Conference Proceedings

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Conference Proceedings on Indian and U.S. Security Cooperation

Defense Production, Indo-Pacific Region, and Afghanistan

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Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available for this publication.
ISBN: 978-1-9774-1161-7

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About These Conference Proceedings

This publication reports on the deliberations of an online conference that took place over two days (June 30–July 1, 2022). The conference, which was sponsored by the U.S. State Department, is a component of an ongoing RAND Corporation project that focuses on Russian and Chinese arms exports and private security and military companies. Weapon exports and the provision of security and military services abroad by China and Russia serve as a means for both countries to extend their influence around the globe. How does this affect an emerging great power—India—and what does it mean for India-U.S. security cooperation? The objective of this track II dialogue meeting was for Indian and American expertise to discuss common approaches to bilateral security cooperation, Russian arms sales to India, and the challenges posed by China to regional security.

This document contains the papers prepared by the six presenters. The reader will note that there is a complementarity about the papers from each side, despite the fact that they cover a wide range of bilateral, regional, and global issues of interest to Indian and American policymakers and scholars.

RAND has applied its standard quality assurance process to the conference proceeding summary and the RAND-authored papers, which are Appendixes B, D, and G. The Observer Research Foundation (ORF) has applied its quality assurance standards to the summary of the conference proceedings and to the papers authored by ORF and their invited participants. Below are descriptions of each organization's quality assurance process and standards.

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ORF has applied its review process to Appendixes C, E, and F. ORF reviews drafts using at least one ORF expert, and one or more external referees. The reviewers' comments are shared with the author for any required revisions. The draft is copyedited, and the author is apprised of any editorial changes that the editor deems fit. The final draft is cleared for publication by the ORF editor after it has been copyedited and checked for plagiarism.

This research was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of RAND's National Security Research Division (NSRD), which operates the National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense intelligence enterprise. For more information on the RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center, see www.rand.org/nsrd/isdp or contact the director (contact information provided on the webpage).

Acknowledgments

The RAND Corporation wishes to thank ORF for cohosting this virtual conference. We wish to extend our sincere appreciation to Raji Rajagopalan, director of the Centre for Security, Strategy and Technology at ORF for bringing together an excellent group of Indian participants. We also wish to thank our internal and external reviewers for their work on these proceedings.

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Conference Overview and Outcomes

John V. Parachini, Rafiq Dossani, and Rajeshwari Rajagopalan

About This Conference

Since its 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine, Russia has intensified its aggressive interference in the affairs of other states across the globe, from its immediate neighbors to countries in Africa. Russia's February 2022 unprovoked, full-scale invasion of Ukraine has had global implications for all major powers. In response to Russia's aggression against neighboring countries, an element of United States foreign policy has been to discourage countries from purchasing Russian weaponry. Russian aggression over the last decade has also had profound implications for India, which has had close relations with the Soviet Union and Russia since its independence. Because of its close relationship, India's military arsenal is largely composed of Russian weaponry. Despite India's desire to build up its own industrial defense base and diversify its arsenal so as not to depend on one major power supplier, this process takes time.

Russia's arms sales to India are part of a long-term strategy to extend its influence to developing countries through the sale of advanced weapon systems—one that dates to the Soviet era. At that time, the Soviet Union sold arms to countries in its sphere of influence that sought to protect themselves during the Cold War. In the post-Soviet era, some countries ended arms imports from Russia, but others continued to purchase Russian arms—in part, because of continued friendly relations with Russia and, in part, because of legacy issues that made it very expensive to change supplier countries.

To many Western observers, these legacy issues seem to dominate the discussion of India's continued purchases of Russian arms—implying that India should be gradually reducing such purchases. But for India, reducing its arms dependence on Russia, if such a goal were desired, could take more than a decade, because many weapon systems are interoperable.

This assessment, however, may be too simple. One view presented at the conference is that India considers itself an emerging great power in a multipolar world. In this view, Indian policymakers believe the United States will maintain primacy, China will take second place, and India will slowly overtake Russia's position in third place for the long term. For India to eventually occupy one pole of what would become a quadripolar world, however, it needs to rely on one or more poles of the current tripolar world for technology and economic support throughout its transition, while also avoiding actions that would lead to long-term dependence on any one of those existing powers.

However, one great power on India's borders, China, is antagonistic, so Russia and the United States remain its only other vital choices. India will, therefore, diversify, but until it becomes self-reliant in defense technology as well as economically strong, it will not abandon Russia.

So, while the United States will see some benefit from India's diversification efforts, these benefits will grow slowly and will be shared, to a certain extent, with some European countries. Technology transfer will be a particularly difficult area for the United States to compete in, as Russia has been India's most willing supplier in this area to date.

The above discussion suggests an idea that is opposed to the typical rhetoric that Indian interests are being driven by a "time-tested" relationship with Russia and its predecessor state; rather, it suggests their interests are entirely pragmatic and oriented toward the long term. And how the United States responds to these interests will no doubt be important for the evolving Indian stance. In particular, the thinking among Indian policymakers is that the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy will be worthless to the United States west of the Strait of Malacca without India. Indian strategists have, therefore, taken the view that the United States has no alternative to India for the development of its FOIP strategy.

The evolution of the China-India relationship parallels that of the China-U.S. relationship in some ways. Both India and the United States see China as an indispensable vendor for traded goods in the near term, albeit one they would like to replace in a reasonable timeframe. For the United States, China is a competitor for influence in Asia; while for India, China is a competitor for influence in the Indian Ocean region. A significant difference is that the United States and China are necessary collaborators on issues such as climate change, the spread of infectious disease, maritime piracy, and terrorism; whereas India and China are collaborators out of choice and not necessity. For example, at the climate change talks in 2021 in Glasgow, India and China chose to collaborate to fend off developed-country initiatives to water down the loss-and-damage mechanism. In addition, the United States sees China as a potential adversary in East Asia, both in the short and long term; while for India, China is a proven adversary.

Thus, this track II dialogue sought to explore Indian and American views on important security issues across the Indo-Pacific and, thereafter, to identify the areas of common interest and disagreement. The discussions were informed by six papers—three from each side. India-U.S. security and defense cooperation was first discussed, with Richard Girven from RAND and Yusuf Unjhawala from *Indian Defence Analysis* presenting their key arguments and perspectives, followed by an open discussion involving all participants. Abhijit Singh from the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and Cortez Cooper from RAND then summarized their arguments and views on Indian and U.S. approaches to great power competition in the Indian Ocean region. Finally, Shanthie Mariet D'Souza of Mantraya and John Parachini of RAND discussed the regional dynamics in Afghanistan and the security implications for all states with interests in the country and region.

This publication summarizes the six papers presented. It is particularly worth noting that a certain amount of complementarity exists in these papers from both sides, despite their coverage

of a wide range of bilateral, regional, and global issues of interest to Indian and American policymakers and scholars. The papers appear in full in the appendixes and are summarized below.

India-U.S. Security and Defense Cooperation

Richard S. Girven, senior international defense researcher at RAND, provided evidence to show that India-U.S. defense collaboration had increased to a level that would have been unthinkable 30 years ago and was the most solid underpinning of the overall relationship. The relationship has also been bolstered by both countries' interest in supporting each other in balancing China in the Indian Ocean region, aiding the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. The periodic exercises of the Quad nations (United States, Australia, Japan, and India) are a demonstration of this shared goal, but there is still unmet potential where more can be done.

The United States and India could partner in antipiracy operations, for instance, which would help in building a comprehensive framework for cooperation in areas such as real-time information exchange. There are also issues that have stymied the U.S.-India relationship. These include well-documented differences over Russia. India, for its part, has sought more sophisticated weapons and technology from the United States, without the expectation that India will have to commit to military operations if the United States so requests. However, India's continued arms imports from, and arms production cooperation with, Russia has put a damper on how far the United States may be willing to cooperate with India in defense production.

In his presentation, Yusuf Unjhawala, editor of the *Indian Defence Analysis* at ORF, noted that India-U.S. relations have expanded rapidly in the last 15 years, from a growing number of defense trade agreements to shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region and China. India has been diversifying its defense trade partners, moving away from Russia while developing its domestic defense ecosystem. This presents opportunities for U.S. companies, although India's defense acquisition policy and localization requirements, together with the United States' unwillingness to share technologies, poses challenges. For example, India seeks access to key missing technologies, such as naval propulsion, that the United States could provide, if willing; while India could make its defense acquisition policy less cumbersome and incentivize U.S. companies to partner with Indian counterparts.

Indian and U.S. Approaches to Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region

Abhijit Singh, senior fellow and head of the Maritime Policy Initiative at ORF, noted in his presentation that India's maritime posture in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has evolved considerably over the past 15 years, having moved from localized constabulary and surveillance operations to region-based capacity building, outreach, and diplomacy. However, these efforts are constrained by the emerging China-U.S. rivalry in the IOR, concerns among some Southeast Asian countries about power projection by India in the Bay of Bengal, and competition from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which, despite its dual-use potential, is largely welcomed in Africa and Asia for its economic potential.

The India-U.S. relationship also presents potential challenges. The partnership works well for the eastern Indian Ocean with regard to China, but the two nations differ in their perspectives for the western Indian Ocean. Disagreements over Iran and Pakistan persist, and India is uncomfortable with how the United States has divided the area between the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and the U.S. Central Command, communicating with the latter less adequately than with the former. The United States sees China as a threat in the Western Pacific, particularly regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea, but not as a threat in the Indian Ocean. India, however, regards the Chinese maritime threat as encompassing the entire Indian Ocean region.

In his presentation, Cortez Cooper, senior international defense researcher at RAND, noted that U.S. Asian policy is focused on China. In Cooper's assessment, the United States views the Quad, of which India is a member, as being about countering China in the Western Pacific. Cooper agreed with Singh on the need for greater U.S. attention to the IOR. He further noted that the Biden administration's initiative regarding maritime domain awareness was a step in the right direction, but said that India was not yet ready to make full use of its foundation agreements with the United States in order to benefit from the initiative.

Regional Dynamics in Afghanistan

In her presentation on Russian and Chinese stakes and the Indian equities in Afghanistan, Shanthie D'Souza, founder and president of Mantraya, observed that no country has taken advantage of the strategic space vacated by the United States when it withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021. D'Souza felt that the situation in Afghanistan provided opportunities for India and the United States to collaborate. India has signaled to the Taliban that it is ready to engage, but also contends that engagement with Afghanistan does not mean recognition of the Taliban. For example, having sent supplies since 2021, India stepped in as a first responder after a recent earthquake in Afghanistan.

John Parachini, senior international defense researcher at RAND, noted in his presentation that the international community seems to have predominantly coalesced around the view that it will not recognize the Taliban government in Afghanistan as is, although there are varying degrees of diplomatic engagement. There is insistence that the Taliban incorporate other ethnic groups, improve the status of women, and suppress terrorism. The U.S. policy toward Afghanistan is slowly evolving and consists of isolating, engaging with, or imposing sanctions on the Taliban. Right now, the United States is mostly in an isolate mode of nonrecognition, imposing sanctions and providing some aid but keeping Afghanistan financial assets frozen.

Afghanistan ought to present opportunities for both China and Russia. China will be patient and cautious, taking a leadership role by saying that it will recognize the Taliban government only if Iran, Russia, and Pakistan do, but likely not investing much through its BRI. Russia is distracted with the Ukraine crisis and other domestic challenges due to global sanctions. Moreover, Russia will coordinate its policy toward Afghanistan with Tajikistan, a close partner nation. Given its closeness with Tajikistan and Tajikistan's concern for events in Afghanistan,

Russia will likely follow Tajikistan's lead in many areas unless it discerns other opportunities. Parachini noted that, although the United States has resources and experience, it does not have much credibility and goodwill and did not exercise good judgment in Afghanistan.

Key Findings

The two-day track II dialogue identified several security-related areas for potential collaboration between India and the United States. Discussants identified impediments to cooperation that need to be overcome or, at least, acknowledged and worked around. As Raji Rajagopalan, ORF's group organizer, noted, the significant transformational changes that have occurred in India-U.S. relations must be appreciated. In the defense arena, the two nations have engaged in several important projects and initiatives that were unthinkable until a few years ago.

Several Indian colleagues stressed the need to further strengthen Indian and U.S. defense cooperation networks across micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) as well as startups, which will help in creating sustainable supply chains. Indian colleagues noted considerable collaboration with major U.S. aerospace companies in the civilian aerospace sector, but the partnership must be woven more deeply into sustainable supply chains to further augment the level of defense cooperation.

Indian colleagues acknowledged a growing desire to diversify and shift away from India's dependency on Russia and to develop its own robust and independent defense ecosystem. Some Indian colleagues posited that Russia had taken advantage of India on pricing and had not shared technology to the extent that India had hoped for. India purchases about $2 billion in spare parts from Russia on an annual basis, but where possible, India might consider importing spares for Russian weaponry from other national sources. The Indian desire to diversify its defense trade partners should present opportunities for the United States, but there are bottlenecks that need to be addressed. The main impediments are India's defense acquisition policy and systemic bureaucratic issues, and the United States' inability and/or unwillingness to share certain defense technologies.

Defense technologies that India has shown interest in are mostly at the high end of the technology spectrum and critical for India. These technologies, which include naval propulsion technology, conventional propulsion technology, and high-performance engines in general, might provide opportunities for U.S.-India collaboration. Both countries can also cooperate in the production and development of directed energy weapons and micro-electronics for military purposes.

While some bilateral concerns between India and the United States still need to be worked out, relations have matured enough that these issues do not hinder mutual longer-term strategic goals. India and the United States should look for opportunities to advance logistics support and intelligence-sharing for military exercises and maritime operations, promote freedom of navigation, guarantee safe overflight, enforce the rule of law against piracy in the high seas,

address drug trafficking, and enhance the proliferation of materials and technology for weapons of mass destruction. Working together in operational situations would enable both militaries to understand which advanced technologies would allow India to most effectively partner with the United States and other allies. For example, the United States and India can partner more in antipiracy operations to show their commitment to shared goals and to help build a comprehensive framework in which to exchange information in real time and across domains.

The Quad partnership was described by all participants as a useful framework for regional security cooperation. Indian colleagues acknowledged that as a Quad partner, India still needed to do more in terms of capacity-building and securing the global commons, and they highlighted a willingness to do so. For instance, in a division of labor to advance security in the region, India could leverage its expertise in cybersecurity to further capacity-building in South and Southeast Asia amid growing cyber threats from states like China as well as from nonstate actors.

India and the United States also have issues to resolve to further their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. For instance, the partnership works well for the eastern Indian Ocean with regards to China, but the two countries differ in their perspectives of the western Indian Ocean and in approaches to Iran and Pakistan. India claims that the U.S. military division of the Indo-Pacific theaters into the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. Africa Command makes coordination difficult.

The United States and India both view China as a collaborator, competitor, and adversary. While the United States considers China a bigger threat in the Western Pacific, particularly regarding Taiwan and the Spratly Islands, it also sees China challenging the interests of disputed countries in the South China Sea and posing a threat in the Indian Ocean. The latter concern is shared by India, which believes that if China had a stronger hold over the Western Pacific, it would then project power into the Indian Ocean. Thus, India desires new multilateral initiatives with the Quad and AUKUS (a trilateral partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to counter China's militarization, not only in the South China Sea but also in the Indian Ocean region.

The last topic of discussion at the dialogue was Afghanistan and associated regional security issues. Both Indian and American colleagues recognized the humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan, and both governments are taking steps corresponding to their abilities. India has shown leadership in this area, but like other major regional and global powers, it is waiting for the Taliban regime to meet three requirements put forward by the international community—form an inclusive government, respect the rights of women and girls, and disallow their country to be a sanctuary for terrorist groups—before officially recognizing them or engaging further. The likelihood of the Taliban meeting these requirements is low, so in the meantime, the United States and India should cooperate on counterterrorism and intelligence-sharing about the terrorist groups moving in and out of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Regional and global powers are unified on not formally recognizing or engaging with the Taliban regime until the three requirements are met. Many of these powers, particularly China

and Russia, have troubled relations with the United States, but in a de facto way, they share U.S. views of Afghanistan. Further, none of the states with regional interests in Afghanistan or the United States have recognized the Taliban government, and recent Taliban policies restricting educational opportunities for women make international recognition unlikely in the foreseeable future. It is unfortunate that the confluence of common views cannot be leveraged to further Afghan stability. The Taliban is unlikely to accept offers of support for its stability from the United States. However, regional organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which do not include the United States, could serve as important bodies to further Afghan stability. India could play an important role in such bodies.

The two-day track II meeting concluded with a strong desire on the parts of both ORF and RAND organizers to convene a similar dialogue in the future.

Appendix A. Conference Schedule

Observer Research Foundation and RAND Corporation

Track II Hybrid Dialogue (June 30–July 1, 2022)

Indian and U.S. Security Cooperation

Day 1: June 30, 2022		
Time	*Session Details*	*Notes*
(6:30 p.m. IST/ 9:00 a.m. EDT)	**Opening Remarks** **Raji Rajagopalan**, Director of the Centre for Security, Strategy, and Technology, ORF **John V. Parachini**, Senior International/Defense Researcher, RAND	7 minutes each
(6:45 p.m. IST/ 9:15 a.m. EDT)	**India-U.S. Defense Cooperation** Presenters: **Richard S. Girven**, Senior International/Defense Researcher, RAND **Yusuf Unjhawala**, Editor, *Indian Defence Analysis* Moderator: **Raji Rajagopalan**, Director of the Centre for Security, Strategy, and Technology, ORF	
(7:35 p.m. IST/ 10:05 a.m. EDT)	**Great Power Stakes in the Indian Ocean** Presenters: **Abhijit Singh**, Senior Fellow and Head, Maritime Policy Initiative, ORF **Cortez A. Cooper**, Senior International/Defense Researcher, RAND Moderator: **Rafiq Dossani**, Director, Center for Asia Pacific Policy, RAND	
(8:25 p.m. IST/ 10:55 a.m. EDT)	**Wrap-Up Comments** **Raji Rajagopalan**, Director of the Centre for Security, Strategy, and Technology, ORF	

Day 2: July 1, 2022		
Time	*Session Details*	*Notes*
(6:30 p.m. IST/ 9:00 a.m. EDT)	**Russia-China Stakes in Afghanistan** Presenters: **Shanthie Mariet D'Souza**, Founder and President, Mantraya **John V. Parachini**, Senior International/Defense Researcher, RAND Moderator: **Cortney Weinbaum**, Senior Management Scientist, RAND	
(7:30 p.m. IST/ 10:30 a.m. EDT)	**Workshop Wrap-Up Comments** **John V. Parachini**, Senior International/Defense Researcher, RAND **Raji Rajagopalan**, Director of the Centre for Security, Strategy, and Technology, ORF	

Appendix B. U.S. Security Cooperation with India: The Road Less Traveled

Rich Girven
Senior International/Defense Researcher
RAND Corporation

> India and United States enjoy a comprehensive global strategic partnership covering almost all areas of human endeavor, driven by shared democratic values, convergence of interests on a range of issues, and vibrant people-to-people contacts.
> **—Indian Ministry of External Affairs white paper on India-U.S. relations**

> The U.S.-India partnership is founded on a shared commitment to freedom, democratic principles, equal treatment of all citizens, human rights, and the rule of law. The United States and India have shared interests in promoting global security, stability, and economic prosperity through trade, investment, and connectivity.
> **—U.S. Department of State fact sheet on U.S.-India relations**

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States underscores the importance of the region and highlights the fact that administrations of both parties have recognized how critical the Indo-Pacific is to U.S. security and prosperity.[1] The U.S. Department of State's fact sheet on U.S. security cooperation with India further defines the vital role that India plays in working toward a shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. But India and the United States face challenges to their bilateral relationship, especially in the areas of defense and security cooperation. This paper explores the defense and security relationship between the United States and India, discusses some of the complex challenges and obstacles that face their development of a stronger relationship, and provides insights that may be useful to policymakers trying to navigate the relationship on both sides of the Indo-Pacific.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III met with Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh and Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar in Washington, D.C., on April 11, 2022, for the fourth U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. The 2+2 dialogue with India was preceded by a virtual meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joseph Biden, but these dialogues are just the most senior and highly visible

[1] The White House, *The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, February 2022.

of the many meetings that the United States and India hold annually.[2] More than 30 U.S.-Indian bilateral dialogues and working groups occur throughout the year, focusing on issues from regional security to economic cooperation, and from "space and health cooperation to energy and high technology."[3]

In mid-April, INDOPACOM commander Admiral John C. Aquilino met in Honolulu with Indian defense minister Rajnath Singh to discuss how to advance the India-U.S. major defense partnership in accordance with the objectives agreed to at the fourth ministerial dialogue. According to the INDOPACOM readout of their meetings,

> their talks focused on information sharing; opportunities to further advance and deepen maritime cooperation; regular bilateral logistics operations such as replenishments at sea, air-to-air and ground refueling; and reaffirmed the importance of regular bilateral and multilateral exercises.[4]

As the epigraphs at the beginning of this paper suggest, both nations officially cite shared democratic values and convergent interests on a comprehensive list of topics as the driving force behind their strategic "partnership." To a large degree, however, and echoed in the subtext of most official speeches and media statements following many of the dialogues mentioned above, the United States and India share a more pragmatic strategic objective: containment of Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

India and the United States—despite having so many areas of agreement, and despite several recent years of heightened tension between India and China that would seem to undergird increased cooperation between India and the United States in a myriad of topics—still have a range of issues where their individual histories and priorities outweigh the goals of their larger strategic partnership.

Foremost among those goals, the United States would like to see India take a more forceful stance against Russian aggression in Ukraine, not just in voicing concerns over the humanitarian crisis and calling for an end to hostilities, but in condemning Russia for attacks on civilians and in boycotting Russian imports, especially Russian oil.

India would like to see the United States provide more sophisticated defense technology without expecting India to commit to specific levels of military operations, coalitions, or contingencies.

The United States would also like to see India reduce its dependency on Russian military equipment, and Indian officials are still waiting to learn whether President Biden will renew waivers granted by the Trump administration that would otherwise result in sanctions being imposed on India under the U.S. Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act

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[2] U.S. Department of State, "Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," April 11, 2022.

[3] U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with India," January 20, 2021.

[4] "Readout of Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Adm. John C. Aquilino's Meeting with Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh," INDOPACOM, Honolulu, April 15, 2022.

(CAATSA). Despite concerns over CAATSA sanctions, India is very unlikely to accede to U.S. diplomatic efforts to bring it into alignment with U.S. strategic goals outside of major issues that relate to the containment of China.

But asking New Delhi to close the door on Moscow ignores the reality of India's long-standing interactions with and quasidependence on Russia. Therefore, understanding India's reluctance to accede to U.S. objectives outside the Indo-Pacific region and charting a potential path for improved security cooperation between the two nations requires a quick review of the history of the strategic relationship between India and the United States.

Short History of the U.S.-India Relationship

India's independence from Great Britain in 1947 saw British India divided into Muslim-majority Pakistan (East and West) and secular India, whose population was a mix, but majority Hindu. Forced migrations of nearly 20 million people led to massive communal clashes between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, and nearly a million people were killed in the violence. The state of Jammu and Kashmir, which at the time had a predominantly Muslim population but a Hindu leader, shared borders with both India and then West Pakistan. Disagreement over which nation would inherit Kashmir (as it was then known) led to the first India-Pakistan War in 1947–48 and ended with UN mediation. Pakistan controlled a part of the state, and India controlled the rest. The Indian-controlled part of Kashmir joined the Republic of India, and the Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir joined Pakistan. Both sides claimed the other's share of Kashmir, and it led to three wars between the two countries.[5]

Following the end of the first India-Pakistan war, Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited the United States and met with President Harry Truman just before formally declaring India neutral in the burgeoning Cold War. New Delhi took a leadership role among nations in the non-aligned movement. While some assessments of U.S.-India relations suggest that India's involvement in the non-aligned movement constrained the potential relationship that Washington shared with New Delhi,[6] soon-to-be published research by RAND Corporation suggests that Washington was more constrained by its own complicated strategic calculus for the Cold War.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and despite Indian leadership of the non-aligned movement, the United States sought to buttress both India and Pakistan against the threat of global communism and—it's important to note for this paper—especially China. Because of this, Washington provided considerable economic and military assistance to New Delhi, including food, development aid, and military equipment that was seen as having good economic value,

[5] U.S. Department of State, "The India Pakistan War of 1965," Office of the Historian, undated.

