces."³¹

The Quad provides an insurance policy against China's strong-arm tactics; it also provides states in the region with confidence that pressure from China can be resisted. As Asia struggles under the burden of a permanent Chinese military presence in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, New Delhi has no option but to balance power with Beijing, using the "quad with teeth" as the trump card.³² Adhering to strategic autonomy made sense when India did not have global power ambitions. But in aspiring to emerge as a world power, India cannot rely entirely on internal balancing. With global interests and global responsibilities, strategic orientation cannot remain prisoner to a bygone era. Persistent concerns need persistent partnerships to demonstrate the readiness for joint action. New Delhi needs to conceptualize an alliance with Washington—beyond friendship—to address long-term concerns.

29 IANS, "Navy Conclave Assesses Combat Readiness amid Chinese Presence in Indian Ocean," *Nanhind Times*, May 8, 2018.

30 Rajesh Rajagopalan, "India's Hedging Strategy Is Bound To Fail," Observer Research Foundation, June 21, 2018.

31 Harsh V. Pant, "Cornered by the Quad?," *Hindu*, February 28, 2018.

32 Abhijnan Rej, *Reclaiming the Indo-Pacific: A Political-Military Strategy for Quad 2.0*, ORF Occasional Paper 147 (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2018).

Recommendations

The dialogue between the defense and foreign ministers of India and the United States on September 6, 2018, provided a significant milestone for the countries' strategic and security ties. It sought to converge defense cooperation, Quad formation, Afghan reconciliation, counterterrorism strategy, and maritime security interests in the Indo-Pacific region. But its abrupt postponement—when former Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson stepped down in March 2018 and due to the Trump-Putin summit in July 2018—sent a negative signal to India regarding America's strategic priorities. One delay may not have constituted a setback. But postponing twice suggests India's issues are not receiving their due priority.³³

Even though India's relatively weak economic and military resources prohibit the country from confronting Chinese revisionism alone, the Trump administration should not take lightly India's deeply entrenched lobby for strategic-autonomy. Regular discussions to develop a common vision for the security architecture in the Indo-Pacific should be organized with US allies and partners. Otherwise divergent visions will continue to make joint policies and strategies difficult. In addition to Japan and Australia, the effort to develop common understanding of threats and security should involve Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam, who are equally wary of China's economic and military rise.

India's position in America's Indo-Pacific vision is very important for ensuring greater interoperability between the Indian and American militaries. Geographically, India sits between INDOPACOM and US Central Command (USCENTCOM). Operationally, India lies in INDOPACOM's area of responsibility. But Pakistan, India's troublesome nuclear-armed neighbor allied with radical Islamist ideology, is in CENTCOM's area of responsibility. This framework diminishes the defense institution's awareness of India's significant interests, which needs to be rectified.³⁴

Despite the Trump administration's tough public stance against Pakistan's duplicity on terrorism, CENTCOM depends on Islamabad's support to achieve objectives in Afghanistan, which hinders effective coordination with New Delhi to counter terrorism. Thus, the United States needs to include all of the western Indian Ocean in its definition of the Indo-Pacific. America also needs to address the challenge of terrorism to a sovereign, rules-based region. India recently assigned a military attaché to the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) in Bahrain. This ability to coordinate joint activities in the Red Sea, the

33 Yashwant Raj, "Why Friction between India, US Is Rising When the Two Nations Are Trying To Improve Ties," *Hindustan Times*, June 29, 2018; Alyssa Ayres, "All Is Not Well between Washington and New Delhi," *Hindustan Times*, July 2, 2018; and Joanna Slater, "Mike Pompeo Was Supposed To Meet with His Indian Counterpart. He Went to North Korea Instead," *Washington Post*, July 6, 2018.

34 Harsh V. Pant and Abhijnan Rej, "Is India Ready for the Indo-Pacific?," *Washington Quarterly* 41 no. 2 (Summer 2018): 47–61.

Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea provides a logical first step in increasing India's involvement in CENTCOM.³⁵

Iran exacerbates the incongruity between the Indian and US visions of the Indo-Pacific. With Washington's unilateralism irritating the bilateral relationship, New Delhi is closely watching US accommodations of India's strategic interests vis-à-vis Iran. Energy security apart, India needs a cooperative relationship with Iran to develop the strategically vital Chabahar port—a venture involving New Delhi, Tehran, and Kabul—which is seen as India's gateway to landlocked Afghanistan and resource-rich Central Asia without having to cross Pakistan, as well as an effective alternative to the China-led One Belt, One Road initiative.

Geopolitically, weakening ties between Iran and India may have the unintended consequence of pushing Beijing and Tehran closer together, giving China room to embed itself in the Middle East.³⁶ If Indian companies are sanctioned for associating with Iran, India-US coordination toward a common Indo-Pacific strategy to contain an increasingly assertive China will be adversely affected.

India cannot live up to its full potential as an Indo-Pacific power if its strategic vulnerabilities are not addressed. The Pentagon needs to convince India that America's current transactional approach will not preclude the defense of India's border interests. America's vocal opposition to Chinese bullying would go a long way toward ensuring peace and stability in the South Asian theatre. Moreover, collaborating with India secures the US ground offensive option through Tibet and Xinjiang—China's military underbelly—if Beijing does not tone down its territorial aggressiveness.³⁷

The Pentagon has agreed to have an Indian military representative at the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU), which funds private companies working on innovating defense technologies. This step is likely to help India identify its own military technology requirements. Simultaneously, these defense companies should be encouraged to collaborate on modernizing India's military.

Joint operational training and military exchanges could also provide shared experiences India and the United States could use to build greater cooperation across a variety of other security issues such as counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. These improvements will be especially beneficial when applied in conjunction with joint efforts to share information, dismantle terrorist camps, and limit financing of terrorist activities. A bottom-up approach where Indian and American military personnel find it comfortable to work together will build greater

35 Shishir Gupta, "Soon, India Defence Attaché at US Navy Bahrain Command," *Hindustan Times*, March 21, 2018.

36 Vikram S. Mehta, "Trump's Foreign Policy: An Unlovely Triangle," *Indian Express*, August 6, 2018.

37 Tata, "US Landpower," 98.

familiarity in terms of equipment and technology, strategic doctrines, and operational planning to conduct joint campaigns whenever required.³⁸

The United States designated India a Strategic Trade Authorization (STA) Tier 1 country, which allows it to buy advanced and sensitive technologies from the United States.³⁹ With this status, India is equal to America's closest allies and partners, elevating the strategic partnership by several notches. The designation should accelerate the bilateral defense trade relationship and encourage the United States to share sensitive technologies with India. Expediting the sale of priority military hardware and technologies and identifying areas for joint production will further strengthen India's defense capabilities. This initiative will also assuage India's doubts about America's commitment to supporting India as a leading Indo-Pacific power.

Conclusion

India's multidimensional relationship with the United States is the most comprehensive of all its major power relationships. Few other powers have been as positive as the United States in addressing India's concerns on regional terrorism. President Trump's opposition to China's assertiveness has expanded India's role in the Indo-Pacific region. New Delhi's unwillingness to see a Cold War-type division of competing spheres of influence in the Indo-Pacific should not be interpreted as disinterest in countering Chinese assertiveness; India seeks to consolidate its borders while reducing the danger of armed conflict with China. Support from Washington and its Asian allies provides India an important component for balancing China's power.

The strategic alignment between India, the United States, Japan, and Australia offers a basis for reinforcing a rules-based order in the region. A diplomatic consensus on China, strong bilateral ties, and converging security interests favor further cooperation with the United States.

At the same time, the United States must show publicly that it remains committed to India's rise to global prominence. A long tradition of strategic autonomy may ultimately prevent India from forging a formal alliance with America. But it makes sense for New Delhi to establish a unique, multifaceted, and future-oriented partnership with Washington. Such a partnership can deliver a beneficial balance of power without the limits of a formal architecture.

38 Harsh V. Pant, telephone conversation with author, August 9, 2018.

39 PTI, "India Third Asian Nation To Get STA-1 Status from U.S.," *Hindu*, August 4, 2018.