

FUTURE OF THE INDO-US MILITARY PARTNERSHIP UNDER BIDEN

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INTRODUCTION

In the ensuing years since Biden was last in office, the geopolitical emphasis has fluctuated from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific and for several years the strategy of the United States has been to succour India's advent as an impregnable cornerstone of regional stability. With the appointment of Joseph Robinette Biden as the 46th President of the United States accompanied by the uproarious transition, there is a conjecture that over the evolution of the US foreign policy. The prompt transition is being monitored by India to comprehend how the newly elected president will orchestrate the most significant contemporary challenge, that is the ascent of China under the leadership of Xi Jinping and it is at present, for the United States, an intimidating peer adversary, a rival and an opponent willing to lay hold of any opportunity that ousts the United States in Asia and across the globe¹. The conception of the Chinese threat has been distinctly apparent across Asia, in the South China Sea, East China Sea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and majorly across Indian borders in the Himalayas that have been balked by the Indian armed forces in the Eastern Ladakh². These activities saw a powerful resistance by the United States and with these challenges subsisting, the US administration under president Biden will be monitored with apprehension and anticipation. Similarly, India will be keeping an eye out for persisting US allegiance to be a crucial security partner.

A contemporary paper by the Asia Society Policy Institute (ASPI) states that "*the US strategy was not merely to bolster its relationship with India; it was a manoeuvre to assiduously underpin India's rise, with an aim to make India economically, militarily and diplomatically secure for countering the China*"³. This cogitation was the stimulus behind President Bush's determination to terminate the nuclear agreement between India and the United States. Similarly, several well formulated and discerning players by specific crucial Obama

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¹ Singh, Hemant, Nalin Surie, Arun Sahgal, Lalit Kapur, V.S Seshadri, and Sanjay Pulipaka. 2021. "Foreign, Security and Trade Policy Challenges of 2021". *DPG Policy Report 4* (2). https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/foreign-security-and-trade-policy-challenges-of-2021-2167.pdf.

² Ahuja, Anil. "Prospects of India-US Defence Cooperation."

³ Gupta, Anubhav. "Nature and Nurture: How the Biden Administration Can Advance Ties With India." *ASPI Issue Paper (New York: Asia Society, 2021)* (2021).

administration officers in the pentagon and other wings guaranteed a well-organized transition of this association to the Trump administration. India and the United States are crucial and paramount stakeholder's in sustaining Asia's stability and balance, creating free and accessible Indo-Pacific, and developing to overcome emanating challenges. The United States regards India to be an essential and crucial stalwart of stability and a prospective regional proxy to pugnacious and hegemonic China. Jim Mattis, the former United States Secretary of Defence asserted that "*India's significance lies in being a stabilizing force on the region's geographical frontline*"⁴. The recently appointed US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken also affirmed that, "*India and the United States face a common challenge in the form of a progressively domineering China, and that New Delhi has to be a crucial associate in engaging from a position of strength*"⁵.

US-INDIA DEFENCE AND SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

The United States regards India as the Western strategic cornerstone of the Indo-Pacific, paramount and significant to encounter the advent of a Sino-centric Asia and to recuperate the strategic order gradually lost to China in the South China Sea. The US Defence Secretary visited India certainly in the very initial tenure of the Biden administration and the Indian authority's ebullient response, accentuates the determination of both the nations to boost the bilateral defence relationship. Sundered by shared challenges and threats from a growing China and amalgamated by a contemporary geopolitical approach on the Indo-Pacific, India and the United States seems to be ready to increase the scope and extent of defence and strategic partnership. The military association between India and the United States started in the early 1990s, right after the Cold War ended. After Narendra Modi was elected as the Prime Minister in the year 2014, he has discarded several of Raisina Hill's established beliefs reservations on defence coordination with the United States. Today, China's increasingly belligerent strategies in the Himalayas and the Western Pacific has started to duress its relationship with both India and the United States, making it ineluctable for both the country's to strengthen their defence systems. The bedrock of the discussion between the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and US Defence Secretary Austin was on augmenting the military-to-military association, information sharing, integration in the emanating sectors defence like artificial intelligence, and mutual logistics support in the Indo-Pacific region⁶. Simultaneously, the Indian armed forces aim to procure pioneering and modern US weapons, and considering its present emphasis on underpinning the national defence industrial base and reducing its weapons

⁴ Jha, Lalit K. 2018. "India, US Agree to Strengthen Defence and Security Ties". *The Wire*. <https://thewire.in/external-affairs/india-us-agree-to-strengthen-defence-and-security-ties>.

⁵ Bhatnagar, Armaan. 2021. "President Joe Biden: What It Means for India, China | India News - Times Of India". *The Times Of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-india-china-should-expect-from-biden-administration/articleshow/80364479.cms>.

⁶ "Deepening Ties". 2021. *The Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/india-us-bilateral-defence-partnership-narendra-modi-joe-biden-7238843/>.

imports, India is anticipating United States funding for India's defence manufacturing. The robust dynamic favoring the defence association between India and the United States is confronted by certain political hindrances. In the post COVID era, the US-India strategic partnership will emerge to play an even more significant role. The pandemic has fortified the need for unanimous countries to cooperate and join forces to safeguard health, financial growth, etc. Furthermore, China's belligerent and pugnacious political and military tactics across the contentious Indo-China border, subsequently after the COVID outbreak, has exhibited the requirement to strengthen cooperation between India and the United States. It is conjectured that, for India to persist as a supreme power in the Indian Ocean region and prevail to advance towards its military modernization is the aim of the United States⁷.