[6] Council on Foreign Relations, "U.S.-India Relations: 1947–2020," webpage, undated.

such as Sherman tanks.[7] The Indian Air Force at independence included half a squadron of U.S.-sourced C-47 Dakota transports, which were quickly joined by three squadrons of reconditioned B-24 Liberator bombers built in the United States.[8] Until the early 1960s, India continued to receive U.S. military equipment, some of which was transferred under the auspices of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program, an aid program designed to deter and defend against Communist China.

Washington denied a 1952 Indian request to buy 200 combat aircraft, concerned that such an extravagant defense purchase could undermine economic development critical to India at the time.[9] When war broke out between secular India and Communist China in 1962, Washington quickly supported India, offering to provide air assistance and arms, but deferred from providing combat aircraft, choosing instead to provide more C-119 transports and other arms. The conflict ended quickly in an Indian defeat, but China withdrew from the region. The United States recognized the McMahon Line as the border, providing some diplomatic support to India. Strategic and military relations between India and the United States remained close for the next few years, and the two nations held their first and only combined air-combat training exercise during the Cold War, called Exercise Shiksha, in November 1963.[10]

In 1964, Washington again denied Indian requests to purchase F-104 fighters out of concern that such a purchase could provoke Pakistan and, again, divert badly needed aid away from economic development.[11] In response to Washington's rejections, India began to source fighter aircraft in unprecedented numbers from the Soviet Union and secured the rights to produce most of them in India.[12]

A year later, India fought, this time successfully, to defeat Pakistan's invasion of Kashmir. The United States, seeking to be evenhanded in its efforts to achieve a cease-fire in the region, suspended all military assistance to both India and Pakistan. Washington was concerned that a war in South Asia would undermine regional cooperation against communism and might even risk inviting Chinese intervention. New Delhi felt betrayed by Washington because it viewed itself as the victim of Pakistani aggression, especially considering that Pakistan had fought with U.S.-sourced equipment, in direct contravention to U.S. rules on provision of military aid. This

[7] Council on Foreign Relations, undated.

[8] Indian Air Force, "History of IAF," undated; Kapil Bhargava, "India's Reclaimed Bombers: The B-24 Liberator," *Bharat Rakshak*, November 30, 1999.

[9] Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941–1991*, University Press of the Pacific, 2002, p. 86.

[10] Donald Michael, "Exercise Shiksha," *Bharat Rakshak*, March 27, 2015.

[11] Kux, 2002, pp. 229–231.

[12] SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 1950–2022, webpage, updated March 13, 2023.

war marked the start of a long downturn of U.S.-India relations that would not improve for decades.[13]

In August of 1971, India signed the 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, sharply deviating from its prior position of non-alignment in the Cold War. Diplomatic relations between the United States and Pakistan were strong in light of Islamabad's role in mediating President Nixon's rapprochement with Beijing a year earlier. As India and Pakistan entered into their third war in December of 1971, in conjunction with internal conflict in Pakistan that led to the creation of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), Washington sided with Islamabad, further deepening the rift between the United States and India.[14]

India tested a nuclear weapon in 1974, making it the first nation to declare nuclear capability outside of the five permanent members of the UN security council. Early in 1978, President Jimmy Carter and Indian prime minister Morarji Desai each made visits to the other's capital, signaling a potential positive change in the U.S.-India relationship. When the United States passed the nuclear nonproliferation act in March of the same year, requiring all nations not included in the nonproliferation treaty to allow full-scope safeguards and inspections of all nuclear facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency, India refused.[15] India's refusal ended all U.S. nuclear assistance to India and further separated the two nations diplomatically.

In 1982, Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi visited Washington to meet with President Ronald Reagan, and the two leaders agreed to increase cooperation and seek to resolve the ongoing dispute over nuclear power. In 1984, then–Vice President George H. W. Bush led a high-level visit to New Delhi to improve relations.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 brought significant change to Europe, ended the Cold War, and led to a new world order that included the dissolution of the Soviet Union by 1991. The Soviet collapse had what Indian-American journalist and author Akash Kapur described as a "profound impact on India."[16] In a *New York Times* article written on the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Kapur said,

> In many ways, it paved the way for a reinvention of the country: from a stultified, socialist economy to a more dynamic, capitalist one; from a foreign policy defined by suspicion of America to one defined by shared interests and even mutual affection; and from public attitudes that frowned on individualism, consumerism and ambition to a nation that today exalts those same qualities.

In the early days of 1991, facing a foundering economy and a severe balance-of-payment crisis, the Indian government under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao passed sweeping economic

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[13] Kux, 2002.

[14] Robert Wihtol, "U.S. China Relations: Nixon and Mao, 50 Years On," *The Strategist*, February 21, 2022.

[15] "Full-scope safeguards" refers to a system of inspections and materials-accounting on all nuclear activities in a country, in accordance with the rules of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

[16] Akash Kapur, "India's Path Was Paved by Soviet Fall," *New York Times*, November 19, 2009.

reforms, opening the Indian market to international trade and expanding economic ties with the United States. This opened the doors for U.S. investment, and U.S. companies began to explore options within India.

The United States and India signed the "Agreed Minute on Defense Relations between the United States and India" in 1995, allowing military-to-military exercises between the two countries, and both nations began to explore the possibilities of a stronger defense relationship. But in May 1998, India conducted a series of underground nuclear tests at Pokhran, close to the border with Pakistan, surprising the U.S. intelligence community. A commission headed by retired Admiral David Jeremiah reviewed the intelligence community's performance and recommended a number of measures to improve future intelligence collection and analysis. Commenting on the report, Chairman Richard Shelby of the Senate Intelligence Committee called the report a "wake-up call" for Mr. Tenet (the CIA director) and all senior managers within the intelligence community. A now-declassified CIA analysis of the BJP government, which was newly elected one month before the tests, suggests the BJP was setting up a national security council, which would be used to "buy time" before making decisions on issues that would "affect India's relations with the West, such as nuclear policy."[17]

No published analysis at the time suggested that India would risk the ire of the West by testing a device, even though the prime minister of India's election platform had included "induction of nuclear weapons" as a campaign promise. The international community condemned the tests, and India's relationship with the United States was severely damaged. President Clinton recalled the U.S. ambassador to India and imposed economic sanctions to signal Washington's displeasure.[18] Later in May, Pakistan also conducted a series of tests, incurring sanctions from the United States as well.

Less than a year later, in May 1999, Pakistani forces were discovered to have crossed the Line of Control near Kargil in Kashmir, setting off the third Indian-Pakistan war. In the wake of recent nuclear tests by both nations, the Kargil conflict fueled greater global fears of potential nuclear war in the subcontinent. Embarrassed by having missed the Indian nuclear tests, a hypervigilant intelligence community determined that Pakistan had deliberately violated the Line of Control, and as a result, the United States quickly admonished Pakistan for risking a broader war with India. For the first time in their decades-long relationship, the United States was publicly siding with India against Pakistan. As Bruce Riedel, former special assistant to the

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[17] *India: Problems and Prospects for the BJP Government*, CIA report, April 13, 1998, declassified through the Freedom of Information Act.

[18] The Glenn Amendment of the Arms Export Control Act requires the president to enact sanctions if he determines that a nonnuclear weapons state (as defined by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT]) detonates a nuclear explosive device. The sanctions impose broad-ranging restrictions on various types of assistance, loans, and trade.

president and senior director for Near East and South Asia Affairs in the National Security Council, recalled,

> The Pakistanis and Indians were both surprised by the U.S. position: Pakistan because Islamabad assumed the U.S. would always back them against India and India because they could not believe the U.S. would judge the crisis on its merits, rather than side automatically with its long time Pakistani ally. Both protagonists were rooted in the history of their half-century conflict and astounded that the U.S. was not bound by the past.[19]

Pakistani president Nawaz Sharif met with President Clinton in Washington, D.C., in July 1999, and Clinton demanded that Pakistan withdraw to positions behind the Line of Control. Later that month, militants backed by Pakistan withdrew from India.

Just one year later, President Clinton made the first U.S. presidential visit to India since 1978, ending the two years of extremely limited relations caused by the 1998 nuclear tests. The trip signaled a further shift in Washington's strategic orientation in the region, away from its previous Cold War alliance with Pakistan and toward a new agreement with India to open dialogue on a range of issues. That President Clinton spent one day in Bangladesh, five days in India, and just a few hours in Islamabad may have been the strongest signal of all that the relationships were changing.

Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States reinvigorated its relationship with Pakistan—which would become a critical base for supporting coalition operations in Afghanistan—but became increasingly interested in India. New Delhi had strongly signaled its support for the U.S. global war on terror (GWOT), which, in its interpretation, would include the Islamic terrorism originating in Pakistan. Washington lifted the last remaining nuclear test-related sanctions on India. India, in turn, provided operational support, offering bases for U.S. operations in Afghanistan and escorting U.S. vessels transiting the Strait of Malacca.[20] Anti-terrorism became a driving cause for the bilateral relationship, and expectations in Washington began to rise. In 2003, the United States requested that India contribute ground forces for the stabilization of Iraq—but this was a level of cooperation that, from New Delhi's perspective, was too much, too soon.[21]

In 2005, the United States and India began a dialogue on energy security and signed the "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship," a comprehensive agreement that set priorities for defense cooperation in maritime security, nonproliferation of weapons of mass

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[19] Riedel Bruce, "American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House," *Policy Paper Series*, Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, 2002.

[20] Amit Baruah, "Only 'Escort Duties' in Malacca Straits," *The Hindu*, April 23, 2002.

[21] Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States Since 1947*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 200–208.

destruction, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, and counterterrorism.[22] In October of the same year, the two countries held their largest naval exercise to date, followed by major land and air exercises. A 2015 Department of Defense (DoD) fact sheet on the bilateral relationship describes the 2005 "New Framework" document as having set "the U.S. and India on a path to increasingly broad, complex and strategic cooperation."[23]

Officials on both sides of the Indo-Pacific continued to work to strengthen the relationship to new levels, and by the time of the Obama administration, the United States had come to see India as a net security provider and the "linchpin" of security in Asia.[24] Washington and New Delhi convened the first U.S.-India strategic dialogue in 2010, bringing a large delegation of high-ranking Indian officials to Washington for talks. At a White House media event with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, President Obama called the relationship "a defining partnership in the twenty-first century" and said that "the United States welcomes and encourages India's leadership role in helping to shape the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia."[25] Two years later, in the wake of the Obama administration's announcement of a pivot to Asia, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta visited India to strengthen the military-to-military relationship.

In 2014, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi visited the United States to bolster the U.S.-India strategic partnership and to discuss U.S. assistance to India for energy development as well as U.S. energy exports to India. A year later, President Obama traveled to India for a second time, and the two leaders announced a breakthrough on nuclear-related issues. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and Indian defense secretary Manohar Parrikar renewed the ten-year defense framework agreement.

The last decade of interactions between Washington and New Delhi have trended upward at a rapid pace, with minor perturbations set to the side in favor of continued cooperation and growth in the relationship. In 2016, President Obama named India a "major defense partner"; and in 2018, the United States and India signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) allowing real-time information sharing between the two militaries. In spite of ongoing disagreements over trade issues, the two nations signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020, meant to allow and foster the sharing of intelligence. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper highlighted the two nations' commitment to keeping the

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[22] DoD, "Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship," signed June 3, 2015.

[23] DoD, "Fact Sheet: U.S.-India Defense Relationship," 2015.

[24] Leon E. Panetta, "Partners in the 21st Century," speech at the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, June 6, 2012.

[25] Chidanand Rajghatta, "U.S.-India Ties Will Be Defining Partnership of the 21st Century: Obama," *Times of India*, November 25, 2009.

Indo-Pacific free and open, "particularly in light of increasing aggression and destabilizing activities by China."[26]

Recent events in Ukraine may seem to have strained relations between the United States and India over India's reluctance to condemn Russia's invasion and boycott Russian imports, especially oil. But the U.S. position has softened since it first asked New Delhi to condemn Russia.

On February 24, 2022, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken spoke with External Affairs Minister Dr. Subramanyan Jaishankar to discuss "Russia's premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified attack on Ukraine." The secretary "stressed the importance of a strong collective response to condemn Russia's invasion and call for an immediate withdrawal and ceasefire."[27]

Just a week later, on March 30, Secretary Blinken spoke with the minister about including the worsening humanitarian situation in Ukraine and "our shared efforts to promote a free, open, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific, in which the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states is respected."[28]

The following day, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price, in response to a question about whether there were any administration concerns regarding Indian actions as they related to Russia, said,

> Different countries are going to have their own relationship with the Russian Federation. It's a fact of history; it's a fact of geography. That is not something that we are seeking to change. What we are seeking to do, whether it is in the context of India or other partners and allies around the world, is to do all we can to see to it that the international community is speaking in unison, speaking loudly against this unjustified, unprovoked, premeditated aggression, calling for an end to the violence, using the leverage that countries, including India, have to those ends.[29]

Free and Open Indo-Pacific

The February 2022 INDOPACOM strategy discusses the following five strategic objectives to be undertaken in concert with allies and partners:

- advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific
- building connections within and beyond the region
- driving regional prosperity

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[26] Anjana Pasricha, "With Eye on China, India and U.S. Sign Landmark Military Agreement," *VOA News*, October 27, 2022.

[27] U.S. Department of State, "Secretary Blinken's Call with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar," webpage, February 24, 2022.

[28] U.S. Department of State, "Secretary Blinken's Call," 2022.

[29] U.S. Department of State, "Department Press Briefing—March 31, 2022," webpage, March 31, 2022.

- bolstering Indo-Pacific security
- building regional resilience to transnational threats.[30]

This new strategy document attempts to refocus the strategic vision away from Asia as an arena of geopolitical competition to one in which opportunity and freedom are available to all. The strategy supports a "strong India" as a partner in creating a positive regional vision and describes efforts the United States will undertake to achieve these objectives, focusing on the "unprecedented cooperation" required to achieve the stated goals.

In a free and open Indo-Pacific, "governments can make their own sovereign choices, consistent with their obligations under international law."[31] The United States will continue to support open societies along with freedom of information and expression, and it will seek to improve fiscal transparency in order to expose corruption and drive reform.

These are all areas in which the United States and India have common interests and goals, and while not directly related to security cooperation, they provide ample opportunity for partnering to improve aspects of regional peace and security by strengthening democratic institutions, supporting the rule of law, and fighting against regional economic coercion.

U.S. and Indian senior officials at the 2+2 dialogue in April 2022

> reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific in which the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states are respected, and countries are free from military, economic, and political coercion. They further reaffirmed their dedication to promoting regional stability and prosperity, with an inclusive regional architecture, abiding by the rule of law, the freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, and ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] centrality. They also reiterated the importance of adherence to international law to meet challenges to the rules-based order, including in the South China Sea.[32]

Potential Opportunities

New Delhi and Washington have agreements on everything ranging from mutual logistics support to cooperative intelligence sharing, and they have the basic architecture in place to work more closely not just in military exercises but also on operations that ensure maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation, safe overflight, enforcement of the rule of law against piracy on the high seas, efforts against drug trafficking, and the proliferation of materials and technology for weapons of mass destruction. They are working to fully implement the BECA, signed in 2020, to support the exchange of geospatial information as well as the exchange and placement of liaison officers in each other's military organizations. At the 2+2 dialogue in April 2022, the ministers supported joint service cooperation between their militaries to support integrated and

[30] The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy*.

[31] The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, p. 8.

[32] U.S. Department of State, "Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue."

multidomain cooperation. Such commitment to cooperation has as a natural result—increased commitment to partnering against real-world threats.

About 25 percent of the world's commerce and nearly 50 percent of its oil passes through the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea, areas that continue to be rife with modern-day pirates. India and the United States could increasingly partner in antipiracy operations in these areas to demonstrate a strong commitment to their shared goals.[33] In particular, such partnering would require them to realize a shared goal described at the 2+2 dialogue—building a comprehensive framework under which the two nations' militaries can exchange information in real time and across a multitude of domains.

Building Connections

The United States seeks to build collective capacity in the Indo-Pacific in order to guarantee a free and open region. To do this, it is deepening its five regional treaty alliances and has committed to strengthening relationships with its leading regional partners—first among which is India. The Indo-Pacific strategy calls for U.S. allies and partners to strengthen their ties with each other, to form flexible groups that enable them to face defining challenges, and to continue to cooperate regionally on issues ranging from those in critical and emerging technologies to those in cyberspace and clean energy.

Ministers at the April 2022 2+2 dialogue reaffirmed the importance of deepening collaboration in science and technology in the U.S.-India joint technical group and in areas of rapidly evolving technologies, such as space, artificial intelligence (AI), and cyberspace. They welcomed the second Defense Cyber Dialogue held in 2021 and agreed to hold an inaugural AI dialogue to harness opportunities for joint innovation and cooperation in new domains. The bilateral framework for the U.S.-India cyber relationship underscores the importance of bilateral and international cooperation for combating cyber threats, an area in which the two nations could partner to build regional resilience and connectivity.[34]

Potential Opportunities

The United States and India have the opportunity to expand technological cooperation beyond their bilateral agreements by assisting other nations in building cyber resilience and defense. U.S. security cooperation programs that seek to build partner capacity in the cyber domain often rely on U.S. active-duty and national guard units to serve as implementing partners and exercise leads across scores of bilateral programs. New Delhi could ease some of Washington's burden of cyber-partner capacity-building in the Indo-Pacific by offering to leverage some of its own cyber expertise and capabilities in South and Southeast Asian nations,

[33] U.S. Navy, "Navy vs. Piracy," webpage, *All Hands Magazine*, undated.

[34] U.S. Embassy & Consulates in India, "Framework for the U.S.-India Cyber Relationship," August 30, 2016.

partnering with the United States and expanding its regional partnerships, thereby demonstrating its commitment to serve as a regional leader in facing a defining challenge—the growing threat from state and nonstate actors in the cyberspace domain.

Driving Regional Prosperity

The Indo-Pacific strategy calls for investments that "encourage innovation, strengthen economic competitiveness, produce good-paying jobs, rebuild supply chains, and expand economic opportunities for middle class families."[35] In 2021, India was reported to have surpassed Brazil in its number of COVID cases, rising to second behind the United States and becoming one of the two nations worst hit during the second wave of the pandemic.[36] The Indian economy, like many others in the world, was significantly affected, increasing joblessness and dramatically affecting internal and external supply chains. But according to an assessment by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in November 2021, India's "broad range of fiscal, monetary and health responses to the crisis supported its recovery and, along with economic reforms, are helping to mitigate a longer-lasting adverse impact of the crisis."[37] More recently, the IMF has bolstered its assessment of what will likely be India's dramatic economic recovery, projecting 8.2-percent real growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022, more than double the projection for the U.S. economy, which may afford India some leeway in investing in trade and business improvements.

Potential Opportunities

Despite continuing global uncertainty over the future of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on trade and economic prosperity, the United States and India have real opportunities to improve economic stability in the region by partnering to build trusted and resilient regional supply chains. Ministers at the April 2022 2+2 dialogue agreed to

> explore and further promote the means to encourage reciprocal participation of U.S. and Indian vendors in each other's defense supply chains. Acknowledging India's focus on developing its domestic capabilities and helping to ensure reliable defense supplies, the Ministers committed to work closely across their respective governments on co-production, co-development, cooperative testing of advanced systems, investment promotion, and the development of Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facilities in India.[38]

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[35] The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy*.

[36] Billy Perrigo, "Officially, India Has the World's Second-Worst COVID-19 Outbreak. Unofficially, It's Almost Certainly the Worst," *Time*, April 14, 2021.

[37] "India's Economy to Rebound as Pandemic Prompts Reforms," *IMF News*, November 2, 2021.

[38] U.S. Department of State, "Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue."

Success in experimentation and improvements in military technologies, processes, and procedures often quickly find their way into the private sector. So, as India and the United States work to build secure and resilient bilateral defense-supply chains, they may encounter lessons applicable to the rebuilding of regional and global supply chains that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. If so, Washington and New Delhi could seek to share their combined expertise with regional partners, improving connectivity, strengthening supply chains, and increasing economic resiliency in the face of future waves of the pandemic.

Bolstering Indo-Pacific Security

The United States maintains a "strong and consistent" defense presence in the Indo-Pacific in order to "support regional peace, security, stability, and prosperity."[39] The Indo-Pacific strategy calls for a more integrated approach to deterrence that will see U.S. forces operating alongside allies and partners across warfighting domains and the entire spectrum of conflict. This approach will require greater interoperability of systems and forces and more alignment of regional strategies than ever before. Advancing the major defense partnership with India and increasing support to New Delhi to ensure it can fulfill its role as a regional net security provider will require the accelerated transfer and sustainability of advanced warfighting capabilities that are interoperable with U.S. forces in the region.

Ministers at the April 2+2 dialogue "commended the significant and continuing progress in the U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership" and "reaffirmed their ambitions for building an advanced and comprehensive defense partnership in which U.S. and Indian militaries coordinate closely together across all domains."[40] They also reaffirmed the importance of a strong slate of bilateral and multilateral exercises and the continuation of Indian participation in the U.S. Red Flag exercise.

Potential Opportunities

Bilateral military exercises between the United States and India have grown in scope and scale to include not only cross-national weapons familiarization and side-by-side training events, but also combined training and operations that reinforce the defense partnership at a strategic as well as person-to-person level. For example, in October 2021, U.S. paratroopers from the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) and the 25th Infantry Division, along with Indian soldiers from the 136th (I) Infantry Brigade Group, participated in Exercise Yudh Abas 21 at Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson in Alaska.

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[39] The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy*.

[40] U.S. Department of State, "Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue."

The culminating event for the exercise was an FTX that "took place thousands of feet above sea level in the Chugach Mountains in deep snow, blowing winds and subfreezing temperatures. Combined Indian and U.S. Army units assaulted an objective in support of a notional military operation."[41]

This type of exercise likely saw the U.S. Army gaining a strong appreciation of the capabilities of the Indian Army, with its decades of experience in high-altitude and cold-weather combat in the Himalayas. Military leaders on both sides should share candidly their strengths and growth opportunities, so that each may learn from the other and continue to build a better understanding of how each military operates independently and can best operate together.

Working in cooperation in the most realistic scenarios possible would enable the two militaries to better understand which advanced technologies would be best to allow India to partner in an interoperable fashion with the United States and other allies, should the need arise.

Building Regional Resilience to Transnational Threats

In the area of resilience, the Indo-Pacific strategy focuses mainly on actions the two nations can take in response to global climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes limiting global temperature growth and incentivizing clean energy technologies wherever possible, while fostering climate-aligned infrastructure investment. It also includes strengthening partner health systems and working with the World Health Organization to strengthen preparedness and response.

While economic and diplomatic initiatives will be the main tools used to achieve their goals in these two areas, U.S. and Indian militaries can continue to work together in the security realm to prepare cooperative responses to natural disasters (which are increasing in rate and severity) and to future crises such as COVID-19.

At the April 2+2 conference, the ministers "welcomed regular bilateral logistics operations such as replenishments at sea, air-to-air and ground-refueling and committed to increasing such cooperation, including through the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)." They also supported "increasing the scope and complexity of these exercises."[42]

Potential Opportunities

Crisis operations in peacetime are often great opportunities for nations to learn to work together to discover the challenges and limits of their interoperability, the depth and breadth of their similarities, and the manner in which they can best share strengths to achieve mission success. In response to the 2004 Asian tsunami, India and the United States partnered with

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[41] Alex Skripnichuck, "Indo-U.S. Bilateral Exercise Yudh Abhyas 21 Concludes," *Army News*, October 29, 2021.

[42] U.S. Department of State, "Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue."

Australia and Japan to form an active coordination group known as the Tsunami Core Group and coordinated the distribution of relief supplies in order to avoid duplication of effort.

