

## Article

# Prospects of India-US Defence Cooperation

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### Abstract

*In the years since Biden was last in office the geopolitical focus has transitioned from Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. The US approach over the years has been to support India's emergence as a strong pillar of regional stability. For India, the US is a major security partner, relied upon for capability development. Mutual convergence now transcends across political divide in both countries. The positive trajectory of defence and security relations however cannot be taken for granted. Some serious questions confront both sides: whether the defence and security component will be kept reasonably insulated from other contentious bilateral issues. How would the India-US-Russia relationship be balanced? How would India balance the imperatives of defence along disputed land borders with the vision of its role in the Indian Ocean? How transactional would the Indo-US relationship be? The paper suggests nuanced consideration of issues of divergence. The trend of India-US relations remains positive. It requires a review and reinvestment rather than any major reset- which however is imperative..*

As Joseph. R. Biden begins his term as the President of the United States following a tumultuous transition, there are speculations over changes that may be in the offing in US foreign policy. The early transition is being watched closely by India and the region to see how the new US administration will address the single most important challenge being faced by it in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century -- the rise of China under Xi Jinping, and what role would allies and close partners play in this contestation. In the years since Biden demitted the office of the Vice President, the geopolitical focus has transitioned from the Euro-Atlantic

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to the India-Pacific. China is now, for the US, a peer competitor- a challenger, a rival, and an adversary, ready to seize this moment to displace the US in Asia and eventually across the globe<sup>1</sup>.

The manifestation of China-threat has been starkly evident throughout Asia during the pandemic times-- in the South China Sea, East China Sea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and most directly across Indian borders in the Himalayas that has been thwarted by the Indian armed forces in Eastern Ladakh. These actions also saw a forceful push-back and calling out of China by the US, adding to the resolve of some of the regional powers to come together to counter Chinese aggression. With these challenges persisting, the US Policy under President Biden will be watched with concern (and expectation). India would be looking out for continued US commitment to be a major security partner, in face of Chinese challenge across its land borders and the Indian Ocean.

According to a recent paper by the Asia Society Policy Institute (ASPI), New York, over the years, "the US strategy was not simply to strengthen relations with India; it was a gambit to actively buttress India's rise, in hopes that a stronger India, economically, militarily and diplomatically, would be beneficial in tackling the China challenge"<sup>2</sup>. This consideration was the motivation behind President Bush's decision to conclude the US-India nuclear deal. The Obama administration carried this rationale forward bringing about convergence in the strategic vision for Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region. Likewise, some well-conceived, perceptive, and tangible actions by certain key Obama administration functionaries in the Pentagon and other departments ensured a smooth transition of this relationship to the Trump administration. Formalised in the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) 2017, these provisions ensured a smooth transition in the field of defence and security. Consequently, not only did this relationship survive but deepened substantially through the Trump era, with tangible results. At the macro level, it resulted in the transformation of the Asia-Pacific geopolitical framework to the Indo-Pacific, bringing India and the Indian-Ocean into the spotlight of regional security considerations. There are, however, concerns as the Biden Administration assumed office whether this shift would persist.

India and the US are significant stakeholders in maintaining Asia's stability, ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific, and in capability development to meet emerging challenges. For the US, India is a significant pillar of stability and a potential regional alternative to belligerent and hegemonic China. As Defense Secretary Jim Mattis stated on the eve of the inaugural Indo-US 2+2 dialogue in 2018, "India's significance lies in being a stabilising force on the region's geographic frontline"<sup>3</sup>. Also, the new US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken, recently stated that, "India and US face a common challenge in the form of an

increasingly assertive China, and that New Delhi has to be a key partner in engaging with Beijing from a position of strength.”<sup>4</sup>

For India, the US is now a Comprehensive Global Strategic Partner, on which it has chosen to rely to build and strengthen its defence and security capabilities; mitigate China challenge, gain political heft, and strengthen its technological and defence industrial base. Today, India is willing to shoulder the regional responsibility of mitigating the China challenge, at its own cost, without being an alliance treaty partner of the US. This mutual understanding has now permeated across the political divide in both countries, resulting in bipartisan support for the relationship. The attractiveness of Indian markets to the US business, including in the field of defence sales, has helped reinforce this perception.

Continuation of a positive trajectory of defence and security relations cannot however be taken for granted amidst the changing geopolitical and economic dynamics. This paper, while highlighting substantial results achieved in creating building-blocks of strategic partnership, identifies differences in perceptions, which need to be reconciled. Some additional issues of dissonance that may emerge with the new administration taking office have also been highlighted for both sides to be able to foresee and mitigate their impact.

Some questions that confront us and which merit mutual deliberation are: whether the new US administration will maintain the policy of keeping the defence and security relationship reasonably insulated from (turbulence in) other facets of bilateral relationship? Would Russia be considered, by the US, a 'lesser revisionist power' and a lower security challenge than China? Would the US accommodate India's imperatives of engagement with Russia? Would India's significance as a pillar of Indo-Pacific security be retained or the reliance would largely shift to alliance partners? What would be India's response to the US approach of possibly being more 'nuanced' (accommodative) towards China and Pakistan? What would be the impact of any slowing of India's economic growth on the motivation of the US (corporates) to maintain the momentum of defence and security cooperation? How would possible Indian engagement with China (for settlement of boundary dispute), post easing of Ladakh standoff impact India- US relations? Would the new US administration be able to make a distinction between strategic partners (like India) and treaty allies-- in its expectations?