The institution of the 2+2 arrangement during the tenure of the former US President Donald Trump notably aided to underpin the partnership between both the countries and is anticipated to persist to do so during the tenure of the new President Biden. The recent visit of the United States Secretary of Defence Lloyd James Austin to India accentuates the aspect that the United States deems India to be one of its most significant defence cooperation. The US proffered assistance and aid to India in the manner of enhanced information, intelligence sharing and stimulated the supply of essential military resources and tools⁸. The United States sublet two MQ-9 armed predators and provided large numbers of equipment to help forces against the severe weather conditions along the Line of Actual Control. This exemplifies that the United States is an infallible ally and the partnership between the two nations will further strengthen under the Biden administration. India's dominant position in South Asia and emanating a crucial part in the wider Indo-Pacific region. Over the past few years, escalated US and India's apprehensions with regards to China facilitated the way for a profound and established defence and military relationship, contemporary or fortified structures to engage with each other and its partners encompassing the Quadrilateral dialogue, and discussions, cooperation along with the impetus for both India and the United States to administer differences on several issues⁹. Therefore, the Indian government will scrupulously monitor the strategy of the Biden administration to the Indo-Pacific, and distinctly China. India anticipates that the United States will persist to acknowledge the issue that China's actions propound and to strengthen the ties with allies like India to deal with the challenges in the Indo-Pacific and other regions. Simultaneously, India is also worried about the United States considering China as a strategic opponent, focusing on the coordination with regards to climate change and health security that will make China more domineering. It is usually affirmed that India and the United States have

⁷ Pandeya, Maneesh. 2021. "'US Considers India One of Its Most Important Defence Partners' - The Sunday Guardian Live". *The Sunday Guardian Live*. <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/world/us-considers-india-one-important-defence-partners>.

⁸ Pandeya, Maneesh. 2021. "'US Considers India One of Its Most Important Defence Partners' - The Sunday Guardian Live". *The Sunday Guardian Live*. <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/world/us-considers-india-one-important-defence-partners>

⁹ Madan, Tanvi. 2021. "India and The Biden Administration". *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/02/16/india-and-the-biden-administration/>.

certainly triumphed over the hesitation of the past. Both the countries have realized the significance of their partnership, specifically in the domain of defence and security. There is an emanating discourse that defence and security partnership has become the fundamental cornerstone of the bilateral alliance and that the US government would want to stabilize.

A significant issue that can be seen to have evolved in the Biden administration is the Indian consternation of enforcing sanctions on India under Countering America's Adversaries through Sanction Act (CAATSA), in the advent of India obtaining five regiments of S-400 Air Defence System from Russia¹⁰. The other concern related to the Indo-US partnership is the heterogeneity of relations, with nations not conceived propitious by the other side. India will persist distinctly intuitive to how the United States administers its relationship with nations like Russia, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the United States will also monitor India's relationship with Russia, Iran, China and its involvement with Quad and operations in the Western Pacific. One of the most paramount hindrances that the Indian government and Biden administration will have to administer is the military sphere. The 2005 civil nuclear agreement is regarded as a diplomatic quantum leap that cleared the US sanctions concerning India's nuclear program and enabled a strategic relation achievable¹¹. Following that, the United States has classified India as a significant defence ally, increasing the sales of military equipment, and interceding agreements with India for enabling military planning and communication cooperation. India and the United States constitute half of the Quad making it an immensely paramount system to administer Indo-Pacific affairs. The question that arises now is, whether the Biden administration display more resilience? The Russian promulgation throughout the 2016 elections made an arduous Russian policy primary for the Democrats, and the Biden administration has previously made notable compromises to Moscow by ceding sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in Europe and developing the New START arms regulation agreement¹². Nevertheless, the S-400 will enumerate crucial challenges for the India-US military partnership and is likely to resist India from attaining top-notch US aircraft like the F-35. The United States majorly focuses on evolving interoperability and functional partnership among its armed forces, distinctly in its navy, and on the other hand, India's precedence is on growing its capabilities. The United States regards Russia as a revisionist country and for India, Russia persists to be its significant and critical defence partner. This US is also apprehensive about India's continuous reliance on Russia for defence equipment's and this is regarded as a menace to its technology security.

¹⁰ Ahuja, Anil. "Prospects of India-US Defence Cooperation."

¹¹ Watson, Mike. 2021. "Is There Trouble Ahead for The US and India?". *TheDiplomat.Com*. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/is-there-trouble-ahead-for-the-us-and-india/>.

¹² Watson, Mike. 2021. "Is There Trouble Ahead for The US and India?". *TheDiplomat.Com*. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/is-there-trouble-ahead-for-the-us-and-india/>.

The relationship between India and the United States has regardless of the endeavours of naysayers has burgeoned on a positive course over the past twenty years. Contemporarily, the United States is one of the most significant security allies, with cooperation in intelligence, national security, defence technologies, maritime, space, and cyber¹³. With the Biden administration now in power, the defence partnership between both countries proffers several significant challenges. It is conjectured that the Biden administration will not specifically bring changes in the US and India's relationship and many believe that president Biden will possibly reinstate the US national security decision system that was gutted during the Trump tenure. The most significant aspect in strengthening defence and military partnership is predictability and integration. The change in the leadership of any country is regarded to bring uncertainty and apprehension, however with president Biden now in power the partnership between the two countries seems to have a positive discourse. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that the former US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Modi shared a bond, both Biden and Modi are anticipated to be highly rational and practical about a partnership that encompasses the geopolitical constraints.

¹³ Jaishankar, Dhruva. 2020. "Charting The Future Of India-US Ties | ORF". *ORF*. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/charting-the-future-of-india-us-ties/>.