Efforts at the time resulted in local areas of responsibility in each nation and in the region in general, with cooperation between militaries coordinated at the commander-to-commander level, such as by admirals at sea or by helicopter squadron commanders operating from the same base in an affected nation.[43]

Future exercises could take advantage of the developments made in logistics support and in information-sharing agreements over the past several decades if militaries planned and undertook complex disaster relief, noncombatant evacuation, or other disaster response scenarios by design. India and the United States both have strong and capable militaries able to handle complex challenges during regional and international emergencies. Together, the two nations could likely handle even greater challenges.

Conclusion

While Washington and New Delhi have many common goals and areas of cooperation on which to focus, there will not always be 100-percent agreement between the two capitals. The United States wants India to align with the West against Russian aggression in Ukraine, especially considering that the two capitals agree on protecting the territorial integrity of sovereign nations; but the United States also recognizes that, as stated in its Indo-Pacific agreement, "governments can make their own sovereign choices, consistent with their obligations under international law," and has therefore allowed India diplomatic leeway in its less-than-forceful denouncement of Russian aggression.

The two nations have a near infinite range of opportunities to partner their militaries regionally as strong representatives of democracy, adherent to the rule of law, and working together to build stability, security, prosperity, and peace for many years to come.

[43] The author was the defense attaché in Sri Lanka during the Asian tsunami and witnessed firsthand how India and the United States cooperated and at what levels.

Appendix C. The Making of an India-U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership

Yusuf Unjhawala
Editor
Indian Defence Analysis

Introduction

Although the United States and India were at odds during the Cold War, a series of high-level strategic decisions were made to break with the past and forge new relationships. These measures strengthened ties to a level that the two countries eventually came to describe as indispensable. Now, the world has entered a new phase of strategic competition. And as India marks 75 years of independence and diplomatic ties with the United States, we see that the next 25 years will be critical. As such, this paper focuses on the development of comprehensive global strategic relations between India and the United States—both the political will and the methodical and strategic approach to strengthening ties with various results-oriented agreements and statements—over the coming 25 years.

Despite the sanctions imposed on India following the nuclear tests, the Vajpayee government was quick to open dialogue with the United States, and the United States reciprocated. The Vajpayee government supported America on missile defense even though this stance was in variance with India's foremost strategic partner at that time—Russia. India's support for the U.S.-led war on terror altered the U.S. approach to India's concerns over terrorization by Pakistan. This resulted in the dehyphenation of India and Pakistan, something that India had long sought.

The game-changing nuclear deal marked the start of the process of establishing strategic trust, which was reflected in defense relations thereafter. Other key deliverables included the removal of sanctions and technology restrictions, as well as India's admission to arms control organizations. Since 2008, the United States has increased its defense sales to India, the world's largest weapon importer, from zero to more than USD20 billion. Military cooperation has increased, with the two countries now conducting more military exercises with each other than with any other country on the planet, increasing interoperability. Finally, after much deliberation and lengthy negotiations, India finally inked four foundational agreements, referring to them as pillars of their defense ties.

Today, U.S. defense companies are forming joint ventures with Indian firms and integrating other enterprises into their global supply chain, accounting for 35 percent of India's total defense exports. Despite the growing ties, however, and despite an enabling framework that has made India a major defense partner on par with key U.S. allies, one critical joint development effort

that India has been seeking remains elusive, and opportunities to transform defense ties have been squandered.

Specifically, India is severely lacking in critical propulsion technologies such as nuclear and conventional naval propulsion systems, as well as aero engines, which could be a focus of cooperation. Another potential focus is the joint development of weapon systems in areas where India is gaining expertise, as well as in ongoing programs such as those in directed energy weapons and hypersonic missiles. Cooperation in these areas could take ties to a whole new level.

In addition, India's emphasis on the indigenization of weapon purchases, as well as their invitation to foreign weapon manufacturers to manufacture in India and sell to the rest of the world, presents an opportunity for the United States to strengthen its presence in the country. However, India must provide incentives not only to domestic private enterprises but also to foreign firms. Changing the definition of an "Indian company" and giving weight to foreign companies investing and manufacturing in India would be a significant incentive. India could also take a page out of its semiconductor manufacturing policy by providing financial support for investments and a page out of its electronics manufacturing policy by providing production-linked incentives.

India is critical to the Indo-Pacific region's stability, and having the capability to manufacture indigenous weapons is critical. The United States has an incentive to support such a capability. As one American president said during a visit to India, "The strength of India is our interest." One might think a recent U.S. president made this statement, but Dwight Eisenhower said it during a visit to India in 1959.[1] Still, years later—after the United States chose partners and allies during the Cold War; after Washington imposed sanctions on India, denied them technology, and armed and supported Pakistan while dismissing India's concerns about being terrorized by them; and after India maintained close relations with the Soviet Union, albeit in a non-aligned position—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed a similar sentiment when she said, "The United States has a vital stake in India's rise to global power and prosperity."[2]

The current state of relations between India and the United States is the result of conviction and commitment from the highest levels of leadership in both countries to develop ties. These leaders cut across party lines and administrations, spanning Democratic and Republican governments in the United States and the BJP-led NDA and Congress-led UPA governments in India over nearly 25 years. Throughout these years, India, which was in the opposite camp as the United States during the Cold War, broke from its status quo past and made decisions that helped propel these ties and give the relationship direction—the Vajpayee government backed the United States in missile defense and the war on terror and nearly committed troops in Iraq; Manmohan Singh put his government on the line over the nuclear deal until a regional party

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[1] Dheeraj Kumar, "Indo-U.S. Relations: Historical Perspectives," *Strategic Insights*, Vol. 8, No. 3, August 2009.

[2] "U.S. Has Vital Stake in India's Rise as a Global Power: Rice," *Economic Times*, June 11, 2008.

stood up at the last moment to support him; and Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed the four foundational agreements, sounding a clarion call for both nations to break away from the hesitancies of history and work together toward a brighter future in pursuit of shared interests, backed by shared values, democracy, and a respect for international law. Over the years, increased strategic trust led to increased military ties. This led to increased defense trade, which led to a larger presence of American defense firms in India, laying the groundwork for the two strategic partners to consider codevelopment and coproduction. Step by step, the relationship has been carefully crafted and supported by leadership, with any friction addressed in a mature, pragmatic manner and with many stated goals accomplished successfully along the way.

This paper investigates this development of India-U.S. relations in the twenty-first century, presenting its evolution through nine distinct sections:

- The first section examines the making of India-U.S. strategic ties, including the various joint statements and agreements signed by the two countries and what they accomplished.
- Section two depicts the strengthening of these strategic ties and of the trust between India and the United States, which has resulted in increased defense cooperation through the signing of foundational agreements and increased interoperability between the two nations' militaries.
- Section three demonstrates how increased strategic trust resulted in increased defense trade, going from zero weapon sales in 2008 to USD20 billion in total sales over twelve years.
- As shown in section four, the growth in defense trade resulted in an increase in the presence of major American defense companies in India.
- Section five delves into missed opportunities to strengthen defense relations with game-changing technologies, despite the framework built over the previous years.
- Section six provides a broad overview of India's current defense production status.
- Section seven focuses on key aspects of India's defense acquisition policy as well as its potential issues.
- Section eight argues that India should reconsider its defense acquisition policy in a way that might include incorporating elements of policies outlined for semiconductor and electronics manufacturing.
- Section nine investigates the possibility of future collaboration between India and the United States.

The Making of an India-U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership

Shared interests and concerns over China were the linchpin that brought India and the United States closer together than ever before. Although naval exercises between the two countries began in 1992,[3] during the administration of George H. W. Bush, it was discussions between Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh and U.S. deputy secretary of state Strobe Talbott in the

[3] India Ministry of Defense, Government of India, "Indian Navy Participates in Naval Exercise Malabar," webpage, August 26, 2021.

aftermath of India's nuclear tests and sanctions—during the Clinton administration—that laid the groundwork for their strategic partnership. The momentum carried over into George W. Bush's administration in the United States, and in April 2001, President Bush "dropped by"[4] during a meeting between Jaswant Singh and then–U.S. national security advisor Condoleezza Rice, and invited Singh to the Oval Office for talks. The move was seen as not only indicative of the growing importance of India to the United States, but with U.S.-China tensions rising,[5] as a message to Beijing.[6]

After supporting the U.S. decision to proceed with missile defense in May 2001, India acted quickly and decisively to offer support for the war on terror after the 9/11 attacks.[7] This was the first of several pivotal events upon which the two countries built cooperation, as the United States reversed its position on terror and Pakistan, dehyphenating Pakistan and India. The following year, India and the United States signed their first defense agreement, the General Security of Military Information Agreement,[8] to facilitate defense technology cooperation.

In 2004, the United States and India announced the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership,[9] in which they agreed to expand cooperation in three areas: civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programs, and high-technology trade. They also agreed on missile defense and on ways to improve their cooperation in peaceful uses of space technology. In June of the following year, the ten-year "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship" document was signed, and it was renewed in 2015.[10] The two countries agreed to strengthen defense relations and sign defense deals in order to increase security, strengthen strategic ties, and build interoperability. The agreement resulted in the formation of various groups that were to interact regularly to strengthen defense ties. The agreement also resulted in the proclamation of an "Indo-U.S. global partnership" and the acceptance of India as a "responsible state with advanced nuclear technology," which implied that India's nuclear weapons—despite India's nonsignatory status to the nuclear nonproliferation treaty—were a game-changer in the partnership.[11] The decision by India to support U.S. missile defense and U.S. collaboration with India on civil nuclear programs solidified their strategic ties. The U.S. pledged to help India obtain sophisticated civilian nuclear

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[4] "Bush Does a Clinton," *Indian Express*, April 10, 2001.

[5] Kenneth Lieberthal, "The United States and Asia in 2001: Changing Agendas," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 1, January–February 2002.

[6] "Bush Does a Clinton," 2001.

[7] "India Backs Bush's Defence Plan," *Times of India*, May 12, 2001; "Vajpayee, Bush Meet Over Terrorism War," CNN, November 9, 2001.

[8] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Joint Statement of India-U.S. Defense," May 23, 2002.

[9] U.S. Department of State, "Statement by the President: Next Steps in Strategic Partnership with India," January 12, 2004.

[10] U.S. Department of Defense, "Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship," signed June 3, 2015.

[11] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Joint Statement, India-U.S.," July 18, 2005.

technology and join multiple arms control regimes, removing what it called "core differences" that had hampered the strategic relationship for more than 30 years.[12] This agreement charted a bold global course for India-U.S. cooperation, which they viewed as critical to promoting stability, democracy, prosperity, and peace throughout the world.[13]

The United States, which had asked India to roll back its nuclear and ballistic missile programs until the late 1990s, not only implicitly acknowledged India's nuclear power status but also appeared to support its intercontinental ballistic missile program later on—once in 2012, when it viewed New Delhi's first test of the Agni V missile as a counterbalance to China, and again in 2019, when it tacitly supported India's antisatellite test.[14]

In 2006, the Indo-U.S. Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation was signed, which committed to comprehensive cooperation in ensuring a secure maritime domain.[15] In the years to come, India's maritime security strategy shifted from Freedom to Use the Seas, released in 2007, to a power-projecting ambition in Ensuring Secure Seas in 2015.[16] This shift was necessitated by what the then–chief of the Indian Naval Staff, Admiral Robin Dhowan, described as sweeping changes in the global and regional geostrategic environment, a change in worldview from a Euro-Atlantic to an Indo-Pacific focus, and the repositioning of global economic and military power toward Asia. This formalized India's acceptance of the "Indo-Pacific" and further brought into convergence with the shared maritime interests of the United States, Japan, and Australia (the members of the Quad, which was revived in 2017).

The United States formalized the 2005 nuclear agreement with the passage of the 123 agreement in 2008, the significance of which was reflected in the defense trade. Until 2008, Indo-U.S. defense trade was almost nonexistent.[17] In 2008, India signed its largest-ever defense deal with the United States, worth USD1 billion, for six Super Hercules C130J aircraft.[18] Months later, an even larger agreement was signed for 8 P8 Poseidon antisubmarine warfare (ASW)

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[12] U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-India: Civil Nuclear Cooperation," *Archives*, information released online from January 20, 2001, to January 20, 2009.

[13] "Joint Statement, India-U.S.," 2005.

[14] "U.S. Supports India Closing Missile Gap with China: Think Tank," *Indian Express*, April 24, 2012; Huma Siddiqui, "India's A-SAT Test Mission Shakti: Decoding 'Friends' U.S. and Russia's Reaction," *Financial Express*, March 30, 2019.

[15] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Indo-U.S. Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation," March 2, 2006.

[16] Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defense (Indian Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Strategy*, Naval Strategic Publication (NSP) 1.2, October 2015.

[17] U.S. Department of State, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Cooperation with India," January 20, 2021.

[18] Gulshan Luthra and Air Marshal Goel, "India Signs Agreement for Hercules Aircraft," *Hindustan Times*, February 6, 2008.

aircraft worth USD2.1 billion. India purchased nearly USD20 billion in American weapon systems between 2008 and 2020.[19]

The bipartisan nature of U.S. support for relations with India was reflected in the further strengthening of ties during the Obama administration. The administration pledged in 2010 to support India's full membership in four multilateral export control regimes: the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Australia Group (for chemical and biological controls), and the Wassenaar Arrangement (for dual-use and conventional arms controls).[20] To expand cooperation in space and defense technologies, Indian defense and space-related entities were removed from the U.S. entities list.[21]

President Barack Obama called for more American companies to join India's efforts to improve its defense capabilities.[22] In 2013, the two countries signed the U.S.-India Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation,[23] promising to put each other on par with their closest allies in terms of defense technology transfer, trade, research, development, and coproduction for defense articles and services, including the most advanced and sophisticated technology. Their relationship was described as a "comprehensive global strategic partnership,"[24] which was formalized during President Trump's visit to India many years later, in February 2020.[25]

In 2015, the two countries issued the Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and the IOR.[26] This document reiterated the indispensable nature of their partnership in promoting peace, prosperity, and stability in the region and reaffirmed the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea. Both governments urged all parties to avoid the threat or use of force and to seek peaceful resolution to territorial and maritime disputes in accordance with internationally recognized law principles, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Since then, in a number of bilateral and international organizations and fora, both countries

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[19] Jim Wolf, "U.S. OKs Record $2.1 Billion Arms Sale to India," Reuters, March 16, 2009; "Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Cooperation with India," 2021.

[20] The White House, "Fact Sheet: U.S.-India Partnership on Export Controls and Non-Proliferation," *Archives*, two pages of the India-U.S. agreement, undated.

[21] "Fact Sheet: U.S.-India Partnership on Export Controls and Non-Proliferation," undated.

[22] The White House, "U.S.-India Joint Statement," *Archives*, Statements and Releases, September 27, 2013.

[23] The White House, "U.S.-India Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation," *Archives*, Statements & Releases, September 27, 2013.

[24] "U.S.-India Joint Statement," 2013.

[25] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Joint Statement: Vision and Principles for India-U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership," February 25, 2020.

[26] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region," January 25, 2015.

continue to urge such conduct, their message aimed at the single power in the region that is breaching all of them—China.

In 2016, noting that the U.S.-India defense relationship could be an anchor of stability, and given the two nations' increasingly strengthened cooperation in defense, the United States recognized India as a major defense partner.[27] Signed into law by President Barack Obama,[28] this was a unique distinction for India that would allow it to access technologies that only the United States' closest allies had. This distinction was boosted further in 2018, when India was promoted to Tier-1 of the Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) system, which India described as the "natural conclusion" of India's classification as a U.S. Major Defense Partner.[29] The STA-1 designation placed India alongside treaty allies Japan and South Korea. Since 2015, the United States has authorized the export of almost $3 billion in defense products to India under the DCS procedure, which permits the export of defense equipment, services, and related manufacturing technology governed under the 21 categories of the U.S. Munitions List (USML).[30]

The two countries have extensive consultations on a wide range of issues. Between the two governments, there are over 50 bilateral dialogue mechanisms.[31] The establishment of the 2+2 ministerial dialogue between the countries' foreign and defense ministries indicate a close relationship between their foreign and defense policies. During these talks, three of the four military foundational agreements were signed. Now, the two countries, along with Japan and Australia, comprise the Quad, whose level of interaction has been elevated to that of leadership, laying the groundwork for future collaboration in the critical Indo-Pacific region.

Boosting Defense Ties and Interoperability with Foundational Agreements

In 1992, India and the United States began the bilateral Malabar naval exercises, conducting various surface and antisubmarine warfare exercises in a biannual format, which have become crucial to building interoperability to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific. These exercises have since expanded to include Japan and Australia. India and the United States now conduct more bilateral exercises than any other country.[32] Improving interoperability, the drills include the tri-services exercise Tiber Triumph, the Yudh Abhyas (Army), the Vajra Prahar (Special Forces), the RIMPAC (Navy), the Red Flag (Air Force), and several PASSEX. The United States

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[27] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "India-U.S. Joint Statement During the Visit of Prime Minister to USA (The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century)," June 7, 2016.

[28] Yashwant Raj, "Obama Signs into Law Bill Declaring India a 'Major Defense Partner,'" *Hindustan Times*, December 25, 2016.

[29] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "India moved to Tier-1 of Department of Commerce's Strategic Trade Authorization License Exception," July 31, 2018.

[30] "Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Cooperation with India," 2021.

[31] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Brief on India-U.S. Relations," June 2017.

[32] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "India-U.S. Relations," July 2021.

also assigned a liaison officer to the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR).[33]

Realizing the full potential of relations was hampered, however, by U.S. requirements for India to sign foundational military agreements, along with India's reluctance to sign them due to opposition in political and military circles. But after years of negotiation, a breakthrough was finally made, and the first agreement, the LEMOA, was signed in August 2016.[34] Then, after lengthy negotiations and concerns in India about its sovereignty and information security, the COMCASA was signed in September 2018.[35] This was particularly important because the previous failure to sign this agreement had limited the full potential of American weapon systems (such as the P8 aircraft, which were outfitted with commercial communications equipment) and hampered interoperability. The Industrial Security Annex (ISA) was then signed in December 2019, to facilitate the exchange of classified military information between Indian and U.S. defense industries.[36] And the final foundational agreement, the BECA, was signed in October 2020, giving India real-time access to geospatial intelligence that would improve the accuracy of weapons such as missiles and drones.[37]

The first agreement, LEMOA, has already been operationalized. India is benefiting from replenishment at sea, as well as air-to-air and ground refueling, and looks forward to expanding cooperation to fully realize the potential of this agreement.[38] In the midst of India-China border tensions, a U.S. aircraft was refueled for the first time under this agreement in 2020.[39]

Rapid progress has also been made in the implementation of COMCASA, with India acknowledging that the agreement has already enabled valuable cooperation and calling for the immediate installation of secure communications capabilities between the Armed Forces, including the Armies and Air Forces.[40] Within months of signing the agreement, India and the United States established the first secure communication link between Indian naval headquarters

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[33] Indian Navy, "Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region," undated.

[34] Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defense, "India and the Unites States Sign the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)," *Archives*, August 30, 2016.

[35] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Joint Statement on the Inaugural India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," September 6, 2018.

[36] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Joint Statement on the Second India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," December 19, 2019.

[37] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Documents Announced During the 3rd India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," October 27, 2020; Mallika Soni, ed., "What Is BECA and What Does It Mean for India and U.S.?" *Hindustan Times*, October 26, 2020.

[38] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Joint Statement on the Fourth India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," April 12, 2022; Indian Ministry of Defense, "Press Statement by Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh after India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," April 12, 2022.

[39] Snehesh Alex Philip, "U.S. Military Aircraft Refuels at Indian Base for First Time Under Defense Pact," *The Print*, October 2, 2020.

[40] "Joint Statement on the Second India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," 2019.

and the United States Central and Pacific Naval Commands.[41] The United States also activated secure communication equipment on Indian P8 aircraft as well as the Selective Availability Anti-Spoofing Module GPS system in some Indian C-130 and C-17 transport aircraft.[42]

The Indian Navy's P8 is able to effectively communicate in real time with the United States, which has admitted that the two countries share information on Chinese maritime movement, thanks to the secure U.S. communications system.[43] Through multilateral and bilateral exercises, India has developed a common understanding of operating procedures and information-sharing with the Australian Navy, which also operates these aircraft.[44]

India and the United States are on track to complete BECA implementation, and India anticipates that the ISA will be fully utilized by American and Indian companies in sharing advanced technologies, increasing participation in each other's supply chains, and attracting American defense companies to manufacture in India.[45]

Although India took time and careful consideration in signing the foundational agreements, it has been quick to seek implementation. India now regards these agreements as critical in contributing to Indo-U.S. defense ties and, under them, seeks to expand the scope of cooperation.[46]

India-U.S. Defense Trade

In 1962, when India was embroiled in a conflict with China, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru appealed to U.S. President John F. Kennedy for assistance, requesting 12 squadrons of supersonic fighter jets.[47] In fact, Nehru desired not only the jets but also the American pilots to operate them, along with radar stations while Indians were being trained. In addition, he wanted two B-47 bomber squadrons to attack Tibet. However, China declared a unilateral cease-fire, so the war ended before the United States could respond. If the conflict had gone on longer and if the United States had intervened, history would have been very different. During the 1960s, the United States stationed U2 spy planes in India to spy on China.[48]

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[41] Pranab Dhal Samantha, "First Secure Link Between India, U.S. Navies Set Up," *Economic Times*, April 2, 2019.

[42] Franz-Stefan Gady, "India, U.S. Conduct Anti-Submarine Warfare Drill in Indian Ocean," *The Diplomat*, April 16, 2019; Samantha, 2019.

[43] Anki Panda, "U.S., India Sharing Information on Chinese Submarines. Here's Why That Matters," *The Diplomat*, January 23, 2017.

[44] India Ministry of Defense, "India-Australia Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA) Coordinated Operations," April 12, 2022.

[45] "Press Statement by Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh," 2022; Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defense, "Raksha Mantri Invites U.S. Companies to Carry Out Joint R&D, Manufacturing & Maintenance of Defense Equipment in India to Achieve 'Make in India, Make for the World,'" April 21, 2022.

[46] "Raksha Mantri Invites U.S. Companies to Carry Out Joint R&D," 2022.

[47] "Nehru Sought U.S. Assistance During 1962 Indo-China War," *Indian Express*, October 14, 2015.

[48] Sandeep Dikshit, "U.S. Planes Used Indian Airbase to Snoop on China," *The Hindu*, August 16, 2013.

As the Cold War intensified and India maintained its non-aligned stance, Pakistan found favor by aligning itself with the United States. India's treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union and the United States' saber-rattling during the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, put both countries at odds, and India became heavily dependent on Soviet weapons—a reality that continues to this day, with over 86 percent of its weapons being of Soviet/Russian origin.[49]

According to the SIPRI trend indicator value, India received USD43 billion in weapons from the Soviet Union/Russia between 1971 and 2001, out of a total of USD60 billion in arms purchases. During that time, India purchased only USD78 million in military equipment from the United States.

In 2002, India placed its first big defense order with the United States, purchasing 12 weapon-locating radars from Raytheon for USD200 million.[50] Then between 2008 and 2020, India purchased almost USD20 billion in defense equipment from the United States, including transport planes, antisubmarine warfare aircraft, howitzers, attack helicopters, naval helicopters, and missiles such as Harpoon, Hellfire, and light torpedoes (see Table C.1). Since 2008, the United States has become the second highest exporter of weapons to India; however, the gap between U.S. and Russian weapon exports to India remains huge.

