

Editor's Note

The Significance of India-US Partnership

In less than three months since President Joe Biden assumed office it has become apparent that America's deepening and multi-dimensional relationship with India is set to become one of the two defining features of the first half of the 21st century global order-- the other being the US rivalry with a rising and predatory China led by a hard-line nationalist Communist Party leader, Xi Jinping. These two relationships are large, complex, and fascinating in their distinctly alternative politico-strategic dynamics, and inter-twined. Both relationships are between the world's leading global power, the US, and the two largest and rapidly rising but markedly different Asian powers, signifying that the global order has definitively moved its centre from the US-Europe Atlantic partnership to the dynamic and much larger Indo-Pacific regional complex. The fact that over the past few years the US and India, with Japan's active involvement and vision, have constructed their partnership within the Indo-Pacific geopolitical framework is therefore of far-reaching significance.

US, China, and India are the world's three largest countries that dwarf all others and would soon be the three largest economies and military powers as well—the first two already are. Their size, role, and evolution matter in every way in shaping the emerging order. The two leading Asian states, of course, represent two opposite political models for ordering societies and states, and therefore the global order. India is the world's largest and most diverse, multi-religious, multi-ethnic unified and vibrant constitutional democracy, China the world's largest autocracy that acclaims homogeneity in language, religion, culture as the foundation of a strong nation. Autocracy and homogeneity – brutally forced over large parts of the current Chinese geography-- buttress each other, the alternative democratic vision is unthinkable and legally punishable. The US-India strategic partnership tilts the

balance of power and of politico-economic systems decisively towards democracies. This is vital for building the emerging order based on rule of law, peaceful settlement of disputes, multilateralism, and universal principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the Constitutions of the US and India. Together, they can advance the interest of all nations. India's long tradition of universalism and pacifism is deeply rooted in its civilisation and culture and has significantly shaped its foreign policy. India brings balance, responsibility, growing comprehensive capabilities, and global legitimacy to the emerging Indo-US relationship. It is unlike any other strategic relationship that the US has and must be carefully nurtured so that the entire region gains.

But shared values, institutions and order do not thrive on their own; they must be sustained and backed by leadership, alliances and partnerships, and the power of the states. This is especially so when China's challenge is significantly shaped by its military power, ultra-nationalism, and systematic territorial expansion. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the rapid progress in Indo-US relationship is anchored on the defence relationship as its driver. This also indicates that the larger strategic goals are pre-eminent in shaping the overall relationship, the bipartisan US consensus and Biden's vision that a strong India is vital for stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific and for US foreign and security policy in the region. India too has shed many of its past hesitations and come to share this vision given the rising threats posed by China. The sudden and unacceptable Chinese military aggression in Ladakh in April-August 2020, amid a pandemic that originated in Wuhan and spread to the rest of the world has brought strategic clarity. A deep distrust of China that goes back to its occupation of Tibet in 1950-51 and the territorial aggression that culminated in the 1962 war, has worsened following Chinese conduct throughout the region.

Is the world, as many argue, destined for a new Cold War marked by rising tensions and confrontations over values, sovereignty, technology, strategic space, and economic gains? Much will depend on choices and policies China and its leader Xi Jinping make. It must call a halt to its expansionism, coercive diplomacy, economic manipulation, and political warfare to advance its interests. But it will also depend significantly on the new security policies and engagement strategies towards China that the United States and India evolve, and what the Quad comprising the US, India, Japan, and Australia together does to stabilise the region, contribute to its development, and constrain China's coercive and expansionist policies even as they engage Beijing in areas where they share common interest such as climate change. The first summit of the Quad leaders held in March underlines the commitment of the four nations to a comprehensive vision of cooperation and build a strong partnership to stabilise the vast Indo-Pacific region amid rising adventurism and predatory actions.

This special issue of *National Security* explores the strategic dimensions of the emerging Indo-US relationship under the Biden Administration and the Modi government. Some of India's most knowledgeable and outstanding experts, most of whom have actively shaped foreign and defence policy making of the country at the highest levels over the past few decades, have shared their thoughtful and informed perspectives. They emphasise the advances made in building the ties, the opportunities that exist to positively shape the bilateral ties and build a new global partnership, and the many challenges that need to be overcome. There is also an interesting American observation on the emerging India-US relationship. There is much that needs to be done to realise the vision of a strong Indo-US partnership and it is apparent that the leaderships in both Washington DC and New Delhi are committed to it and aware of their historic mission.

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