Table C.1. Major U.S. Weapon Systems Bought by India

Weapon System	Type	Numbers	Amount
Lockheed Martin Hercules C-130J	Transport aircraft	13	USD2.1 billion[a]
Boeing P8 Poseidon	Antisubmarine warfare aircraft	18	USD5.52 billion[b]
Lockheed Martin C-17 Globemaster	Transport aircraft	11	USD4.5 billion[c]
BAE M777	155-mm howitzer	145	USD750 million[d]
Boeing AH-64	Attack helicopter	28	USD3 billion[e]
Boeing CH-47 Chinook	Transport helicopter	15	USD1.1 billion[f]
Lockheed Martin MH-60R	Naval multirole helicopter	24	USD2.6 billion[g]

NOTES: [a] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "India—C-130J Aircraft," October 27, 2011.
[b] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "India—P-81 and Associated Support," April 30, 2021.
[c] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "India—C-17 Globemaster III Aircraft," April 26, 2010.
[d] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "India—M777 155MM Light-Weight Towed Howitzers," August 7, 2013.
[e] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "India—Support for Direct Commercial Sale of AH-64E Apache Helicopters," June 12, 2018.
[f] Rahul Bedi, "IAF Inducts First Four of 15 Chinook Helicopters," *Janes*, March 25, 2019.
[g] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "India—MH-60R Multi-Mission Helicopters," April 2, 2019.

[49] Sushant Singh, "86 Per Cent of Indian Military Equipment of Russian Origin: Stimson Center Paper," *Indian Express*, July 22, 2020.

[50] "India Acquires 12 Contracted Weapon Locating Radars," *ZEENEWS*, May 2, 2007.

All major American defense companies have a presence in India, and they are critical to India's goal of developing a robust defense industry. Over the last five years, Indian joint ventures and vendors have contributed USD2.5 billion[51] in defense exports from India, accounting for 35 percent of total exports. The world's top three defense companies, Lockheed Martin (LM), Boeing, and Raytheon, all have subsidiaries and joint ventures (JV) in India.

LM has joint ventures with Tata, including Tata Lockheed Martin Aerostructures Limited (TLMAL) and Tata Sikorsky Aerospace Limited (TSAL), both based in Hyderabad. LM has invested more than USD100 million in manufacturing equipment, tooling, and intellectual property through these JVs. Lockheed Martin has also signed memorandums of understanding to explore aerospace collaboration with public entities such as Bharat Electronics Limited and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.

TLMAL is the sole supplier of major aerostructure components for Lockheed Martin's C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft, making it an essential part of their global supply chain.[52] TLMAL's C-130J empennages are now more than 90 percent indigenous. TLMAL has been qualified to construct one of the most technologically complex aerostructures—a 9G, 12,000-hour, interchangeable/replaceable fighter wing with over 70 percent of its detail parts produced in-house.

TSAL manufactures aerospace components for commercial helicopters and aircraft and has expanded to include aircraft engine components. Fully integrated into the global supply chain, TSAL has delivered 157 S-92 cabins to date, and they are 100 percent indigenous.[53]

These two joint ventures have approximately 500 suppliers, including over 140 MSMEs. At this time, Lockheed Martin's global supply chain includes more than 70 Indian vendors. Over USD600 million in exports and over USD200 million in Indian industry income have resulted from these JVs.

Boeing's joint venture with Tata, Tata Boeing Aerospace Limited (TBAL), is the sole global supplier of AH-64 fuselages, secondary structures, and vertical spar boxes for customers around the world, and over 90 percent of the parts are sourced from India.[54] It has agreements with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., Rossel Techsys, and Dynamatic Technologies to source major components for its AH-64, V-22, F/A-18, F-15, and P8 aircraft.

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[51] "Raksha Mantri Invites U.S. Companies to Carry Out Joint R&D," 2022.

[52] Lockheed Martin, "Making in India: TLMAL Delivers 100th C-130J Super Hercules Empennage," news release, February 20, 2019.

[53] Lockheed Martin, "TATA Sikorsky JV Delivers First Fully Indigenous S-92® Helicopter Cabin," news release, October 24, 2013.

[54] "Tata Boeing Aerospace Delivers First AH-64 Apache Combat Helicopter Fuselage," Tata.com, June 1, 2018; Boeing India, "The New Face of Indian Aerospace: Tata Boeing JV," webpage, 2022.

Over 275 Indian vendors, including 70 MSME vendors, produce critical systems and components for some of Boeing's most advanced commercial and defense aircraft, including aerostructures, wire harnesses, composites, forgings, avionics mission systems, and ground support equipment worth over USD1 billion annually, employing 3,000 directly and 7,000 indirectly.[55]

Raytheon has a substantial presence in India, employing approximately 5,000 people through its group firms Pratt & Whitney, Collins Aerospace, Raytheon Missile and Defense, and Raytheon Intelligence and Space.[56] Collins Aerospace claims to be India's largest exporter of aerospace products, with a major manufacturing facility in Bangalore producing a variety of products, such as evacuation slides, cargo systems, lighting, and actuation components.[57] It has a large manufacturing facility in Bengaluru that produces a wide range of products such as evacuation slides, cargo systems, lighting, and actuation components. Pratt and Whitney has a training facility and a research and development (R&D) facility.

Not only are U.S. defense companies sourcing from India and supporting vendors, but they are also investing in R&D; maintenance, repair, and overhaul; skills development; and training centers, all critical to the development of India's aerospace and defense ecosystem. This practice is reflected in defense exports from India, 35 percent of which go to the United States.

India-U.S. Defense Collaboration

In an effort to move away from a buyer-seller relationship and toward codevelopment and coproduction of weapon systems, India and the United States announced the Defense Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) in 2012. Four joint working groups were formed—Land Systems, Naval Systems, Air Systems, and the Aircraft Carrier Technology Cooperation—three of which were functionally aligned with individual services.

Despite the initiative and other enabling factors for India, such as Major Defense Partner and Strategic Trade Authorization-Tier 1, the two countries have yet to deliver a single project that can elevate relations to a higher level. There are numerous reasons for this. The United States is a developed and wealthy country that has been manufacturing weapons and selling them around the world for decades, whereas India is a major importer that has yet to fully industrialize. In terms of defense technology, the United States is even ahead of its allies. With the U.S. global profile and corresponding weapon needs, its requirements are largely different from India's, limiting the areas in which the two nations can focus on codevelopment and coproduction even

[55] Boeing India, About Boeing in India," homepage, 2022.

[56] "Raytheon Technologies and Its Businesses Including Pratt & Whitney Send Life-Saving Machines to India for COVID-19 Relief," Pratt & Whitney India, webpage, May 4, 2021; Raytheon Technologies, "Our Businesses," homepage, 2022.

[57] Collins Aerospace, "India," homepage, 2022.

further. Unlike India, the American defense sector is dominated by private enterprises that will not part with key technologies for economic and strategic reasons in order to maintain their competitive advantage.

There have been a couple of projects that did not yield the desired results. The jet engine project was shelved in 2019 due to export control issues and a lack of understanding about technology-sharing that would be beneficial to India.[58] Because the United States is the world leader in aero engines, this was more of a case of technology transfer than codevelopment and coproduction. Previously, in 2014, India chose Israel's Spike anti-tank guided missile after the U.S. refused to share critical technologies for the Javelin missile it had offered.[59]

In 2019, the two countries decided to reconsider how DTTI would proceed, attempting to set more attainable goals with short-, medium-, and long-term projects. Small, unmanned, air-launched aerial systems; lightweight small-arms technology; and intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance were defined as near-term projects that could take off in about six months. Mid-term projects include maritime-domain awareness solutions and virtual augmented mixed reality for aircraft maintenance. In addition, there are two long-term projects: terrain-shaping obstacles and counter rocket artillery and mortar systems, or C-RAM. The latter entails creating highly accurate weapon systems capable of physically neutralizing enemy drones or drone swarms.

Perhaps the failure of both sides to consider codeveloping and coproducing a long-range air defense system of the class of the Russian S-400 (which India went on to buy, causing much consternation in the United States) was a missed opportunity. This type of air defense system does not exist in the U.S. arsenal. Air defense systems are one area in which India has made significant progress and would have brought that experience to the table.

India's Defense Sector

India's rapid economic development has propelled it to have the world's sixth-largest economy in nominal terms and the third largest in PPP terms. With India's security needs and its aspirations to be a great power, its USD3 trillion economy is now the third-largest spender on defense, trailing only the United States and China, and has a defense budget of INR5.25 trillion (USD70.2 billion) set for 2022.[60] These three countries are likely to maintain their position as the world's top economies and to increase their share of the global economy.

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[58] Snehesh Alex Philip, "India, U.S. 'Suspend' Ambitious Jet Engine Technology Plan Under Defense Trade Deal," *The Print*, October 24, 2019.

[59] "India Spikes U.S. 'Javelin Missiles for Israel's 'Spike,'" *Economic Times*, October 26, 2014.

[60] India Ministry of Defense, "Union Budget 2022–23," February 1, 2022.

With two unresolved borders, India's large standing army of 1.3 million consumes nearly 70 percent of the defense budget through operations, salaries, and pensions.[61] However, the INR1.52 trillion (USD20 billion) set aside in the 2022 budget for capital acquisition is a sizable sum.[62] This figure is expected to rise to around USD35 billion by 2029.[63] This means that India will spend nearly USD200 billion on defense acquisition by 2029.

Domestic defense production in India is largely handled by the country's 16 defense public sector undertakings (DPSU).[64] Since the Indian defense sector was opened to private enterprise in 2001, there have been over 10,000 MSMEs.[65] DPSUs account for 72 percent of the over INR92,000 crore (USD12 billion) in defense production, and India has set an ambitious target of doubling this to USD25 billion by 2025.[66] India has also set an aggressive export target of USD5 billion by 2025, up from USD1.7 billion in 2021–22. Interestingly, the private sector has contributed 74 percent of defense exports in the last five years, accounting for 40 percent of their total production.[67]

Among India's indigenous weapon platforms are aircraft carriers, fighter jets, light helicopters, air defense systems, main battle tanks, armored carriers, cruise missiles, howitzers, multiple launch-rocket systems, rifles, various types of missiles and munitions; and electronic systems such as radar, communications, and intelligence equipment.[68]

India has exported Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters, fast interceptor boats, and offshore patrol vessels over the years, and it recently signed a contract to export the Brahmos supersonic cruise missile to the Philippines.[69] It also has a number of mature platforms that it has pitched for export, including fighter jets, light helicopters, air defense systems, artillery systems, armored carriers, and cruise missiles. The export of weapons is critical in order for a major country like India to pursue its foreign policy goals.

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[61] "Union Budget 2022–23," 2022.

[62] "Union Budget 2022–23," 2022.

[63] "Update: India Increases Defense Budget by 10%," *Janes*, February 3, 2022.

[64] Department of Defense Production, Government of India, "Defense Public Sector Undertakings," webpage, last updated March 3, 2022.

[65] Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defense, "Private Sector Investment in Defense Production," July 22, 2019; India Ministry of Defense, "Public-Private Partnership Can Bring Defense Production Revolution: Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh at SIDM Annual Meeting," September 28, 2021.

[66] Department of Defense Production, Ministry of Defense, "Dashboard," homepage, 2021.

[67] Department of Defense Production, Ministry of Defense, "Dashboard," homepage, last updated November 2, 2022.

[68] Department of Defense Production, Government of India, Ministry of Defense, *Catalogue Indian Defense Industry*, second book, March 1, 2022.

[69] Department of Defense Production, Government of India, Ministry of Defense, *Indian Defense Goes Global*, 2020.

Despite being a large country with considerable industrial capabilities, India lacks a robust military-industrial complex due to the dominance of DPSUs and the problems associated with government-run companies, insufficient R&D investment, and very little private-sector participation. Even though India manufactures many weapon platforms, some key components, particularly propulsion systems such as aero and marine engines, are imported.

India has consistently been one of the world's top two arms importers, with a heavy reliance on Russia; 86 percent of all equipment in its armed forces area of Soviet/Russian origin.[70] Although India's imports from Russia have declined in the last ten years, imports from Israel, France, and the United States have increased.[71] And that is not cause for celebration. For many years, India has sought to achieve self-sufficiency and indigenization for strategic and economic reasons. The Russian invasion of Ukraine only increased the urgency of attaining this indigenization;[72] therefore, 68 percent of the capital outlay in the Indian defense budget for 2022–23 has been designated for purchasing weapons and systems manufactured in India.[73]

To increase domestic weapon production, India has updated its defense acquisition procedure and has extended invitations to foreign defense manufacturing companies to make in India and make for the world, a point emphasized by India's defense minister, who stresses the importance of moving away from just a buyer-seller relationship.[74] India has created two defense corridors, one in the state of Uttar Pradesh and another in Tamil Nadu. In three lists over the last two years, India has banned over 300 complete weapon systems, ammunitions, electronics, and components from import.[75] There are different timelines for these to take effect, and opportunity exists for foreign OEMs to invest in these sectors in India.

India's Defense Acquisition Policy

In recent years, India's defense acquisition policy and other measures have focused on creating self-reliance and indigenization, inviting foreign defense companies to make in India and make for the world, and becoming a global defense manufacturing hub.

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[70] Singh, 2020.

[71] Snehesh Alex Philip, "Indian Arms Imports Fell 33% Over Last Five Years, Drop Hits Russia the Hardest," *The Print*, March 15, 2021.

[72] Manjeet Negi, "Russia-Ukraine War Highlights Need for a Self-Reliant Military: Rajnath Singh," *India Today*, April 29, 2022.

[73] "Union Budget 2022–23," 2022.

[74] Department of Defense, Government of India, *Defense Procurement Procedure/DAP Manuals*, last updated November 11, 2022; "Raksha Mantri Invites U.S. Companies to Carry Out Joint R&D," 2022.

[75] "Rajnath Singh Releases 3rd Positive List of Defense Equipment Indigenisation," *The Print*, April 7, 2022.

Table C.2. Major Weapon Platforms, Systems, Munitions Banned from Import by India

1st List[a]	2nd List[b]	3rd List[c]
Tracked self-propelled 155-mm gun	Light helicopter	Next-gen offshore patrol vessel
Towed artillery gun	Wheeled armored platform	Lightweight torpedo
Short-range SAM	Next-gen Corvette	Ship-based MRSAM
Shipborne cruise missile	Mine-protected vehicle	NAVAL utility helicopter
Multibarrel rocket launcher	Land-based MRSAM	Mounted artillery gun 155/52
Ultralight Howitzer	Anti-material rifle	Light tanks
Shipborne CIWS	Loitering munition	Fast-attack craft
Destroyers		Fast-attack interceptor
Offshore patrol vessel		Ship-based vertical launched SRSAM
Next-gen missile vessel		Anti-radiation missile
Light-combat helicopters		MALE UAV
Wheeled armored fighting vehicle		Long-range air-to-air missile
Assault rifle 7.62 x 39		Long-range guided bombs
Conventional submarine		Medium-range antiship missile
		Submarine-launched cruise missile (antiship)

NOTES: [a] Government of India, "Annexure Import Embargo List of Defense Weapons/Platforms," December 2020.
[b] Government of India, "2nd Positive Indigenisation List," May 31, 2021.
[c] Government of India, "Proposed 3rd Positive Indigenisation List," April 2022.

More specifically, India has set forth the following five categories of acquisition, in order of preference, to encourage private-sector participation, indigenous design development, and production:

- **Buy (Indian)—Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured (IDDM):** Acquisition of indigenously designed, developed, and manufactured products from an Indian vendor with a minimum of 50-percent indigenous content (IC) on a cost basis.
- **Buy (Indian):** Acquisition of products from an Indian vendor that was not designed and developed indigenously, with 60-percent IC on a cost basis.
- **Buy and Make (Indian):** Acquisition of products from an Indian company with a tie-up with a foreign OEM, followed by phased production in India with a minimum of 50-percent IC on a cost basis.
- **Buy (Global—Manufacture in India):** Outright purchase of certain numbers of products from a foreign OEM, followed by production in India via its own subsidiary or joint venture with an Indian partner meeting a minimum of 50-percent IC on a cost basis.
- **Buy (Global):** Outright purchase of required numbers from a foreign supplier with offsets applicable for deals valued over INR2,000 crore (USD260 million).

Strategic Partnership Model

Recognizing the need to increase private-sector participation in the weapon manufacturing industry, which is dominated by DPSUs, India launched a new strategic partnership model in 2017.

The Strategic Partnership Model (SPM) envisions private Indian firms participating in "Make in India" defense manufacturing alongside foreign OEMs and acting as a system integrator by constructing an extensive ecosystem composed of development partners, specialized vendors, and suppliers, particularly those from the MSME sector.

Where applicable, an Indian vendor is defined as any company registered in India in which resident Indian citizens control and own at least 51 percent of the company. As a result, foreign direct investment is limited to 49 percent. The sectors earmarked under the SPM are fighter aircraft, helicopters, conventional submarines, armored fighting vehicles, and main battle tanks.

While the intent is good, the policy's flaws are manifesting themselves in the very first SPM project for six conventional submarines. Although the SPM was intended to promote the development of the private sector in defense, it included Mazagon Dock Ltd. (MDL), a DPSU. As MDL has been producing submarines, this eliminates the level playing field. The SPM requires the Indian entity to present a roadmap for future development, indigenization content, an ecosystem of domestic manufacturers, partnerships with MSMEs, defense PSUs, and a global supply chain, all of which will be monitored by the Ministry of Defense. The entity will also be required to provide an R&D roadmap in order to achieve self-sufficiency. In turn, it will rely on the foreign OEM to meet the requirements. Failure to meet all of these requirements will result in the private Indian entity's demise. A DPSU, on the other hand, can get away with noncompliance. Furthermore, with a limited set of numbers for a one-time project, the costs of fulfilling all of the requirements are not justified, especially with the added expectation of being the cheapest.

Foreign OEMs are concerned about the SPM because of its complexity. SAAB announced its departure in 2019, citing "unbalance" in the SP Model. Because of the nationalization clause and less than 50-percent control, OEMs may be less inclined to offer cutting-edge technology for fear of losing intellectual property. One of the shortlisted OEMs, Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKM), expressed concern that certain conditions, such as a high percentage of indigenous content and almost unlimited liability on the foreign technology partner, would be impossible to meet, making it unwilling to participate.[76] The Naval Group of France, which is building India's Scorpene submarine, has also withdrawn,[77] citing as its reason the lack of an operational battery-based air-independent propulsion system, as specified in the RFP.

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[76] Manu Pubby, "Germany Likely to Opt Out of Navy's Submarine Project, South Korean Company May Be Only Vendor," *Economic Times*, August 19, 2021.

[77] Krishn Kaushik, "Before Modi Meets Macron, French Opt Out of India Project for Submarines," *Indian Express*, May 4, 2022.

Case for India to Revisit Its Procurement Strategy

For economic and strategic reasons, India intends to increase its domestic defense production while decreasing imports. To that end, it wishes to increase private-sector participation by inviting foreign defense companies to invest in India, for India; to export from India; and to make Indian companies a significant part of their global supply chain. The United States is the world's largest manufacturer and consumer of weapons, and connecting with U.S. defense companies' supply chains is critical for India to develop its defense and aerospace ecosystem and achieve self-reliance. There is a case to revisit the existing policy to meet these objectives.

1. **Definition of an Indian company:** Under current policy, an Indian company is one in which resident Indians own a majority stake. This stifles investment. This is reflected in the foreign direct-investment figures, which stood at just INR2,133 crore (USD285 million) between 2014 and 2020. Because India classifies its major acquisitions under its procurement policy, as stated earlier, major defense manufacturers, including American firms, may choose to stay away due to the lack of a controlling stake. India must incentivize foreign OEMs by considering their subsidiaries with operational factories as "Indian," and give them weight for Indian defense contracts. This will help get advanced technology to India with the development of defense MSMEs as the foreign OEMs develop their supply chain to leverage the cost benefits of sourcing from India. This objective can be pursued by stipulating the percentage of indigenous content in their product, which even for Indian companies, as defined right now, is 50 percent under the various procurement headers.
2. **Lowest-cost rule:** The L1 system for defense contracts is not conducive to developing and procuring advanced weapons or to achieving technology transfer. Due weight should be given to companies that are willing to partner in the Indian acquisition program and to transfer advanced technologies, rather than valuing only those companies with the lowest cost. A possible solution is to evolve a mechanism for determining costs, including R&D and technology transfer, and to offer a reasonable profit. Such a method has already been adopted for public procurement policy under quality-cum-cost-based acquisition and contracts, which also considers single-vendor situations as acceptable.[78]
3. **Fiscal support:** India might consider providing financial support to OEMs that are willing to invest in manufacturing in India. This is already being done by the Indian government, which is offering between 30 and 50 percent of the projected cost to attract semiconductor fabrication.[79] Therefore, it could also be done for critical defense products that India needs, like aero and marine engines, transmission systems, and major weapon systems that have been banned for import under the positive indigenization list.

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[78] Ministry of Finance, Government of India, *General Instructions on Procurement and Project Management*, Department of Expenditure, Procurement Policy Division, No. F.1/1/2021-PPD, October 29, 2021; "EXPLAINED: Why Lowest Bid May No Longer Be Enough to Win Govt Tenders as Centre Makes Quality Move," *News 18*, November 10, 2021.

[79] Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India, "Modified Programme for Semiconductors and Display Fab Ecosystem," webpage, October 10, 2022.

4. **Production-linked incentives:** This is another option that is, again, being offered in other Indian sectors like electronics manufacturing, extending an incentive of 4 to 6 percent to eligible companies on incremental sales of manufactured goods, like mobile phones and other specified electronics components, for a period of five years subsequent to the base year. This option might be useful to attract general defense components and parts manufacturing in India for both domestic and global supply chains. India could offer export-linked incentives too.

Future Large Indian Projects and Potential Collaboration with the United States

Future defense acquisition projects in India include 114 fighter jets, multirole helicopters, naval helicopters, conventional and nuclear-powered submarines, main battle tanks, and infantry fighting vehicles, for all of which India requires foreign assistance, particularly in the critical area of propulsion. These projects can open doors for collaboration between India and the United States. There is also the possibility of their collaboration on not only Indian-specific weapons systems but also ones with export potential, which would take advantage of India's cost advantage.

The two countries are also still missing a game-changing project that will transform their defense ties. This could take the form of technology transfer and joint development for India's major equipment needs. India requires a naval nuclear propulsion system for future ballistic-missile and attack submarines as well as conventional naval propulsion systems for various warships and aero engines. The Tejas, India's indigenous fighter jet, is powered by GE engines, as future variants will be. India is also developing a fifth-generation fighter aircraft that will require a more powerful engine. The United States is a world leader in all of these fields.

Even though the opportunity to codevelop and coproduce a long-range air defense system was lost, there is potential in high-powered directed energy weapons to counter aerial threats like fighter jets and drones, as well as in effective and cost-effective countermeasures against small drones and swarm drones. The development of hypersonic missiles also has promise.

Because India is heavily reliant on Russia for spares, maintenance, and upgrades for its large inventory of Russian-made weapons, U.S. assistance in developing supply chains in India with technical know-how will also assist India in indigenizing Russian equipment. The United States can help India in areas such as material science, manufacturing processes, advanced machinery, and various technologies.

Conclusion

India-U.S. relations have been carefully crafted over two decades. Their relations stand on their own merit, even though security concerns originating from China's rise have facilitated growth in those relations. Trade between the two countries has grown manifold. There is

increased people-to-people contact, and there is genuine support for stronger ties between the two countries at the political and public levels.

There also seems to be an understanding on both sides that, as large countries with varied interests, they will pursue independent foreign policy, which sometimes can be at variance. But the two countries are mature and pragmatic enough to accommodate those differences so as not to affect growth in their ties.

A lot of effort has gone into building this strategic relationship. Sometimes it has taken a long time for both sides to come around, but this only shows that a lot of thought and conviction have been put into building the relationship, which sets it on firm footing. But while the gains of the last two decades are immense and have laid a foundation on which to build quickly, a transformational defense cooperation deal still has to be worked on—and as this paper argues, both sides have to work toward it.

Although the U.S. private-industry-driven military-industrial complex might want to guard certain technologies for strategic, economic, or competitive reasons, there are areas where organizations can work with the U.S. government to provide the technological components and weapon systems that India critically needs, especially where India has existing programs and expertise.

In addition, India may need to revisit its procurement policy to align it with the stated goal of increasing private-sector participation in defense. It may also want to consider inviting foreign defense companies with added incentives.

The development of India's defense sector will enhance its economy, which is vital for promoting stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Considered the linchpin of the region, India is expected to play the role of security provider and to shoulder increasing responsibility. But it can only do so if it has the capability to produce its own weapons. There is an incentive for the United States to support this capability because, as Eisenhower said over 60 years ago, the strength of India is still our interest.

Appendix D. America's Indian Ocean Imperative: Integrating a Two-Ocean Strategy

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In the years immediately following the end of U.S.-Soviet Cold War jockeying for primacy in the IOR, India sought to reinforce its South Asian sphere of influence. Meanwhile, post-colonial powers France and England focused on specific interests associated with historical roles and relationships. As China's economic clout and regional influence grew through the 1990s and early 2000s, U.S. interest in the IOR reawakened, albeit slowly and incrementally. In 2009, then–Secretary of Defense Robert Gates proposed that India embrace the role of "net security provider" for the IOR. India, however, was already the linchpin partner for its neighbors in South Asia. The Indian Navy and the absence of strategic competition on its maritime periphery allowed for some degree of complacency in Delhi's regional policies.[1] Only in 2015 did a more formal framework for India's regional vision emerge with Prime Minister Nahendra Modi's Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR) policy initiative.[2]

American strategic interests and policy related to the IOR have shifted over the past decade. When the United States had a presence in Afghanistan, it had an interest in the IOR from an operational viewpoint. Recognizing the challenges posed by China's increasing power and influence across Asia, the Trump administration in 2017 announced a new concept—the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). In that same period, U.S. national security and defense strategy documents formally announced U.S. engagement in a long-term strategic competition with China. The FOIP cemented a two-ocean focus to promote and protect key U.S. economic and security interests based on an inclusive model of "a free and open Indo-Pacific . . . where sovereign and independent nations, with diverse cultures and many different dreams, can all prosper side-by-side." But security and defense documents clearly identified a specific Chinese threat to this broader regional prosperity.[3] As such, evolving U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific has generated as many questions as answers. On the one hand, FOIP endorses regional security via a web of allies and partners, promoting shared interests across a range of areas from trade to energy to cybersecurity; on the other hand, it acknowledges a need to confront Beijing.

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[1] Darshana M. Baruah, "Maritime Competition in the Indian Ocean," testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 12, 2022.

[2] Baruah, 2022.

[3] Lindsey W. Ford, *The Trump Administration and the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific,"* Brookings Institute, May 2022.

Since the end of its occupation in 2021, the United States has viewed the IOR from the strategic viewpoint of addressing China's interests. While this viewpoint does not hold the same level of strategic importance as that regarding the Western Pacific Ocean, it is growing in importance in response to China's increasing involvement in the region.

Two Oceans, Free and Open?

Following the release of the FOIP concept and the national strategy documents, the opening salvoes of great power competition between the U.S. and China consisted largely of economic sanctions and tariffs. These tools elicited concern among regional nations eager to embrace stability but loath to put sand in the gears of the region's economic engine. Adding to this concern, American rhetoric during this period often belittled allies and partners for their insufficient support of a U.S. forward military presence and trade policies.[4] To many in the region, America spoke of inclusivity while driving a zero-sum choice between Washington or Beijing—a losing proposition given the importance of both actors to regional stability and prosperity.

The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) also set what some in the region saw as strategically questionable geographic limits for Washington's interests in the "Indo" portion of the Indo-Pacific. The NSS defined the Indo-Pacific as the area "from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States," excluding the western half of the IOR. Following suit, in 2018, the DoD renamed the U.S. Pacific Command as "U.S. Indo-Pacific Command," but limited its geographic area of responsibility to the eastern IOR.[5] In the western half of the IOR, U.S.-Africa Command and U.S. Central Command divide responsibilities. While formal recognition of the Indian Ocean's importance in the DoD command structure increases IOR visibility, having three combatant commands involved in various portions of the IOR complicates unified strategic action.

U.S. allies, partners, and competitors, on the other hand, tend to view the IOR in more holistic terms. In 2016 Japan preceded the United States in announcing the FOIP concept and introduced this concept at a Kenyan conference in the western IOR.[6] Indian and French "Indo-Pacific" policy and strategy also consider requirements and responsibilities across the breadth of

[4] Ford, 2022.

[5] Jim Garamone, "Pacific Command Change Highlights Growing Importance of Indian Ocean Area," *DoD News*, May 30, 2018.

[6] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) (Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC)," Nairobi, Kenya, August 27, 2016.

the region.[7] China sees opportunity in the broader IOR, as well, and is the only major actor in the region with diplomatic missions in all of the IOR island nations. In addition to establishing its first overseas military base in Djibouti, Beijing promotes a "Maritime Silk Road" (under its broader BRI), which traverses the IOR. Russia is also active in the region, having established a new naval base in Sudan in 2020, which provides Moscow with Red Sea access and strategic reach to the western IOR.[8]

Indian Ocean Geopolitics: Changes Afoot?

While a range of IOR-related initiatives by the United States, its allies and partners, and its competitors focus on transnational and transregional challenges such as climate change and cybersecurity, the heart of the renewed interest in the IOR is geopolitical, tied to hard security and economic interests in the context of the great power competition. From the maritime borders of East Africa and the Middle East to Australia and Southeast Asia, the IOR encompasses sea lines of communication (SLOC) crucial to the global and regional economies, including the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz, Bab al Mandeb, and Mozambique Channel. These choke points are essential to both trade and to military freedom of access and maneuver; and having nearby presence or command of these key maritime passages provides maritime domain awareness—and by extension, sea control operations.[9]

The Biden administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, released in 2022, maintains concepts from the preceding administration's version, but changes both to the U.S. definition of and approach to the IOR seem to be moving into high gear.[10] These changes accompany a renewed focus on assuring allies and partners that the United States is committed to the region and on countering coercive Chinese behavior without zero-sum strings attached. A flurry of activity in late May 2022 saw an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leader's summit hosted by President Biden in Washington, Biden's first presidential trip to Asia, a Quad leader's summit and statement, and a speech from Secretary of State Antony Blinken delineating U.S. policy toward China.[11] These events and the corresponding official pronouncements highlight five pillars underpinning Washington's two-ocean strategic approach to achieve FOIP

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[7] Louis Bergeron, Nick Iorio, and Jeff Payne, "The U.S. Needs a New Indian Ocean Strategy, Now," *The Diplomat*, February 11, 2021.

[8] Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia to Establish Navy Base in Sudan for at Least 25 years," Associated Press, December 8, 2020.

[9] Darshana M. Baruah, "What Is Happening in the Indian Ocean?" Carnegie Endowment, March 3, 2021.

[10] *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, 2022.

[11] See Anna Pederson, *Sharper: The Indo-Pacific Pivot*, Center for New American Strategy, May 25, 2022. The 2022 FOIP strategy states that the U.S. will pursue five objectives in the Indo-Pacific in concert with allies and partners, as well as with regional institutions—advance a free and open Indo-Pacific, build connections within and beyond the region, drive regional prosperity, bolster Indo-Pacific security, and build regional resilience to transnational threats.

objectives: (1) the traditional U.S. alliance structure; (2) the U.S. partnership with ASEAN; (3) the Quad; (4) the AUKUS Defense Pact; and (5) the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). The alliances, together with U.S. interaction with ASEAN, represent a long-standing (but reinvigorated) foundation; the Quad and AUKUS represent a newer multilateral layer for both traditional and nontraditional security initiatives; and IPEF, although nascent, is intended to add the economic component that went missing when President Trump withdrew the United States from the agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership collapsed.

The Foundation: A Web of Allies and Partners

In his May 2022 speech on U.S.-China policy, Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated, "We can't rely on Beijing to change its trajectory . . . so we will shape the strategic environment around Beijing to advance our vision for an open and inclusive international system."[12] The "we" in this case primarily refers to stalwart allies such as Japan and Australia; but it includes other allies and global partners, as well. Blinken drew parallels between allied responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the actions that may be required in response to China that Blinken characterized as increasingly "more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad."[13] In addition to relying on legacy alliance relationships and initiatives to address coercive actions by China, Russia, and North Korea, the recent ASEAN leaders summit hosted by President Biden in Washington illustrates an effort to bolster U.S. influence in that key organization. During the summit, the U.S. commitment to a USD150 million investment in ASEAN paled in comparison to the USD1.5 billion that China offered for ASEAN development assistance. Nonetheless, the summit produced a "joint vision statement" and a commitment to raise the U.S.-ASEAN relationship to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" (a status enjoyed by Australia and China).[14] Much of the U.S. attention related to ASEAN involved concern over South China Sea disputes and Chinese actions pursuant to its claims.

The New Multilaterals

Despite differences between its members regarding the scope and scale of pressure to place on Beijing and responses to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Quad has coalesced as a group capable of changing the power dynamics in the IOR. Not only is the Biden administration counting on the Quad to collectively address a number of nontraditional security challenges, but the Quad seeks to build an order that is more resistant or resilient in the face of Chinese coercion.[15] Not

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[12] Matthew Lee, "Blinken: U.S. to Leverage Russia-Ukraine Bloc against China," Associated Press, May 26, 2022.

[13] Lee, 2022.

[14] Jeff Mason, David Brunnstrom, and Michael Martina, "U.S. Hails 'New Era' with ASEAN as Summit Commits to Raise Level of Ties," Reuters, May 14, 2022.

[15] Dhruva Jaishankar and Tanvi Madan, "How the QUAD Can Match the Hype," *Foreign Affairs*, April 15, 2021.

long ago, driven by concerns over regional military competition and confrontation, the Quad began to live up to its billing (in Washington's terms) as "a premier regional grouping."[16] While avoiding specific mention of China, Quad leaders meeting in Tokyo on May 24, 2022, voiced opposition to attempts to "change the status quo by force" in the Indo-Pacific and decried the militarization of "disputed features" in the region.[17]

The Quad also announced a maritime-domain awareness initiative for the Indo-Pacific as a whole. The program clearly is designed to address Indian priorities, as it expands the focus from the South China Sea and Pacific islands to the IOR. This will tie India into surveillance and reconnaissance architectures designed to monitor maritime activities across the span of the Indo-Pacific and draw the other Quad members deeper into the western IOR.[18] The Quad also provides an opportunity for improved interoperability between member navies. The Malabar series of exercises, which began as bilateral U.S.-India events in the 1990s, are now Quad exercises that have included complex naval drills in both the Pacific and Indian Oceans.[19]

Even more directly tackling core security concerns is the AUKUS pact, under which the United States and United Kingdom have agreed to help Australia build a class of nuclear-powered submarines. Given the blatant military nature of AUKUS, it provides a separate but complementary arrangement to the Quad. It ties Britain more directly into Indo-Pacific maritime security issues at a time when the United States wants and expects allies to respond to China's growing naval might; the pact also calls for the trio of allies to work together on cyberspace, AI, and other advanced technologies.[20]AUKUS did, however, create fissures with Europe, as it undermined a French deal to produce submarines for Australia. Similar challenges could arise if ASEAN member states perceive that the Quad is in some way usurping ASEAN "centrality" as the regional forum of most consequence. As the United States leans into new multilateral arrangements to realize strategic objectives, managing relations with legacy alliances and with blocs such as ASEAN and the European Union will become increasingly important.[21]

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[16] Dhruva Jaishankar and Tanvi Madan, "The Quad Needs a Harder Edge: It's Time for the Group to Prioritize Its Security Agenda," *Foreign Affairs*, May 19, 2022.

[17] Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "Quad Summit Indicates Growing Strength," *The Diplomat*, May 26, 2022.

[18] Michael Kugelman, "The Quad Looks West," *Foreign Policy*, weekly South Asia brief, May 26, 2022.

[19] Maria Siow, "Quad Leaders Vow to Oppose Attempts to 'Change Status Quo by Force,' with China and Russia on Their Minds," *South China Morning Post*, May 24, 2022.

[20] Yatharth Kachiar and Priya Vijaykumar Poojary, "AUKUS? Quad? FOIP? A Fragmented Approach Cannot Counter China," *The Interpreter***,** October 27, 2021.

[21] Akshobh Giridharadas, "Why the AUKUS Helps the Quad?" *Raisina Debates*, Observer Research Foundation, October 21, 2021.

It's the Economy: Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)

Beijing's position as the region's economic engine complicates any effort by the United States to counter Chinese coercive military activity and predatory economic practices. Washington can scarcely hope to achieve FOIP objectives without providing regional economic incentives and leadership—and this perhaps remains the shakiest of FOIP pillars. The IPEF, launched in May 2022 by President Biden while in Tokyo, does not provide a multilateral agreement in the vein of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership; but it marks a step toward reviving U.S. leadership in regional trade and economic development. The framework focuses on supply chain security, digital economy regulation, and infrastructure investment.[22] U.S. officials call IPEF the "most significant international economic engagement that the United States has ever had in this region," with its members accounting for 40 percent of global GDP.[23] The form of any final trade agreement emerging from IPEF, however, is still to be determined, and several significant concerns loom large. Export controls are not addressed despite several participants' requests for them; and U.S. negotiators want stronger labor and environmental protections, to which IPEF partners are unlikely to agree, absent offers of better access to the U.S. market.[24]

Conclusion: A Holistic Vision of the IOR Underpins FOIP

The United States has in place the tools to, as Secretary Blinken put it, "shape the strategic environment" in the IOR as part of a broader two-ocean strategy. The ability to mature newer initiatives while maintaining legacy relationships will be key to realizing FOIP objectives, as will ensuring that the "Indo" portion of the Indo-Pacific is given due weight as the strategy evolves. U.S. military partnerships, posture, and presence provide the foundation for increased interaction with and interoperability between Quad members; but Washington should also increase efforts to coordinate and integrate activities in and across the western IOR—including with France, another important stakeholder in the region. U.S. approaches to the IOR should consider the perspectives and approaches of its key allies and partners in the region, who generally avoid segmenting the region in the way that U.S. strategy documents and military command structures do. The issues that concern the region as a whole, from fishing regulations to climate change to infrastructure development, must be American interests, as well, if the FOIP vision is to be realized.

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[22] Richard Fontaine et al., "CNAS Responds: Takeaways from President Biden's First Asia Trip," Center for New American Security, May 24, 2022.

[23] Fontaine et al., 2022.

[24] Fontaine et al., 2022.

Appendix E. Power Play in the Indian Ocean: Assessing India's Maritime Strategy

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, India's maritime outlook has undergone a significant shift. From a security approach focused mainly on the eastern Indian Ocean, India's strategic gaze today stretches out across a broad swath of the Indo-Pacific region. To a degree, this has been the result of the country's growing trade and diaspora interests. As India's economic interactions and people-to-people ties with regional states have grown, so has Indian willingness for a wider security presence in the Indian Ocean and Pacific littorals. Consequently, New Delhi has defined its strategic interests in the far seas with far greater clarity and purpose than in the past.

From a realpolitik standpoint, however, the main driver of India's interest in an outward expansion of security has been China. China's "maritime awakening" has been a cause of rising concern in India's security establishment, where many believe the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN's) expanding footprint in the Indian Ocean is eroding India's strategic leverage.[1] China's military and nonmilitary deployments suggest an intent to dominate key spaces in the IOR.[2] Indian assessments of Chinese maritime strategy are influenced, in no small measure, by tensions on the India-China border. New Delhi dispatch of frontline warships to the Andaman Sea in the aftermath of the crisis in Ladakh in June 2020 came as no surprise.[3] The border standoff had raised apprehensions of an expansion of the conflict in the maritime domain. The Indian government moved to expedite plans for basing additional military forces on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI),[4] even as the Indian Navy stepped up surveillance in the eastern Indian Ocean.[5]

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[1] Arun Prakash, "China Has Become a Maritime Power: It's Time India Caught Up," *Indian Express*, June 21, 2021.

[2] Abhijit Singh, "Rules-Based Maritime Security in Asia: A View from New Delhi," *ORF Occasional Paper 266*, August 17, 2020.

[3] "Navy Deploys More Frontline Warships, Submarines in Indian Ocean Amid Border Tensions with China," *India News*, July 20, 2020.

[4] Pandit Rajat, "LAC Face-Off: Ladakh Triggers Andamans Build-Up Plan," *Times of India*, July 4, 2020.

[5] "India Increases Surveillance in Indian Ocean Region to Track Chinese Submarines," *Times of India*, June 29, 2020.

But Indian anxiety isn't limited to the possibility of a China-India confrontation in the Bay of Bengal. India's planners believe China's BRI in South Asia is damaging to Indian interests. Beijing has been expanding its developmental footprint in the eastern Indian Ocean in opaque and coercive ways. Much of the Chinese infrastructure in India's neighborhood seems like a veiled display of economic power meant to boost Beijing's geopolitical sway.[6] Far from a model of win-win development, China's investments in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Maldives appear to be aimed at expanding Beijing's sphere of influence. Many of these facilities seem suspiciously "dual use"—designed to advance Chinese strategic and defense priorities.[7]

India, then, has upped its strategic cooperation with Quad partners and other like-minded states. Since November 2020, when the Royal Australia navy joined the navies of India, Japan, and the United States for the Malabar exercises in the Bay of Bengal, there have been a series of multilateral naval engagements between the Quad partners.[8] In April 2021, Quad powers joined France for the La Perouse exercise in the eastern Indian Ocean—an elaborate affair comprising complex interoperability exercises that involved carrier strike groups, antisubmarine warfare aircraft, and attack submarines.[9] Quad navies met again in August for the first phase of the Malabar 2021 exercise off the coast of Guam in the Western Pacific.[10] The Indian Navy also held a joint tri-services exercise with the Royal Navy in October 2021, and Indian P-8I maritime patrol aircraft exercised with French aircraft in the southwestern Indian Ocean.[11] Meanwhile, the IFC-IOR has been working to strengthen maritime security in the region and beyond, building a common and coherent maritime situational picture and acting as a maritime-security information hub.[12]

Although New Delhi has refrained from expanding military presence in the northwestern Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy has actively contributed to the coastal and near seas security of small island states such as Mauritius and Maldives. India has offered to create military and logistics infrastructure on Mauritius' Agalega Island and on Maldives Assumption Island; it has also increased engagement with Indian Ocean powers such as France. However, Indian attempts

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[6] Talmiz Ahmed, "Why India Needs to Take a Fresh Look at China's Belt and Road Initiative," *The Wire*, July 2, 2018.

[7] The term "dual use" indicates civilian ports that can be quickly upgraded to military facilities during a crisis. Chinese laws mandate that even overseas infrastructure be designed to meet military standards. See Daniel Russel and Blake Burger, "Weaponizing the Belt and Road," Asia Society Policy Institute, September 2020.

[8] Indian Navy, "Maiden India-UK Joint Tri-Service Exercise Konkan Shakti," October 27, 2021.

[9] "Quad Navies Join France-Led Drills in Indian Ocean," *Hindustan Times*, April 5, 2021.

[10] "Quad Navies Begin 4-Day Malabar Exercise off Guam," *The Hindu*, August 26, 2021.

[11] Dinakar Peri, "India, France Carry Out Second Joint Patrol in Southern Indian Ocean," *The Hindu*, May 12, 2022.

[12] In May 2022, at the Quad Leaders' Summit in Tokyo, a maritime security initiative was launched to track 'dark shipping' and illegal fishing boats. See "Quad Set to Launch Maritime Security Initiative to Track 'Dark Shipping,'" *Times of India*, May 24, 2022.

to create military facilities have encountered pushback in smaller island states.[13] The political opposition in Seychelles and Mauritius have disputed Indian moves to create infrastructure for potential use by the Indian military.[14] Consequently, New Delhi has had to calibrate the military posture to make it acceptable to regional partners, adding emphasis to nontraditional security challenges—in particular, illegal fishing, piracy, drug trade, and human trafficking.

This paper outlines India's emerging maritime posture in the Indian Ocean. It argues that India seeks balance in its interactions in the IOR. By engaging with regional navies through joint exercises, port calls, and training programs, and by assisting with capacity-building and management of the commons, the Indian Navy is attempting to create a durable template of maritime security cooperation.

Ensuring Regional Prosperity

For an assessment of India's maritime posture in its strategic neighborhood, it is important to understand the Indian Ocean's peculiar geography. The Asian maritime theater hosts vital nautical capillaries of commerce that nourish world economies. Of the six major global chokepoints, four lie in this region.[15] Among these, the Straits of Malacca—through which almost a quarter of world trade passes—is the most vital. This main artery of the world economy is important for economies in East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.[16] Likewise, the Strait of Hormuz is a critical conduit for energy shipments from the Gulf region and for the flow of Asian workforce, capital, and consumer goods to countries in the region.

The chokepoints dominate more than the commercial and economic lifelines of South and East Asia. The global strategic expansion of aspiring powers can be contained and regulated through the mere control of their naval forces through these straits. With more than 150,000 vessels transiting through these narrow waterways every year, the destinies of many regional and global economies are dependent on effective maritime security.[17] The emergence of new trading hubs in the IOR underscores the importance of the security of the SLOC. Growing foreign trade in Asia has led to the establishment of transshipment hubs along the vital sea lanes. The new infrastructure is mostly Chinese, and it has come up on sites that were previously little more than fishing harbors (such as Gwadar in Pakistan or Hambantota in Sri Lanka).[18]

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[13] Suhasini Haidar, "Indian Project In Mauritius Faces Protests," *The Hindu*, October 27, 2018.

[14] Sachin Parashar, "India to Develop Two Islands in Indian Ocean," *Times of India*, March 13, 2015.

[15] Charles Emmerson and Paul Stevens, "Maritime Choke Points and the Global Energy System—Charting a Way Forward," briefing paper, Chatham House, January 2012.

[16] U.S. Energy Information Administration, "World Oil Transit Chokepoints," webpage, August 2012.

[17] "World Oil Transit Chokepoints," 2012.

[18] Sureesh Mehta, "The Indo-Pacific Imperative," Pradeep Kaushiva and Abhiit Singh, eds., *Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific*, Knowledge World, 2014.

An uptick in criminal activity in the littorals, especially growing instances of illegal fishing-people's smuggling and drug trafficking, adds a layer of complexity to the security dynamic.[19] At a time when there is rising geopolitical competition between the United States and China, nontraditional challenges complicate the security picture for India. China, by some accounts, has been using the cover of nontraditional security to expand its presence in the Indian Ocean. Many in New Delhi surmise that China may be attempting to encircle India (a close U.S. partner) through regional alliances and military-grade facilities.[20]

India has sought to negate Chinese power through expanded naval operations with partners and through the enhancement of trade and connectivity; New Delhi's myriad maritime pacts in the region have sought to expand trade and transportation linkages in the broader Indo-Pacific region; and New Delhi has invested in the Asia-Africa growth corridor in a bid to establish economic linkages and networks across the Indian Ocean's western rim.[21]

Maritime Assistance to Indian Ocean Island States

New Delhi is also acutely aware of the need to preserve regional influence. With China snaring South Asian states into "debt trap" dependencies, Indian leaders and policy elite have worked to expand India's leverage in the Indian Ocean. The recent economic aid package to Sri Lanka is a case in point. The prime vehicle for influence creation in the maritime domain, however, has been the promise of capacity-building and humanitarian assistance. In pursuance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) vision, the Indian Navy has played the role of a security provider in the Indian Ocean.[22] During a visit to Mauritius in March 2015, the prime minister proposed the concept, emphasizing India's security and developmental goals.[23] Since then, the Indian Navy has proactively engaged with regional states, jointly fighting maritime security challenges. The Indian Navy and Coast Guard have assisted Mauritius, Maldives, and Seychelles with maritime surveillance, ocean surveys, training, and repair of military equipment. These countries have also been the target beneficiaries of India's COVID-related assistance.[24]

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[19] Christian Bueger and Timothy Walker, "Beyond Piracy: Making Waves in the Western Indian Ocean," Institute for Security Studies, February 14, 2022.

[20] S. L. Deshmukh, "China's Encirclement Policy: Implications for India," Chennai Centre for China Studies, January 31, 2022.

[21] "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, Partnership for Sustainable and Innovative Development—A Vision Document," Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries, May 2017.

[22] Subhashish Sarangi, "Unpacking SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)," *Occasional Paper*, No. 2, Center for Strategic Studies and Simulation, 2019.

[23] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Prime Minister's Remarks at the Commissioning of Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) Barracuda in Mauritius," March 12, 2015.

[24] "COVID-19: India Sends Medical Assistance to Five 'Friendly' Countries Including Maldives, Mauritius," *New Indian Express*, May 10, 2020.

New Delhi's leadership role in the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium reinforces its strong security relationships with island states. Not only has India sought to leverage these fora to develop consensus around maritime security and a rules-based security order, but it has also outlined principles for the effective governance of the maritime commons.[25] Indian assistance in the construction of maritime infrastructure in Agalega and the Assumption Islands in Mauritius and Seychelles has been a way of advancing the marine governance agenda.[26] White Shipping Information Exchange agreements with Indian Ocean countries have led to a better picture of commercial traffic in the IOR.[27]

To further the Indian Navy's India-Pacific reach, New Delhi has also signed maritime logistics agreements with the United States, Australia, Japan, Britain, and France.[28] The aim is to enable a multimission deployment of Indian warships to operate independently across the Indo-Pacific and monitor critical chokepoints around the Indian Ocean. Indian planners recognize the importance of logistics and maintenance support in friendly ports for the success of overseas missions. There is a growing appreciation of the vital role logistical pacts play in expanding situational awareness and enhancing the capacity for humanitarian relief and nontraditional security.

The emphasis on interoperability is another feature of India's evolved maritime posture. Now, more than ever, Indian warships and aircraft engage in joint drills and combined training. A vivid demonstration of the Indian Navy's zeal for integrated exercises came in June 2021, when Indian warships and aircraft participated in a rare two-day multidomain engagement with the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group (CSG 5), widely seen as a sharpening of the rules-based maritime security in the IOR.[29] India's recent exercises in the IOR have, indeed, focused on high tempo-naval operations as a way of building interoperability and strengthening defense coordination.[30] Air-dominance exercises, advanced air defense exercises, antisubmarine exercises, tactical maneuvers, and cross-deck helicopter operations are more the norm than the exception today.

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[25] "Five Principles Needed for Global Maritime Security, Says PM Modi," *Hindustan Times*, August 9, 2021.

[26] Shubhajit Roy, "India to Develop Strategic Assets in 2 Mauritius, Seychelles Islands," *Indian Express*, March 12, 2015.

[27] Dinakar Peri, "India Signs Shipping Information Exchange Pact," *The Hindu*, December 12, 2018.

[28] "Indian Navy Benefits from Strategic Logistics Pacts With U.S., France," *Economic Times*, June 16, 2019.

[29] India Ministry of Defense, "Integrated Bilateral Exercise of Indian Navy and Indian Air Force with U.S. Navy Concludes in Indian Ocean Region," press release, June 25, 2021; Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defense (Indian Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas, Indian Maritime Strategy*, Naval Strategic Publication (NSP) 1.2, October 2015.

[30] "Indian, U.S. Forces Joint Drill Witnesses High-Tempo Naval Ops," *Daily Pioneer*, June 25, 2021.

Even so, India remains wary of the possibility of an increasing militarization of the Indian Ocean rim.[31] South Asia is already awash with Chinese weapons and platforms. To bolster their combat capability, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar have all been acquiring military hardware and platforms, including submarines, from China.[32] Beijing is also active in the Middle East and the western Indian Ocean, where there is a scramble between Gulf states for naval bases.[33] While being cognizant of the need to counter China, India's foreign policy elite remain wary of the prospect of excessive militarization in South Asia, as it could exacerbate power rivalries, damaging India's prospects in the neighborhood.

Exploring Indo-Pacific Synergies

To preserve a favorable balance of power in the Indian Ocean, India has sought a partnership with the United States. The India-U.S. maritime relationship has been riding high since the signing of the LEMOA in 2016.[34] In September 2018, the two sides signed the COMCASA during their first 2+2 dialogue in New Delhi.[35] Two years later, in October 2020, India and the United States inked the BECA for geospatial cooperation, the last of four foundational pacts, allowing India access to U.S. expertise on geospatial intelligence and facilitating greater accuracy in the deployment of Indian cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and drones.[36]

Operational ties have been further bolstered by advances in maritime defense trade. In October 2021, weeks after the Indian Navy had received the first two (of 24) MH-60R Romeo helicopters—widely seen by Indian analysts as a "game-changer" asset[37]—the United States delivered its eleventh Boeing P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, making the Indian fleet the second largest fleet (after the U.S. Navy's) to operate the aircraft. Washington's recognition of India as a major defense partner has further elevated the latter's status as an actor of increasing strategic importance, raising Indian hopes for high-tech defense sales.[38] Another welcome portent came in November 2020 when the Indian Navy inducted two Sea Guardian drones,

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[31] Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Militarisation of Indian Ocean Region Added to Complexities," *Economic Times*, November 9, 2021.

[32] "The Submarine Race in Asia," *New York Times*, January 7, 2014.

[33] Timothy Williams, "The Middle East's Scramble for Africa: Building Bases and Instability," webpage, Royal United Services Institute, February 26, 2018.

[34] "India, U.S. Sign Military Logistics Pact," *The Hindu*, August 30, 2016.

[35] Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defense, "Indo-U.S. 2+2 Dialogue," press release, December 31, 2018.

[36] Elizabeth Roche, "India and the U.S. Sign 'BECA' to Deepen Military Ties Amid China Tensions," *Live Mint*, October 27, 2020.

[37] Abhinav Dixit, "MH-60R Helicopters: The Game Changer of Indian Ocean," *Chanakya Forum*, August 19, 2021.

[38] Joe Gould, "U.S. Names India 'Major Defense Partner,'" *Defense News*, June 7, 2016.

unarmed versions of the deadly Predator series, on lease from the United States. In a fillip to the defense relationship, New Delhi announced plans to buy 30 armed UAVs from the United States to boost its sea and land defenses.[39]

Meanwhile, the Malabar naval exercise has grown in scope and complexity.[40] An abiding symbol of warming strategic ties between New Delhi, Washington, and Tokyo (Japan has been a permanent exercise partner since 2015), the trilateral Malabar has been expanded to include Australia. Since November 2020, the Royal Australian Navy has participated in two successive editions of the Malabar exercises held in the Bay of Bengal and the Western Pacific. Recent iterations of the exercise have featured some of the most advanced platforms in the four navies, including aircraft carriers, guided missile cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and Poseidon P-8A/8i aircraft. The broad range of high-end interactions held include antisubmarine warfare, carrier strike group activities, maritime patrol and reconnaissance, surface warfare, explosive ordinance disposal, and helicopter operations.[41]

Differences in the India and U.S. Strategic Posture

There are, however, seeming limits of the India-U.S. partnership in the Indian Ocean. Notwithstanding robust naval cooperation, Indian and U.S. interests do not fully align in the western IOR.[42] Washington and New Delhi disagree over Iran and Pakistan, and Indian observers have reservations over the U.S. bureaucratic seams that divide the Indian Ocean into three separate combatant commands. In any case, Washington's preoccupation with the war in Ukraine and with challenges in the Western Pacific, Indian analysts posit, leaves little bandwidth for security operations in the Indian Ocean.

New Delhi and Washington differ also on the interpretation of maritime law. A U.S. Freedom of Navigation Patrol off Lakshadweep in April 2021 caused a diplomatic flutter after a U.S. 7th Fleet press release said that the operation was carried out in India's exclusive economic zone "without requesting India's prior consent" to assert "navigational rights and freedoms"—language that many Indian observers saw as needlessly provocative.[43] For the United States, freedom-of-navigation operations are a way of showing that the maritime claims of certain states are

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[39] Sudhi Ranjan Sen, "India to Buy 30 U.S. Predator Drones for $3 BN to Counter China, Pakistan," *Business Standard*, March 11, 2021.

[40] Manu Pubby, "India, U.S. to Focus on Jointly Countering Submarine Operations at Malabar Exercise," *Economic Times*, July 13, 2018.

[41] "Malabar 2018: All You Need to Know about the Trilateral Naval Exercise," *Business Standard*, June 15, 2018.

[42] Manoj Joshi, "Get Closer, but Not Too Closer," *Economic Times*, blog, September 6, 2018.

[43] Rahul Singh and Rezaul H. Laskar, "India Conveys Concern Over U.S. Navy's 'Freedom of Navigation' Operation in EEZ," *Hindustan Times*, April 9, 2021.

inconsistent with international law; but from an Indian vantage point, the convention cannot be interpreted to permit military activities in other nations' exclusive economic zones.

On the critical issue of Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean, too, Indian and U.S. perspectives are not entirely compatible. For India's observers, the PLAN's activities in the IOR—particularly PLAN submarine presence in South Asia—is a worrying prospect, as it points to a Chinese takeover of India's geopolitical space. Indian concerns include China's growing footprint in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, along with the strengthening China-Pakistan nexus in the Arabian Sea. U.S. policymakers empathize with this view but believe Indian apprehensions are somewhat exaggerated. As they see it, China's ability to operate beyond the umbrella provided by its land-based air power and ballistic missile forces is limited.[44] China's military prominence, they believe, remains confined to the Western Pacific, where PLAN remains the primary threat. Washington thus remains hesitant to play a big security role in the Indian Ocean.

There are also some differences of opinion vis-à-vis the U.S. military facility in Diego Garcia. In the tussle between Mauritius and the United Kingdom for sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, India has supported the former (albeit gingerly). While New Delhi has been somewhat ambivalent on the issue—given New Delhi's strong ties with the United States and the United Kingdom—Indian sympathies for Mauritius remain clear. Diego Garcia's controversial history has meant that India's room for maneuver on the issue is limited. Much as it values its relations with London and Washington, New Delhi has balked at the prospect of supporting a U.S. military presence over indigenous people's rights.[45]

Indian realists worry also about the expectation of strategic reciprocity. If the U.S.-India LEMOA grants access to India for supplies, refueling, and repairs, then New Delhi would have to offer reciprocal access to Indian bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. India's political leadership has yet to take a call on opening up its island bases to the U.S. Navy. The regular presence of U.S. warships in the Andaman Sea, some Indian observers suspect, could threaten China's use of the regional SLOC, causing discord in the region. A strategic quid pro quo involving Diego Garcia could force the Indian Navy into a framework of closer strategic engagement with the U.S. Navy in South Asia. This could impinge on New Delhi's strategic autonomy, rendering India a de facto alliance partner of the United States—a problematic proposition for Indian policymakers.[46]

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[44] "Prepared Statement of RADM Michael A. McDevitt, U.S. N (Ret.) Senior Fellow, Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) on DOD's Role in Competing with China," testimony before the House Committee on Armed Services, January 15, 2020.

[45] Abhijit Singh, "Diego Garcia: India's Conundrum," *The Interpreter*, June 16, 2020.

[46] For India's view of strategic autonomy, see Ashley Tellis, "Non-Allied Forever: India's Grand Strategy According to Subrahmanyam Jaishankar," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 3, 2021.

The maritime dynamic is further complicated by AUKUS, the security agreement between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia aimed at providing Canberra with nuclear submarine technology. The agreement, Indian practitioners fear, could lead to a crowding of nuclear attack submarines (SSNs/submersible ship nuclear) in the eastern Indian Ocean and result in the erosion of India's regional primacy.[47] With Washington willing only to share its prized nuclear submarine technology with the United Kingdom and Australia, an Indian plan to develop a fleet of nuclear attack submarines is likely to languish.

Worryingly, maritime factors have never been a significant driver of India's strategic policymaking. The fact that the Indian army still dominates Indian military planning, and that its navy faces persistent problems in acquiring advanced equipment to operate in the Indian Ocean, suggests a continuing limited ability to partner with the United States in the region. U.S. analysts point out that the enthusiastic advocacy by India's naval leadership, amplified in the Indian press and think tank community, ought to be taken with a grain of salt. The fact is that there is an "expectations-delivery gap" in U.S.-India relations.[48] While the Indian Navy enjoys a relatively free hand when it comes to operations with maritime partners, it does not necessarily transfer into political leverage when it comes to overall defense policies in New Delhi.

U.S. policymakers also have concerns about India's continuing dependence on Russian weaponry and platforms.[49] Notwithstanding New Delhi's attempts to diversify risk by forging partnerships with multiple external partners, the Indian military's heavy dependence on foreign imports from Russia serves to dampen the U.S.-India relationship. As some in Washington see it, India's inability to break away from Russia is a significant impediment to the development of strategic ties.[50]

Opportunities for Collaboration

Despite these challenges, India's premier maritime power status in the Indian Ocean does create opportunities for future collaboration with regional states. The Indian Navy's unique constabulary experience makes it a suitable partner in the fight against transnational crime. Emerging irregular security challenges, such as piracy, drug and human trafficking, illegal fishing, and maritime terrorism in the western Indian Ocean could prompt New Delhi to expand its warship deployments and offer greater capacity-building assistance.

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[47] Abhijit Singh, "India Is Not a Bystander in the AUKUS Saga," *The Hindu*, September 25, 2021.

[48] Sameer Lalwani and Heather Byrne, "Great Expectations: Asking Too Much of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Fall 2019.

[49] Sudhi Ranjan Sen and Peter Martin, "U.S. Readying an Arms-Aid Package to Wean India Away from Russian Weapons," *Business Standard*, May 18, 2022.

[50] Harsh V. Pant and Kartik Bommakanti, "India's National Security: Challenges and Dilemmas," *International Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 4, July 2019.

In a post-COVID world, a key area of maritime cooperation is likely to be regional security management. The coronavirus has affected regional and global maritime security dynamics negatively. Economies are floundering under the pandemic's onslaught, and socioeconomic challenges are intensifying, resulting in the shrinking of national defense budgets. Going forward, military acquisitions and modernization programs could face severe cutbacks, with serious long-term security consequences. Shrinking deployment footprints would necessitate greater burden-sharing of littoral security, in which a partnership between India and regional partners (particularly the United States) would benefit the entire IOR.

Cooperative management of the commons, then, could well be an idea whose time has come. Through enhanced interoperability and cooperative engagement, the Indian Navy and U.S. Navy could share capabilities for the upkeep of good order at sea. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is likely to emerge as another area of cooperation. That the Indian Navy's largest rescue of Indian expatriates from Indian Ocean countries occurred in May 2020 underscores the importance of rescue and relief operations.[51] As growing human security challenges lead to a diversion of resources from the front lines, integrated operations are going to be the key to ensuring a secure littoral.

Equally important is the need to build dynamic security networks between and among Indian Ocean powers. Apart from naval collaboration in antipiracy duties, the Indian Navy has played an important role in supporting and training regional maritime forces. New Delhi could burnish its credentials as a net security provider and early responder by signaling a willingness to lead cooperative missions, underscoring its desire to build capacity and collaborative frameworks.

Conclusion

As it comes into its own, the Indian Navy is keen to be seen as a reliable security provider in the IOR. The Indian Navy has set an expansive agenda for itself and aspires to be an efficient responder to regional crises. In its attempts to play the part of a gentle security stabilizer—a source of positive deterrence and greater regional goods—the Indian Navy will need to cooperate with likeminded stakeholders in the Indian Ocean. This does not necessarily translate into an anti-China stance, but implies posturing meant to impose checks on any aggressive displays of force by China.

Even so, India will need to continue to ensure "balance" in its maritime interactions in the Indo-Pacific region. By engaging with regional navies through joint exercises, port calls, and training programs and assisting in capacity-building and in the management of the commons, the Indian Navy can create a durable template of maritime security cooperation. A constructive presence in the region will burnish the Indian Navy's credentials as a reliable partner and efficient provider of security goods.

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[51] India Ministry of Defense, "Indian Navy Launches Operation 'Samudra Setu,'" press release, May 5, 2020.

Appendix F. Indian Equities and Strategy in Afghanistan

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza
Founder and President
Mantraya

Introduction

In August 2021, India was compelled to wind down its presence in Afghanistan. This came after two decades of providing developmental assistance with pledges of more than USD3 billion. This showed the vulnerability of New Delhi's strategy of. pursuing "soft power" diplomacy, under the security umbrella provided by the United States and the NATO countries. To be sure, India had emerged as an important and immensely popular aid-provider, accruing a tremendous amount of goodwill among the Afghans.[1] But such engagement had little value to the Taliban after U.S. withdrawal from the country.

The unveiling of the Islamic Emirate by the Taliban in Afghanistan posed a significant challenge for India, mostly in the realm of security.[2] Having invested heavily in the Afghan government and maintaining a position of not negotiating with the Taliban had put India in a difficult spot. Altered geopolitics in the region, marked by an apparent loss of interest by the United States and by a surge of Chinese and Pakistani influence in the country, makes the task of restarting Indian engagement with Kabul necessary but almost impossible under the prevailing circumstances. Loss of New Delhi's strategic leverage in Afghanistan has been significant and too difficult to reverse, despite its continued expression of concern for the plight of common Afghans. The Taliban have struggled to establish a modicum of governance in the country, while refusing to dilute their rigid worldview on women, girls, and minorities. Regardless of several positive gestures by a recognition- and legitimacy-hungry Taliban, New Delhi seems content to pursue a broad wait-and-watch policy. Whether such a policy will hold good and protect Indian strategic objectives in the medium to long term, therefore, emerges as a critical question.

[1] Author's interviews and discussions with government officials, parliamentarians, security personnel, the business community, women's groups, health workers, farmers, and civil society organizations in the provinces of Kandahar, Nagarhar, Badakshan, Balkh, Bamyan, Kabul, and Herat from May 2007–April 2017. Also see Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "India, Afghanistan, and the 'End Game'?" in Kanti Bajpai, Saira Basit, and V. Krishnappa, eds., *India's Grand Strategy: History, Theory, Cases*, Routledge, 2014; Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "India's Evolving Policy Contours Towards Post-2014 Afghanistan," *Journal of South Asian Development*, 2013, pp. 185–207.

[2] "Taliban Announce Creation of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Will Rule Country Through Council," *Dawn*, August 19, 2021.

From Security and Economics to Politics: Drivers of Indian Engagement in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has always been a land of opportunity for India—as well as a source of anxieties. Not surprisingly, therefore, as India reopened its embassy in Kabul in 2001, after a five-year hiatus, three principal strategic drivers—security, politics, and economics—shaped its policy.

Instability in Afghanistan, which has the potential to transform vast stretches of its landmass into ungoverned territories and safe havens for India-focused, Pakistan-based terrorist groups, has always raised anxieties in New Delhi. The Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) was founded in the Kunar province of Afghanistan and, along with groups like the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), is believed to have enjoyed the patronage of the Taliban. An anti-India regime in Kabul, New Delhi believed, would enhance the capacities of these groups, apart from providing a deniability advantage to Pakistan's military establishment. India looked at the Taliban-led insurgency, which played a dubious role in the final stages of the hijacking of the IC-814 airplane in 1998, with a deep sense of distrust. The insurgent group's anti-India outlook, along with its statements favouring independence of Kashmir and its deep nexus with the Pakistani directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), made it an anathema to India. New Delhi's policy in Afghanistan remained focused on strengthening a pro-India regime, which would act as a hedge against anti-India forces in that country.

Although the promotion of democracy in neighboring countries has not been a stated foreign policy objective of India since the 1990s, strengthening both the central government in Kabul and Afghanistan's democratic and representative institutions was the second important driver of India's engagement. Between 1996 and 2001, India had actively supported the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance (NA), with India's ambassador in Dushanbe coordinating funds and supplies for them.[3] As a number of NA leaders became the new political elites in post-2001 Kabul, India's past good investment started delivering results. The mandate for New Delhi was to expand the group of influential pro-India political loyalists and elites, who would continue not only to vouch for India's contribution to Afghan stability but also share a natural connection with a democratic India. New Delhi hoped to deepen the engagement through continued support for the gradual strengthening of democratic institutions and practices at both the center and the grassroots level.

Afghanistan, for New Delhi, also resembled a land bridge with Central Asia. A stable and peaceful Afghanistan would not only have provided opportunities for Indian companies to invest in its economy and natural resource projects, but also facilitated Indian trade with the economies of the Central Asian states. The windfalls accruing from a vibrant economic regime and connecting multiple states would create stakeholders in the peace and stability of Afghanistan not only within that country but possibly also within Pakistan, which had played the role of a spoiler. This could have led to the smooth implementation of the energy pipeline projects, such

[3] V. Sudarshan, "How India Secretly Armed Afghanistan's Northern Alliance," *The Hindu*, September 1, 2019.

as the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India), vital for India's energy security. Investing in Afghanistan and connecting Central Asian economies would also have complemented India's "Look East" policy, connecting with the economies of the Southeast Asian nations.

Strategy Between 2001 and 2020: Achievements, Constraints, and Challenges

India's quantifiable development assistance and pledge to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2020 was to the tune of USD3 billion, making India the largest regional contributor to the war-torn country. In February 2022, India's junior minister of external affairs, V. Muraleedharan, summed up that the country had executed "more than five hundred projects spread across each of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan in critical areas of power, water supply, road connectivity, healthcare, education, agriculture and capacity building."[4] In the two decades of Indian engagement between 2001 and 2021, a substantial amount of India's total developmental assistance was earmarked for Kabul. The policy remained uninterrupted even with the changes in political regimes in New Delhi, underlining Afghanistan's importance in India's strategic imagination. The tangible benefits accruing from such a seemingly impressive policy, however, were limited and mostly fragile. Those benefits were as follows.

- **Security:** While avoiding a direct role in the security sector and refraining from becoming a part of the UN-mandated and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), India worked with the Afghan authorities to fulfill two primary objectives: (1) securing its investments and ensuring the safety of diplomatic personnel and Indian nationals in Afghanistan; and (2) preventing Afghanistan from turning into a launchpad of terrorism directed against India. The first objective especially attained significance as the Indian embassy in Kabul, some of its four consulates, and Indian nationals came under attack by the Taliban's Haqqani Network, which was allegedly working at the behest of the ISI.

  To achieve these objectives without deploying its own security forces, India had to rely on the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS). India also needed to assist the ANDSF and contribute to building their capacity. However, only a limited number of Afghan police officers were trained in India. At least four attack helicopters and three lightweight Cheetah were also provided. Afghanistan's repeated requests for a range of military hardware, however, were mostly declined. Even as the Taliban attacks and their capture of territories continued in the years leading up to August 2021, India refused to respond favorably to the growing clamor about putting boots in Afghanistan. India's contribution to capacity-building in the ANDSF remained extremely limited and hardly corresponded to its security concerns in Afghanistan.[5]

[4] "India Invested More Than $3 Billion in Afghanistan: MoS Muraleedharan," *Business Standard*, February 5, 2022.

[5] Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "In Afghanistan, How India Missed the Bus," *Hindustan Times*, July 21, 2021.

- **Politics:** India remained supportive of the democratically elected central government in Kabul as a hedge against the insurgents who wished to set up an Islamic regime based on rigid shariah. New Delhi also supported an inclusive Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled peace process with the Taliban, obligating it to respect the constitution of the country.[6] As it appeared almost certain that the insurgents would return to the power center in Kabul, New Delhi argued for a system of checks and balances to prevent the insurgents from destroying the achievements made over the past two decades. India also pushed for a comprehensive cease-fire agreement to precede the peace process, arguing that dialogue amid a spike in insurgent violence would tilt the balance in favor of the Taliban.

  However, these politically astute statements notwithstanding, India's lack of mediation for an inclusive government, along with national reconciliation and the fraud-marred presidential elections of 2014, did little to extend its legitimacy as an important actor. The hasty peace deal with the Taliban provided only token recognition to the government led by President Ashraf Ghani, who had to reluctantly support the process even as the Taliban continued to carry out attacks. India mostly remained a bystander in the developments in Afghanistan, without any capacity or intent to influence the outcome of events.

- **Economics:** India's large and small development projects across Afghanistan's provinces did result in garnering significant popularity for the country among Afghan political elites and common Afghans alike. Construction of the Afghan parliament building, the Salma Dam, and the Zaranj Delaram Highway visibly uplifted India's image. Beyond this, however, India's projects in Afghanistan suffered from delays in implementation, cost overruns, and lack of impact assessment. Requests by various Indian ambassadors in Kabul regarding new projects were either ignored or shot down by the Finance Ministry. As insecurity registered a steady rise, India's capacity to spend its earmarked developmental assistance shrank. In 2021, for instance, India could spend only INR200 crore out of the INR350 crore of announced assistance.[7]

  India's trade with Afghanistan, until the very end, remained subject to Pakistani policies of denying transit opportunities, forcing it to fall back on either the costly air corridors or the sea route using the Chabahar port in Iran. The Indo-Afghan bilateral trade was worth USD1.5 billion in 2020–21, compared with the USD2.5 billion Afghan-Pakistan trade. However, with the state of Indo-Pakistan relations at its lowest, it was almost certain that the full potential of Indo-Afghan trade would never be realized. In 2012, India organized the Afghan Investment Summit in New Delhi to attract investments to the country.[8] The net outcome of the initiative was unsatisfactory. Due to security concerns, Indian companies expressed reluctance to invest in Afghanistan. Trade with the Central Asian states through Afghanistan also remained a nonstarter. It was apparent that its economic objective to succeed in Afghanistan would require New Delhi to improve its relations with Pakistan. Power contestation between the two countries over the past two decades negated such a possibility.

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[6] "India Stresses on Importance of 'Afghan-Led, Afghan-Owned and Afghan-Controlled 'Peace Process," *Deccan Herald*, July 6, 2020.

[7] "India to Provide Rs 6,292 Crore as Development Assistance to Other Countries, Rs 200 Crore for Afghanistan," *Economic Times*, February 1, 2022.

[8] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, *Delhi Investment Summit on Afghanistan*, June 25, 2012.

- **Regional cooperation:** To a large extent, India's engagement in Afghanistan, although appreciated across the board and bereft of a military footprint, was thought to have started a new round of proxy war with Pakistan. In spite of its growing strategic ties with the United States, New Delhi's concerns about the negative role played by Islamabad in Afghanistan were largely ignored. As the regional countries indulged in a game of power brokering, supporting different Afghan political factions, New Delhi's view in favor of evolving a regional consensus on peace and stability found little support. This was, however, not a failure of India's public diplomacy alone. Lack of unity in the effort marred both the ISAF operations against the Taliban and the shortsightedness regarding an end state in Afghanistan. Time and again, New Delhi struggled to find a seat on the high table to decide Afghanistan's future; it, therefore, exercised limited leverage to influence the course of events that ultimately led to the collapse of the central government in Kabul in August 2021.

Challenges in the "New Afghanistan"

The capture of power by the Taliban and subsequent establishment of the Islamic Emirate had a profound impact on India. The country was no longer a familiar territory for New Delhi. Collapse of the central government in Kabul, closure of India's four consulates and embassy, and evacuation of its diplomatic staff and several hundred Indian nationals from the country meant a sudden loss of all its influence in the country. With the withdrawal of U.S. and other NATO countries, a new set of countries, like China, Pakistan, Turkey, and Russia, gained ascendency in Kabul. Real and perceived challenges to India that were posed by the "new Afghanistan" can be summarized as follows.

- **A safe haven for terrorism:** The February 2020 peace agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban[9] had obligated the latter to not allow the territory of Afghanistan to be used by global terror outfits like al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other international terrorist groups for activities such as recruiting cadres, collecting funds, planning, and executing attacks on the United States and its allies. The agreement, however, had remained silent on the responsibilities of the Taliban vis-à-vis India-focused terror groups, such as the LeT and the JeM. Both these outfits had reportedly fought alongside the Taliban against the ANDSF. The Taliban victory had also been celebrated by both these groups in Pakistan.[10] India anticipated that the developments in Afghanistan would have morale- and capacity-boosting effects on these groups, possibly translating into a rise in terror attacks in India.

  Insecurities in New Delhi have been further heightened in view of successive reports by the UN Monitoring Committee, prior to August 2021, that point at the undisrupted ties between al Qaeda and the Taliban. In addition, a surge in the activities of the Islamic

[9] U.S. Department of State, "Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan," February 29, 2020.

[10] Amit Chaturvedi, "Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba Hold Pro-Taliban Rally, Expose Pakistan," *Hindustan Times*, August 23, 2021.

State's Khorasan province (IS-KP) in Afghanistan, which the Taliban seems to have no capacity to control, would potentially add to the specter of violence in the region. For the past several years, both al Qaeda and the IS-KP have been trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to elicit support among Indian Muslims. That could change as a result of the political developments in Afghanistan.

- **An intelligence black hole:** Collapse of the central government in Kabul in August 2021 effectively meant shutting down of all its departments, including the NDS, with which India shared a close working relationship. U.S. withdrawal from the country also curtailed the availability of intelligence and its sharing with New Delhi. Although intelligence concerning impending threats to India's interests in Afghanistan are no longer relevant, information such as the activities of terrorist groups, the planning of attacks on Indian soil, and the Taliban's outlook on India are still important. The new Afghanistan is indeed an intelligence black hole, with significant impact on India's policymaking toward that country.

- **A Chinese vassal state:** The profiles of China and Pakistan shot up prominently after the Taliban takeover. Beijing had prepared well for the scenario by hosting the Taliban delegation and eliciting a promise from it with regard to controlling the Uyghur militants.[11] China further warmed to the Islamic Emirate by providing aid and promising continued economic assistance and investment.[12] The Taliban welcomed such involvement and asked for extension of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan.[13] For a brief while in 2018, both India and China had sought to cooperate with one another in unveiling joint projects in Afghanistan.[14] Much of that plan never came to fruition.

  In view of the worsening Sino-Indian relations, especially after the Doklam border standoff of April 2020, New Delhi is wary of China's ascendency in Afghanistan. With the Taliban desperately seeking international legitimacy and assistance, China could emerge as its savior in return for complete loyalty. In such a scenario, there are apprehensions in New Delhi that Beijing, in collaboration with Pakistan, would keep India away from regaining influence in Kabul.

- **A civil war theater and instability:** The swift and bloodless capture of power by the Taliban initially appeared to have helped in averting a civil war situation. The ANDSF decided not to put up a fight with the invading insurgents in many provinces, including in the capital of Kabul. However, peace and stability continue to elude Afghanistan, which is now marked by systemic violence launched by the Taliban against elements of the deposed regime, minorities, and women. The IS-KP has been able to carry out a number of attacks targeting the minority Hazara population. Further, the National Resistance

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[11] Sui-Lee Wee and Muyi Xiao, "Afghan Uyghurs Fear Deportation as Taliban Cozy Up to China," *New York Times*, September 23, 2021.

[12] Betsy Joles, "Too Big to Fail: China Eyes Afghanistan Investment Amid Fears of State Collapse," *Nikkei Asia*, January 12, 2022.

[13] "Taliban Say They 'Desire' To Join China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Projects," *Times of India*, September 7, 2021.

[14] Sanjeev Miglani, "India, China Launch Joint Training for Afghanistan, Plan More Projects," Reuters, October 15, 2018.

Front (NRF), consisting of the erstwhile ANDSF personnel, continue to fight the Taliban across provinces. The prevailing violence, although less intense than in earlier years, has added to the large scale of human misery brought on by the economic collapse of the state and the ongoing pandemic.

In addition, a rise in opium production and trade is transforming the country into a narco-terrorist state,[15] which has serious repercussions in regional countries, including India. Although New Delhi, not sharing any land boundary with Afghanistan, may remain free from the flow of Afghan refugees, repeated seizure of Afghan-origin drugs in the country points to an equally serious challenge for national security.[16]

Indian Strategy Since August 2021

Days after the Taliban's takeover of power, India's external affairs minister, S Jaishankar, announced at a meeting attended by major political parties in India that the situation in Afghanistan was critical and that India, like the rest of the world, was adopting a "wait and watch" policy.[17] Following the meeting, the minister told media that since this was an evolving situation, he would divulge "where India stands once the situation normalizes."[18] It was unclear, however, whether New Delhi actually envisaged the situation to "normalize." Nevertheless, in the first few weeks, New Delhi focused on evacuating Indian nationals and Afghan partners from the war-torn country. The evacuees included an unknown number of Afghan parliamentarians as well as Afghan nationals and assets who had worked with the Indian embassy and consulates. Over the next few months, India initiated a series of moves that combined to infer the country's strategy in the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. These steps were made in the following four different areas and loosely form parts of the overall objective of regaining lost ground.

- **UN-led humanitarian response:** External Affairs Minister Jaishankar's first statement outlining an element of India's action plan was delivered to the UN on September 13. During the UN's high-level meeting on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the minister supported taking a "central role" in the UN in dealing with the crisis.[19] He promised that India would stand by the people of Afghanistan and called for nondiscriminatory distribution of relief materials, overseen by the UN, to the Afghan people. Over the subsequent months, between December 2021 and January 2022, India dispatched four tranches of life-saving drugs and medical supplies to Afghanistan using the air route. Following hectic negotiations with Islamabad, four consignments of wheat

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[15] Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "Afghanistan, the Rise of a Narco-Terrorist State," *The Hindu*, December 1, 2021.

[16] Neeraj Chauhan, "3,000kg Drugs Worth ₹ 21,000 Crore from Afghanistan Seized at Gujarat Port," *Hindustan Times*, September 20, 2021.

[17] "India Adopting 'Wait and Watch' Policy on Afghanistan, Says Government," *The Hindu*, August 26, 2021.

[18] "India Adopting 'Wait and Watch' Policy," 2021.

[19] Kallol Bhattacherjee, "India Willing to Stand by Afghan People as It Did in the Past: Jaishankar," *The Hindu*, September 13, 2021.

were sent using the land route. The underlying idea was to maintain the immense goodwill that existed among the Afghan people for India, without necessarily having to deal with the de facto rulers of the country.

- **Pushing for an inclusive government:** Notwithstanding a parley with the Taliban in Qatar,[20] New Delhi has largely chosen to ignore a number of positive statements by the group welcoming India back in Kabul. There appears to be a conviction that such gestures by the Taliban are only a ploy to win legitimacy and that New Delhi must not accede to such pleas. Alternately, the goal of installing an inclusive and representative government must be pursued.[21] While reversing the Taliban takeover of power may not be an achievable goal, efforts must be made to make the government in Kabul moderate, accountable, and respectful of the rights of all citizens of the country. Such a position has found support among other countries, including China and Russia.[22]
- **Counterterrorism steps:** In order to bring the Islamic Emirate under pressure and force it to act against global and regional terror groups in Afghanistan, India has periodically used the UN forum. New Delhi's strategy in this regard is to underline the fact that the threat of terrorism continues to be an issue of concern in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and to send the message that the Afghanistan regimes and Pakistan must be judged on the steps they take against groups such as al Qaeda, IS-KP, LeT, and JeM. In early December 2021, India drew the UNSC's attention to the link between al Qaeda, IS-KP, LeT and JeM, while asserting that the international community must hold states accountable for providing finance and safe haven to terrorists.[23] Later in the same month, India voted in favor of a resolution to extend the mandate of the monitoring team set up to assist the UNSC 1267 and 1988 committees, which deal with terrorism.
- **Evolving a regional approach:** New Delhi has also tried to work toward evolving a regional approach to Afghanistan's new set of rulers. Attempts to forge a common approach among like-minded countries have resulted in at least three important meetings organized by India and attended by five Central Asian (CA) states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The first meeting among national security advisers took place in November 2021; the second meeting, at the foreign ministers' level, took place a month later. This was followed by a virtual meeting hosted by Prime Minister Modi and attended by the presidents of the five CA states in January 2022. These meetings have resulted in the formation of a joint working group on Afghanistan.[24] Similar to its previous initiatives, the attempt to evolve a regional solution is New Delhi's way of ending Taliban dominance in the new government and making it inclusive, representative, and accountable.

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[20] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Meeting in Doha," August 31, 2021.

[21] "India Supports Inclusive, Representative Govt in Afghanistan: EAM Jaishankar," *Times of India*, November 26, 2021.

[22] "India, Russia, China Call for Formation of Inclusive Afghan Govt," *Indian Express*, November 27, 2021.

[23] Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "India Votes in Favour of Two UNSC Resolutions on Countering Terror Threat," *Economic Times*, December 19, 2021.

[24] Suhasini Haidar, "Central Asia Meet Forms Afghan Group," *The Hindu*, January 27, 2022.

Conclusion

The Taliban capture of power in Afghanistan has posed a significant challenge to India's national security. Although this eventual outcome was always in the cards, following the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement, New Delhi had hoped that a prolonged deployment of U.S. and NATO forces to oversee a smooth transitional phase would result in the establishment of an inclusive government. The sudden loss of leverage and the frittering away of decades of investment in Afghanistan now appears irreversible. However, forgetting Afghanistan as a bad dream is not an option for New Delhi. Engaging the Taliban, too, is a difficult decision, given the domination of the handline Haqqani Network in the government. While a new strategy is, therefore, a critical necessity, its elements need constant fine-tuning.

India's challenges in this regard are enormous. Multiple and overlapping attempts by regional countries at power-brokering in Afghanistan, along with the setting up of proxies, has come to replace the semblance of order ensured by the ISAF. Instability in Afghanistan can further increase if the IS-KP gains strength. China certainly sees an opportunity for itself in Afghanistan, but its continued support would be hinged on the Taliban establishing order in the country. On the other hand, the Taliban regime is unlikely to revisit its regressive worldview and ideology. Although it might be willing to leverage its nuisance value to garner international recognition, it will still hold on to its belief system to maintain unity among its divided factions.

There is certainly no easy way out of this quagmire. Continuing humanitarian assistance without extending recognition to the Islamic Emirate appears to be the only viable option in the near term. Maintaining steady pressure on the regime and, at the same time, building a global consensus on an inclusive and representative government in Kabul may prove fruitful in the medium to long term. India, therefore, has its task cut out for it. Neither a "wait and watch" policy nor dissipated efforts in various forums to protect its national interest will suffice. Only deft diplomacy, alliances with like-minded nations, and work with the Afghans toward an inclusive government may allow it to regain some of its lost leverage and restore its image as a serious and committed stakeholder.

Appendix G. Major Power Equities in Afghanistan: Drifting to Relative Normalcy or State Collapse?

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In the immediate aftermath of its takeover of Kabul, Russia and China perceived an opportunity to have a relationship with the Taliban government that they had not had under the previous government. As Moscow played host to regional discussion, it sought to position itself as a valued convenor in the region. China, in particular, was eager to assume a more significant role in Afghanistan. In September 2021, just weeks after taking power, Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid proclaimed, "China is our most important partner and represents a fundamental and extraordinary opportunity for us."[1] Meetings between Chinese foreign ministry officials and Taliban officials after the withdrawal of U.S. and foreign forces seemed to signal the prospect of new relations in the region.

Since the fall of 2021, the Taliban have demonstrated a conciliatory tone toward India. For its part, New Delhi has demonstrated a renewed willingness to initiate at least cursory contacts with the Taliban. India's recent provision of wheat to Afghanistan, sent by land route via rival Pakistan, set a constructive tone for the relationship. Moreover, India committed to supply an additional 50,000 metric tons of wheat to Afghanistan. Since this commitment was made, senior Taliban officials such as Anas Haqqani, Qahar Balkh, and Zabiullah Mujahid have been interviewed by Indian news channels.[2] Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid commented that "the Islamic Emirate is grateful to India for its humanitarian assistance and cooperation."[3] Responding to the recent tragic earthquake in Afghanistan, India has once again demonstrated its humanitarian commitment to the Afghan people. Heralding India as a "true first responder" foreign minister S. Jaishankar observed, "Our longstanding links with Afghan society and our development partnership including humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan, will

[1] Zane Zovak, "China's Embrace of the Taliban Complicates U.S.-Afghanistan Strategy," *The Diplomat*, April 13, 2022.

[2] Kabir Taneja, "Three Events Illustrate India's Taliban Outreach," *Hindustan Times*, May 31, 2022.

[3] Ayaz Gul, "Taliban Commend India for Sending Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan," *VOA News*, January 7, 2022.

continue to guide our approach going forward."[4] The Taliban credited India for the assistance and lauded its decision to return diplomats to Kabul and send a technical team to help with relief efforts. Abdul Qahar Balkhi said in a statement that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan "welcomes a decision by India to return diplomats & technical team to their embassy in Kabul to continue their relations with the Afghan people and their humanitarian assistance."[5]

Even though Pakistan, China, and Russia all kept embassies open through the fall of the previous Afghan government, along with India, Iran, and the United States, they have yet to recognize the Taliban government. China has made clear that it will not formally recognize the Taliban government without the concurrence of Pakistan, Russia, and Iran.[6] Along with these three countries, Iran, India, and the United States have all abstained from recognizing the Taliban government until three conditions are met: (1) not to be a sanctuary for terrorist groups, (2) to form an inclusive governing regime, and (3) to respect the rights of women and girls. What is ironic about the tacit agreement of the six powers that have an interest in the stability of Afghanistan is that there are tensions among them; still, for the time being, they are in agreement in their approach to Afghanistan. In the past, these states competed for influence on Afghanistan policy or supported forces seeking to undermine the Afghan government. Now these countries generally take a common approach to Afghanistan, but they are stymied from working collaboratively due to tension caused by conflicts outside the region—in Ukraine, Syria, and the South China Sea.

U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan

The legacy left behind by the United States' departure from Afghanistan is bitter and tragic. U.S. policymakers are not eager to put much political or diplomatic capital into Afghanistan, and their interests in Afghanistan at this point are limited but consistent with the stated interests of the international community. These interests include addressing the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people, respecting the rights of women and girls, and ensuring the country does not serve as a sanctuary for terrorists or contribute to instability generally. The United States also is concerned about the security of the Afghans and other foreigners who have either chosen not to leave or have been unable to leave. Other than these minimum interests, the United States has limited incentive to engage much on Afghanistan.

Currently there are three prevailing options for U.S. policy toward Afghanistan. Because of the potential for domestic political liability in the United States, however, and because of the

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[4] Swati Bhasin, "After Powerful Quake in Afghanistan, India Sends Help: 'True 1st Responder,'" *Hindustan Times*, June 27, 2022.

[5] "Taliban Lauds Return of Indian Technical Team in Kabul for Humanitarian Aid," *Business Standard*, June 24, 2022.

[6] Yew Lun Tian, "China Will Not Be the First to Recognize Taliban Government, Scholar Says," Reuters, October 30, 2021.

intransigence of the Taliban, there is not much motivation for the United States to take diplomatic action. The three options outlined by two former U.S. special representatives are to, (1) engage the Taliban government, (2) isolate it, or (3) overthrow it.[7]

At the moment, the de facto policy of the U.S. government on Afghanistan is a combination of limited engagement and isolation. U.S. diplomats periodically meet with Taliban officials in the Gulf, mainly to discuss the Taliban's concerns over Afghan financial assets that the United States has frozen. Otherwise, the United States has provided humanitarian assistance to Afghan civil society groups. Increasing this limited level of engagement would require the Taliban government to meet the three requirements set by the international community. The Taliban's agreement to do so in a way that persuades the international community of their sincerity, however, does not seem likely in the near term.

U.S. policy to isolate the Taliban regime is based on the belief that the Taliban is not likely to act positively on the three main requirements. Keeping Afghan government assets frozen, maintaining sanctions, and not recognizing the Taliban government are the main elements of the U.S. policy to isolate the Taliban.

When the United States originally helped to overthrow the Taliban regime, it did so by joining an alliance that involved the Northern Alliance, Russia, and Iran. Now, the United States is not interested in supporting Afghan groups that oppose the Taliban. Similarly, neither Iran nor Russia are likely to align with the United States to support Afghan groups to oppose the Taliban. Both countries are involved in other external conflicts, and both face domestic turmoil. Russia will follow the Tajikistan government's lead on the Afghan Tajik community, but neither government is likely to support Afghan Tajik groups in an assault on the Pashtun-dominated Taliban regime.

Until the Taliban government meets the three requirements, U.S. policy toward Afghanistan will continue to be one of isolation, with limited engagement on humanitarian disaster assistance. U.S. diplomats will keep direct and third-party lines of communication open with the Taliban regime, but given other world developments, Afghanistan will be a low priority in U.S. foreign policy.

Chinese and Russian Interests in a Taliban-Led Afghanistan

Both China and Russia see opportunities in filling the considerable gap left by the United States and NATO allies and partners. Both, however, are wary of taking over the responsibilities of rebuilding the Afghan state to any significant measure. Rather, Beijing and Moscow are primarily concerned with stemming any security threats that may emanate from Afghanistan while also seeing in the Taliban regime a potential partner that is more amenable to direct

[7] James Dobbins, Andrew Radin, and Laurel E. Miller, *Engage Isolate, or Oppose: American Policy Toward the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan*, RAND Corporation, PE-A1540-1, May 2022.

engagement than its predecessor. Nevertheless, Chinese and Russian interests on this issue are not identical. Russia aims to maintain its role as the primary security provider for what it views as the greater Eurasian region, while China remains focused on stemming any extremist threat to its Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.[8]

For China in particular, there is an added potential benefit of being able to advance a handful of economic ventures that previously failed to move forward, due either to instability or to perceived noncompliance by the previous Afghan government. China sees benefit in incorporating Afghanistan into its ambitious BRI to increase interconnectivity in its "near abroad."

Russia also finds itself in an awkward political position vis-à-vis the Taliban. On the one hand, like China, it sees value in having the Taliban solidify its power as a means of improving regional security. On the other hand, it still formally recognizes the Taliban as a terrorist organization. If it is seen as too assertively backing the group, this could negatively affect its relationships with Central Asian states, who are more directly threatened by the Taliban and also share ethnic ties with many of the groups who stand to lose in a Taliban-dominated governing system.

Since U.S. withdrawal, there seems to be a de facto division of labor between China and Russia when it comes to Afghanistan: Russia taking the lead on security-related issues while China focuses on economic concerns—not dissimilar from the de facto roles that these two nations have taken in Central Asia. Russia's war in Ukraine, however, has demonstrated that its army is weaker than most, if not all, stakeholders thought, which has called into question the quality of protection provided by Russian forces stationed near the Afghan border in Tajikistan.[9]

This division of responsibilities in the Sino-Russian approaches to countries in the region, however, may not be without points of friction. For instance, the Chinese reportedly have established and gradually expanded an unofficial military complex in the eastern corner of Tajikistan, close to where their respective borders connect with Afghanistan's.[10] While this has not yet resulted in any public discord between Beijing and Moscow, it is likely something that the latter is viewing warily. It may also be the case, however, that China calculated that a single base in this specific area may be begrudgingly accepted, given its connections to its domestic security concerns.[11]

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[8] Elizabeth Wishnick, "Prospects for Sino-Russian Coordination in Afghanistan," *War on the Rocks*, November 8, 2021.

[9] Jennifer Murtazashvili, "China's Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia," testimony to the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 17, 2022.

[10] Muhammad Tahir, "Majlis Podcast: Is China's Base in Tajikistan a Sign of Creeping Penetration?" *Radio-Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 24, 2021.

[11] Tahir, 2021.

Another point of potential friction has to do with India. China is motivated to diminish India's regional influence. In contrast, Moscow continues seeking a balance between its long-standing relationship with New Delhi and increased coordination with Islamabad.[12] Russia also values India as a key legacy market for its defense material; as such, it has abstained from criticizing Russia for invading Ukraine and has become a major purchaser of Russian oil.[13]

China is not the only regional state with economic designs on Afghanistan. Afghanistan also provides a potentially valuable transit route for landlocked Central Asian states. In fact, every major external actor has either implicitly or explicitly endorsed and/or sponsored an initiative intended to increase Afghanistan's connectivity.[14]

According to one analyst, there are three factors that will determine the depth of Sino-Russian coordination with regard to Afghanistan: (1) Russia's reaction to China's establishment of a base in Tajikistan and any other perceived infringements on Moscow's role as primary security provider in Central Asia; (2) how and to what extent Russia will engage India in Central Asia and Afghanistan; and (3) whether Russia and China, likely in coordination with Pakistan and Iran, formally recognize the Taliban government.[15]

Russia and China's senior-level engagement with the Taliban predates the group's takeover of Kabul. In addition to the peace conference hosted by Moscow in 2019, Russia hosted a follow-up event in March 2021. Through a series of apparent protocol stumbles, Moscow offended representatives from the Afghan government, the Taliban, and women, none of which improved its image with Afghan leaders.[16]

China Engages in Highly Public Diplomacy with the Taliban

In July 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted a nine-member Taliban delegation in the northern Chinese city of Tianjin. Despite previous bilateral engagements, this was the highest-level and most public such meeting to date.[17] Then, in October, after the Taliban had assumed power, Wang outlined China's expectations for a Taliban-led Afghanistan: institute an

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[12] Wishnick, 2021.

[13] Shruti Menon, "Ukraine Crisis: Russian Oil and Gas Turn to Asia," BBC News, June 10, 2022.

[14] Klyszcz, Ivan U., "Russia and the Taliban Takeover," research paper, Foundation Pour la Recherche Strategique, No. 17/2021, November 2021. For instance, the Euro-Asian Transport Links (funded by the EU and the UN), the BRI, the Lapis Lazuli Corridor (Asian Development Bank, ADB), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (ADB), the U.S. International Finance Development Corporation, the connectivity initiatives of the EU, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, among others.

[15] Wishnick, 2021.

[16] Ezzatullah Mehrdad, "Moscow Conference on Afghan Peace: Two Steps Back for Women, One Step Forward for Peace," *The Diplomat*, March 23, 2021.

[17] Steven Lee Myers, "China Offers the Taliban a Warm Welcome While Urging Peace Talks," *New York Times*, July 28, 2021.

inclusive political structure in which all ethnic groups and factions play a part; implement more moderate foreign and domestic policies, including the protection of women's rights; and make a clear break from all terrorist forces, including the Islamic State and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM).[18] Notably, these three requests have become a common refrain among international stakeholders, regardless of differing perspectives on this and other issues. In early January 2022, the Chinese government accepted the Taliban's designee to serve as ambassador in Beijing.[19]

In March 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi made an unannounced visit to Kabul, joining Pakistan and Qatar among only a handful of countries who have sent a ministerial-level representative there since the Taliban took over.[20] On the same day, Russia's senior representative was also in Kabul for meetings ahead of a Beijing-hosted neighbors-of-Afghanistan meeting that took place on March 30–31. The official Chinese statement noted that scholarships for Afghan students, visa issues, the commencement of work by Chinese investors in the mining sector, and an Afghanistan's potential role in the BRI were discussed.[21] According to Raffaello Pantucci, a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, "What has been surprising has been China's willingness to be seen so publicly as doing this and being the most forward of Afghanistan's many neighbors to be doing this."[22] The Taliban have been attempting to revive the Mes Aynak project, a copper mining effort initially secured by Chinese interests in 2008 but effectively dormant due to security concerns and a lack of infrastructure.

The Third Foreign Ministers' Meeting among the Neighboring Countries of Afghanistan (including Russia), which concluded March 31 in Tunxi, China (dubbed by China as the Tunxi Initiative), specifically mentioned the Mes Aynak project as well as petroleum interests.[23]

Many of the extractive interests that China has expressed interest in, such as lithium, rare earth, and copper, however, require substantial infrastructure investment. According to two analysts, China can reap more immediate benefit with greater discretion by focusing on iron ore and pine nuts. In the case of the former, there are already a series of small steel mills throughout Afghanistan, and regional demand remains high. In the case of the latter, such goods are viewed as luxury items in China and have sold quickly for high profit when available. As an added

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[18] Asim Kashgarian, "With U.S. Away, China Gets Friendly with Afghanistan's Taliban," *VOA News*, February 1, 2022.

[19] Kashgarian, 2022.

[20] Charlotte Greenfield, "China's Foreign Minister Visits Afghanistan," Reuters, March 24, 2022.

[21] Ayaz Gul, "Chinese Foreign Minister, Russian Envoy Visit Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan," *VOA News*, March 24, 2022.

[22] Kashgarian, 2022.

[23] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Tunxi Initiative of the Neighboring Countries of Afghanistan Supporting Economic Reconstruction in and Practical Cooperation with Afghanistan," April 1, 2022.

benefit, in both cases, China can engage in Afghanistan with little direct state commitment and without taking on the risk of sending high numbers of its workers into an unstable environment.[24]

China is approaching Afghanistan in much the same way it works with Pakistan—engage but minimize risk. For example, the CPEC, a component of the broader BRI, has not lived up to its initial billing. Thus far, it has failed to reap the desired return on investment and Chinese workers have been attacked by militants and separatists. The CPEC currently accounts for only $62 billion of the estimated $282 billion China has lent globally—roughly 22 percent—and represents a considerable liability.[25] Most recently, on April 26, a suicide bomber killed the leader of the Confucius Institute at the University of Karachi as well as two Chinese teachers and a Pakistani driver.[26]

Russia's More Limited Engagement with the Taliban

Tajikistan plays an important role in Moscow's calculus pertaining to Afghanistan as it represents Russia's only treaty ally bordering the country (as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan now manage their own respective defense efforts).[27] This is potentially impactful, as Tajikistan stands out from the other Central Asian states in maintaining an adversarial tone regarding the Taliban and according to some reports is hosting and/or in contact with members of the NRF, an anti-Taliban group comprised mostly of ethnic Tajiks who are attempting to challenge the Taliban's monopoly in Kabul. Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has also pushed for the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to create a security belt around Afghanistan.[28] With the security of Central Asia remaining a top priority, Russia will have to move cautiously as it engages the Taliban without alienating its wary Tajik allies.

However, in March 31, 2022, Russia accredited a diplomat appointed by the Taliban for the first time, despite still formally classifying the group as a "terrorist organization."[29] Nevertheless, a Russian foreign ministry spokesperson confirmed, "We regard this as a step toward the resumption of full-fledged diplomatic contacts."[30]

Russian and Chinese Common Perspective on the Taliban in Afghanistan

From an ideological standpoint, Russia and China tend not to be overly concerned with the makeup of the government or with human rights practices when engaging with another state. In

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[24] Pantucci and Waziri, 2022.

[25] Murtazashvili, 2022.

[26] Pantucci and Waziri, 2022.

[27] Klyszcz, 2021, p. 11.

[28] Abubakar Siddique, "Hostilities Grow Between Taliban and Tajikistan Amid Border Closure, Truck Seizures," *Gandhara*, May 19, 2022.

[29] "Russia Accredits Taliban Envoy, Voices Concern About Islamist Groups," Reuters, March 31, 2022.

[30] "Russia Latest Country to Establish Diplomatic Ties with Taliban," *VOA News*, April 9, 2022.

the case of Afghanistan, however, there are practical reasons for each state to push for improvements. Both countries urge inclusive governance, because this would help demonstrate that a Taliban-led regime can achieve some semblance of stability; it would also reinforce commitments the Taliban makes regarding the tamping down of extremism and provide security for potential investments made by external actors. For Russia, the added benefit of incorporating ethnic Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Tajiks improves the likelihood that the Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan feel more secure and amicable to increased engagement with Taliban-led Afghanistan. In regard to human rights, the draconian measures of the Taliban since taking power have incurred near universal condemnation and limit the value China and Russia see in increasing ties with the government. Both countries will likely see draconian measures as anathema to increasing the prospects of stability.

Fundamental Challenges to Engagement with the Taliban

For years, the Taliban have proven adept at exploiting existing fissures among key global stakeholders and using it as leverage to play one against the other. For instance, in February 2019, the Taliban successfully blocked the participation of Afghan government officials at a peace conference hosted by Moscow. Such a move allowed an opportunity for the Taliban to build their *bona fides* on an international stage. It also allowed them to publicly meet and be photographed with prominent nongovernment Afghan influencers, many of whom were contesting then–president Ashraf Ghani for the presidency.[31] Their success in manipulating key global and regional stakeholders has come to an impasse, as the global and regional powers are thus far unified in their support for the Taliban to meet the three general requirements.

As previously noted, the international community's three general requirements are: (1) forming an inclusive government; (2) protecting the basic rights of minorities, women, and children; and (3) illustrating a clear break from terrorist organizations and guarantees that Afghan soil will not be used to plan or carry out attacks. On each of these points, the Taliban has demonstrated that they are unwilling and/or incapable of compromise.

Every commitment the Taliban has made pertaining to its governance has rung hollow.

As of June 2022, the Taliban continually insist that they are living up to their obligations or provide seemingly justifiable reasons for why commitments remain unmet. In regard to providing girls' schooling, for example, as deadlines for such inclusion have come and gone, excuses tied to a lack of funds to make the necessary refurbishments of classrooms to separate the sexes have persisted. In terms of disallowing terrorist organizations in Afghanistan, recent events demonstrate that this commitment is not being met.

[31] Sayed Salahuddin, "Afghan Government Frozen Out of Moscow Peace Talks with Taliban," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2022.

As an organization, the Taliban needs to thread a narrow needle between seeking and achieving international respect and recognition on the one side and, on the other side, continuing to hold itself up as a fundamentalist Islamic political movement aligned with the most conservative Sunni interpretations of Islam. This makes efforts to court nations such as China and Russia risky, as harder-line factions of the Taliban will be reflexively wary of concessions perceived to deviate from the group's fundamentalist roots. There is the added threat of negative propaganda stemming from the Taliban's chief rival, ISIS-K, who continue to carry out attacks in Afghanistan and serve as a viable alternative for fighters who view the Taliban as kowtowing to international pressure. The Taliban has moved to get ahead of this narrative by noting that China has an established principle of not interfering in the domestic politics of nations it engages with, though such justification may not hold up against more extremist narratives.[32]

As the UN Security Council report states, the Taliban "appear not to feel international pressure in specifying Taliban deliverables and penalizing non-compliance."[33]

Taliban's Long Track Record of Prioritizing Islamic Fundamentalist Values

As the UN Security Council has pointed out, the Taliban have demonstrated a "propensity to reverse policies and go back on promises made prior to assuming power." This statement directly pointed at the Taliban's previous commitments to support an inclusive government and the right for girls to attend school.[34] The Security Council wrote

> The Taliban also appear confident in their ability to control the country and 'wait out' the international community to obtain eventual recognition of their government. They asses that, even if they make no significant concessions, the international community will ultimately recognize them as the government of Afghanistan.[35]

According to a May 2022 report by the UN Security Council, the Taliban and al Qaeda continue to maintain a close relationship, with "several dozen" of the latter's core leadership currently residing in Afghanistan.[36]

Unfulfilled pledges have also hurt the Taliban's ability to bolster its security forces. Interim minster of defense Mullah Mohammed Yaqub Omari has reportedly stated a desire to build an

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[32] Murtazashvili, 2022.

[33] United Nations Security Council, *Thirteenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team*, submitted pursuant to resolution 2611 (2021) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace stability and security of Afghanistan, Report S/2022/419, May 26, 2022, p. 7.

[34] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 6.

[35] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 7.

[36] UNSC Report, 2022, pp. 12–13.

army of up to 150,000 and an overall standing security force of 300,000 to 350,000.[37] To support this, the Taliban has made attempts at recruiting former members of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, which were employed under the previous government. Their efforts have been hampered significantly, however, as initial calls of amnesty for such personnel have nevertheless resulted in reports of hundreds of retaliatory killings and kidnappings by Taliban fighters.[38] Such inconsistencies demonstrate insincerity and/or an inability by the Taliban leadership to instill guidance on subordinate elements within its organization.

No Sign of Tamping Down Extremism: Pakistan Demonstrating "Buyer's Remorse"?

In the immediate aftermath of the Taliban overthrow, senior Pakistani officials moved quickly to engage the new leadership in Kabul, attempting to solidify their position as key interlocutor among external stakeholders. For instance, as early as September 5, 2021, ISI director general Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed led a senior delegation to Kabul to discuss the formation of a new government as well as security and border issues.[39] As one publication described, "Pakistan's dapper spy chief was all smiles when he swanned into Kabul . . . three weeks after the Taliban regained power. During his visit . . . [he] tried to reassure a nervous world that Afghanistan's future would be rosy."[40] Later that month, then–Prime Minister Imran Khan, whose sympathetic tone regarding the Taliban had become widely known, made a plea during a recorded statement to the UN General Assembly for the international community to support, rather than isolate, the new Taliban leadership in Kabul.[41]

Now, in the context of Hameed's stepping down and Prime Minister Imran Khan being voted out of office, the once-promising relationship between Islamabad and the Taliban serves as a potential cautionary tale. Despite playing host to senior Taliban leaders and their families and providing various means of support throughout the past two decades, the Pakistani establishment is finding that their influence over the new regime in Kabul is not what they had hoped.

The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a Pashtun-dominated group that has challenged the writ of the Pakistani establishment along its frontier with Afghanistan for more than a decade, continues to conduct strikes in Pakistan. Over time, the Pakistani security forces have gradually pushed the TTP across the border into Afghanistan. Yet the rise of the Taliban has emboldened the TTP and frustrated Islamabad as the new powerbrokers in Kabul appear unwilling and/or

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[37] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 9.

[38] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 9.

[39] Ismail Dilawar, "Pakistan's ISI Chief Faiz Hameed Visits Kabul for Meeting with Taliban," Bloomberg, September 5, 2021.

[40] "Pakistan is Losing Patience with the Taliban," *The Economist*, April 30, 2022.

[41] Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan PM Urges World to Support Taliban, Not Isolate It," *VOA News*, September 24, 2021.

unable to stem their increasingly assertive activities. According to one analyst, after taking power, the Taliban granted the TTP de facto political asylum.[42]

The TTP constitutes the largest faction of foreign terrorist fighters within Afghanistan, with numbers estimated at 3,000 to 4,000 located mainly along Afghanistan's eastern and southeastern border with Pakistan.[43] Since the Taliban's takeover, the TTP has increased attacks and operations in Pakistan, and on March 30, 2022, announced a spring offensive against Pakistani security forces.[44] Since the Taliban took over in Kabul, militant attacks in Pakistan are up nearly 50 percent.[45]

In mid-April, 45 Afghans were killed as a result of Pakistani air strikes launched against villages in the Kunar and Khost provinces along the border of Pakistan.[46] While Pakistani officials have denied carrying this out, Taliban officials claim it was carried out by Pakistani helicopters and summoned Islamabad's ambassador for admonishment.[47] There is some sentiment, however, that rather than demonstrate a heightened willingness to act, the Pakistanis may have overplayed their hand: according to reports, at least 20 children were killed in the strikes, there is no evidence that TTP leadership was killed, and the event has apparently shored up support for the TTP within the Taliban.[48]

In the aftermath of the increased attacks, the Taliban recently agreed to once again mediate talks between the TTP and Pakistan, and in mid-May 2022, they were successful in negotiating a temporary cease-fire between the two sides.[49] A similar cease-fire agreed to in 2021 ultimately fell apart, however, over disagreements about the release of TTP prisoners held in Pakistan. While in the most recent iteration, there appears to be a greater willingness among Pakistani officials to consider the release of hundreds of imprisoned TTP members, these rumors have generated significant dissent among segments of the Pakistani population who feel they have

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[42] Asfandyar Mir, "Pakistan's Twin Taliban Problem: Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan Attacks Lead to Growing Tension Between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan. What's at Stake?" analysis and commentary, U.S. Institute of Peace, May 4, 2022.

[43] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 20.

[44] "Pakistan Taliban Announce Ramadan Offensive Against Security Forces," *Agence France Presse*, March 30, 2022.

[45] Kathy Gannon, "Pakistan's Relations with Taliban Regime Worsen," *The Diplomat*, May 19, 2022.

[46] "Pakistan is Losing Patience with the Taliban," *The Economist*, April 30, 2022.

[47] "Pakistan is Losing Patience with the Taliban," 2022.

[48] Christina Goldbaum and Safiullah Padshah, "'I Lost Everything': Pakistani Airstrikes Escalate Conflict on Afghan Border," *New York Times*, April 30, 2022.

[49] Mohammad Yunus Yawar and Saud Mehsud, "Afghanistan's Taliban Mediate Ceasefire Between Pakistan, Local Militants," Reuters, May 18, 2022.

been victimized by the group and who point to similar agreements over the year that failed to alter their behavior.[50]

Overall, one analyst outlines three potentially overlapping theories to describe the Taliban's position vis-à-vis the TTP: (1) the Taliban plan to use the TTP as leverage in its engagement with Pakistan; (2) the Taliban would like to see a fundamentalist organization such as the TTP eventually take power in Islamabad; and (3) the Taliban currently has neither the political clout nor the capability to press on the TTP, particularly given its ongoing rivalry with ISKP.[51]

The ETIM is a predominantly Uighur movement that the Chinese view as a particular threat, even though estimates of its overall size range between several dozen and up to 1,000 members.[52] According to the UN Security Council, there are reports that the ETIM remains active in Afghanistan and collaborates with TTP, and that its members are making efforts to solidify their presence through intermarriage and by relocating Uighur women from elsewhere. To assuage Chinese concerns and demonstrate a willingness to curb threats to the region, Taliban officials reportedly relocated elements of the ETIM from the Badakhshan province, where the short-shared border between China and Afghanistan is located, to central provinces, as a way of better monitoring the group's activities. There is no evidence, however, that any of these fighters have been transferred to Chinese custody.[53] There are also reports of roughly 40 to 50 Uighurs affiliated with ISIL-K in Nuristan province.[54]

Yet, despite significant evidence that the Taliban has made cursory, if any, effort to tamp down Islamic extremism in Afghanistan, its officials continue to claim the contrary. As recently as late May 2022, a Taliban spokesman claimed that the group was abiding by the Doha Agreement it signed with the United States in February 2020 by not "allowing anyone to use the soil of Afghanistan against any neighboring country."[55]

In its actions concerning the TTP and Pakistan, the Taliban is sending the message that it is willing to accept significant risk in remaining committed in its support for foreign jihadis in Afghanistan, even at the expense of broader international recognition.[56]

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[50] Abubakar Siddique, "'Rubbing Salt into Our Wounds': In Pakistan, Opposition Grows to Impending Deal with Tehrik-e Taliban," *Gandhara*, June 8, 2022.

[51] Mir, 2022.

[52] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 20.

[53] Murtazashvili, 2022.

[54] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 20.

[55] "India Engages Russia, China, U.S. on Afghanistan; Taliban Say Country Terror Free," *Times of India*, May 26, 2022.

[56] Mir, 2022.

No Sign of an Inclusive Government

Since taking power in Kabul, the Taliban has come to find out that maintaining group cohesion is more challenging without the unifying factor of what seems to be an irretrievably corrupt government acting as the puppet of unpopular international intervention. In time, this helped the Taliban to expand into parts of Afghanistan that were outside of its traditional Pashtun areas of influence and to attract members from outside the Pashtun tribes that predominated the group. In recent months, however, the traditional power brokers have moved quickly to consolidate their influence. Amid a concerted effort to relocate ethnic Tajik, Uzbek, and Turkmen communities from fertile land in the north, Taliban commanders representing these tribes have been replaced by Pashtuns from the south.[57]

Within these larger camps exists a dynamic vying for influence among various tribal and regional interests. While the particulars of this dynamic is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice to say that, in this context, use of the term "moderate" or "pragmatic" is a misnomer, in that no constituency in the Taliban openly supports negotiations with external entities that incorporate genuine concessions in exchange for continued aid and/or diplomatic recognition. In such a political climate, achieving support or even modest flexibility on the three primary concerns of the international community are difficult to foresee.

Reports persist that say, on a macro level, there are two competing camps among Taliban leadership—one typically classified as "moderate" or "pragmatic" and the other referred to as "hardline" or "ultraconservatives." The former camp places greater weight on achieving international recognition and more readily acknowledges that Afghanistan's economic stability hinges on continued external assistance and, ultimately, a place in the global economy. Even within this group, however, the goal is to achieve minimal economic and bureaucratic functionality while making as few concessions as necessary to do so.[58] The hardline bloc, on the other hand, views any concession to international demands as a sign of weakness and as anathema to the principles on which it has waged more than two decades of insurgency.[59]

Conclusion

History has not been kind to governing bodies who ignore Afghanistan's diverse ethnic and tribal networks and attempt to form a bureaucracy dominated by one Afghan faction. This history does not bode well for the success of the Pashtun-dominated Taliban government. External powers are not likely to get the type of security guarantees the Taliban has promised

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[57] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 8.

[58] UNSC Report, 2022, p. 8.

[59] Some analysts even include a third category, "extremists," to describe those who advocate for a full return to the repressive statutes of the 1990s Taliban regime and even a willingness to host other fundamentalist Islamic organizations and to essentially eschew external consequences.

vis-à-vis Islamic terrorism, which is a critical concern for all states in the region. The implication of this is that major powers like China, Russia, India, and the United States are not likely to make major or long-term investment or security commitments to Taliban-led Afghanistan until they are confident that the Taliban will control violent Islamic extremists and that the state will not divide into factions. Along these lines, according to one analyst, China will not commit to significant long-term investments until the Taliban demonstrates that it is a reliable security partner, which will likely require handing over members of the ETIM and proving it holds a monopoly on violence in Afghanistan.[60]

Recent tensions between Pakistan and the Taliban regime suggest that the Taliban's historical protector may not be as helpful as it was in the past. Pakistan initially took the lead in calling for international support for the Taliban regime, pressing for formal recognition of the new government. It has signaled to other stakeholders that it is willing to consider broader coordination on pressing the Taliban to adopt measures that most if not all stakeholders agree will improve the stability of Afghanistan.

As long as international stakeholders fail to reach some consensus on matters of mutual interest, the Taliban will continue to show favor to competing camps as a means of furthering their interests. There is no reason to suspect that they will refrain from never-ending semantic justifications or attempt to strengthen their de facto recognition via persistent international engagements with no intention of compromising.

With Russia currently distracted by its military operation in Ukraine, the United States may find opportunities to better engage the region and, by extension, affect events in Afghanistan. The United States might attempt to do so by engaging and building consensus among the Central Asia states, India, and even Pakistan.[61] Such a move is apparently a point of concern for China, as one Chinese scholar close to the Chinese military establishment suggested at a conference in October 2021 that, "Central Asia is Russia's backyard. We can't let the United States have a foothold."[62]

India's significant humanitarian assistance in response to the recent earthquake in Afghanistan could prove important in establishing meaningful working relations with the Taliban government. Prior to the earthquake, India was rightfully focused on the security aspect of its outreach with the Taliban, justified by things such as an uptick in narcotics and weapon seizures from Afghanistan to Kashmir since the Taliban takeover.[63] India must also be cognizant that recent entreaties by the Taliban are likely motivated by its troubled relationship with Pakistan as well as the lack of material progress in its discussions with China.

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[60] Murtazashvili, 2022.

[61] Murtazashvili, 2022.

[62] "China Will Not Be the First to Recognize Taliban Government, Scholar Says," Reuters, October 30, 2021.

[63] Taneja, 2022.

There are clear opportunities for the United States and India to cooperate in addressing mutual concerns regarding Afghanistan, pursuing regional and international approaches to the Taliban regime. In particular, the two nations could leverage their complementary diplomatic strengths. Washington could seek to engage Pakistan and perhaps China regarding Afghanistan. India, in contrast, could seek to coordinate with Russia, Iran, and other central Asian states. While such an effort is unlikely to materially alter the current independent efforts of China, Russia, and Pakistan, the current de facto international consensus requirements on the Taliban regime provide for a unique unified approach. Unfortunately, the intransigence of the Taliban on issues of mutual interest to all external parties is likely to endure. In light of this intransigence, common approaches, even if informal and not publicly stated, are liable to deprive the Taliban of its preferred method of leveraging international stakeholders against each other. Tragically, the Afghan people will suffer as a result.

Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUKUS	Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States
BECA	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAATSA	Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act
COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
DoD	Department of Defense
ETIM	Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement
GDP	gross domestic product
GWOT	global war on terror
IFC-IOR	Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
JV	joint venture
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
LM	Lockheed Martin
MSMEs	micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises
NRF	National Resistance Front
ORF	Observer Research Foundation
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
SLOC	sea lines of communication
TLMAL	Tata Lockheed Martin Aerostructures Limited
TSAL	Tata Sikorsky Aerospace Limited
TTP	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan

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ISBN-10 1-9774-1161-4
ISBN-13 978-1-9774-1161-7

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CF-A2613-1