### **Strategic Rationale of India- US Defence and Security Relationship**

To the US, India is the Western strategic pivot of the Indo-Pacific, vital to prevent the emergence of a Sino-centric Asia and to reclaim the strategic space incrementally lost

to China in the South China Sea. It is for this reason that the US, National Security Strategy (2017), National Defence Strategy (2018) and the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (2019) highlight the significance of India's role as a credible strategic partner of the US. These aspects are further amplified in the recently declassified 'US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific (of 2018)<sup>5</sup>', which rightly assumes (one of the assumptions) that the loss of US prominence in the Indo-Pacific would weaken US ability to secure its interests globally. Towards this end it identifies the significance of alliances and partnerships, remaining mindful that China would endeavour to dissolve them and exploit the vacuum and the opportunities so created. Amongst the regional partners of choice, it identifies India as a preeminent nation in South Asia that can take a lead role in maintaining security in the Indian Ocean region. Amongst the identified objectives of this strategy is to accelerate India's rise and capacity to serve as a Net Provider of Security in the region and a Major Defence Partner of the US.

To India, this relationship is consequential in balancing China, in both, continental as well as maritime domains. Towards this end, India seeks a reliable strategic partnership for acquiring, at its own cost, advanced weapon systems, niche defence technologies and operational capabilities, including in asymmetric domains. Alongside, it also aspires to develop its indigenous capabilities-- a legitimate aspiration of significant self-reliance. While capability enhancement is central to India's core security interests as a stand-alone power in the Indo-Pacific, it remains conscious of the strategic and military heft that the US provides by its robust presence in the region.

The contours of the Biden administration's approach towards China are still emerging. The general perception is that while the tough stance of the Trump era and its policy of balancing China through asymmetric capabilities and strengthening allies and partners would continue, but the implementation may be more nuanced. It is likely that a dual policy may be adopted to include economic reconciliation while maintaining a hard line on security and human rights issues. Biden's virtual address at the Munich Security Conference on February 19, 2021, was perceived, by a CNBC reporter, to be suggesting that, 'the new administration seeks to maintain a tough stance on China while moving away from Trump's pugilistic relationship'<sup>6</sup>. The selection of some of the political appointees in the new administration, continued conduct of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) and the dual-carrier exercise (PASSEX) conducted between USS Roosevelt and USS Nimitz in February is being projected by some as the continuation of hard-line towards China. At the same time, however, there are suggestions about the Biden administration adopting a *Kissingerian* (moderated) approach and of de-securing economic relations with China. The third Quad ministerial meeting was held on February 18, 2021, indicating continued US

commitment, but the content and tone of the statement of Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken<sup>7</sup> contrast substantially with the statement of his predecessor Mike Pompeo at the second ministerial meeting in Tokyo in October 2020<sup>8</sup>. Also, Biden's recent long telephone call with Xi Jinping and the message emanating from it suggest that the China policy of the new US administration remains a work in progress, which would be watched keenly by India, amongst others. The US-China relationship would be a key factor in shaping India-China and India-Russia relations and for India's capability development programmes.

### **Current State of Defence Relationship**

The Third India- US 2+2 Dialogue was held at New Delhi on October 26-27, 2020, during which the last of the remaining foundational agreements were signed. With this, most building blocks for transacting formal defence cooperation with the US are in place. India is now a signatory to all the foundational agreements. Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) (*India specific LSA- Logistics support Agreement*), was signed in 2016; Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) (*India specific CISMOA- Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement*), was concluded in 2018; and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA), was signed on October 27, 2020.

In the field of defence trade and industry cooperation, India was elevated to the Strategic Trade Authorisation (STA-1) status in July 2018, allowing controlled items to be exported under defined conditions without a transaction-specific license. The two countries formalised a Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) in 2014-15, for senior-level engagement and oversight to resolve process issues impeding cooperation and for alignment of the systems for technology and trade cooperation. India on its part has twice revised its Defence Procurement / Acquisition Procedure (DPP/DAP) in the last five years, in 2016 and 2020. Numerous issues related to streamlining acquisitions and leasing and concerning off-sets and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) have been reviewed to streamline defence trade.

An Industrial Security Annexe (ISA) to General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA-2002) was also signed in December 2019, enabling the transfer of classified technology and information between private industries of the U.S. and India. The two countries are now looking ahead to an ISA summit later this year (2021) to further strengthen defence industrial cooperation.

**The US-China relationship would be a key factor in shaping India-China and India-Russia relations and for India's capability development programmes.**

Towards the end of the Obama Administration, in June 2016, India was designated as a Major Defence Partner (MDP) of the United States. This was an India-supportive gesture by some officials and political appointees in the Pentagon, who were to exit the office, regardless of who won the elections, then. The aim was to cement the significant progress made within the US Department of Defence in redefining the bilateral relationship, by placing India at par with most of the US allies within NATO for technology release and cooperation. This status has been legalised and codified in US law, through the NDAA (National Defence Authorisation Act) 2017. An endeavour was also made in July 2018 to extend the provisions of 'Major Defence Partner (India) to the State Department, giving it legislative authority under Title 22. While the bill could not be passed, the idea remains alive.

In the sphere of military-to-military cooperation, India presently conducts the maximum number of military exercises with the US armed forces. Besides the service-specific and special forces exercises, a new bilateral tri-service amphibious exercise, Tiger Triumph was instituted in November 2019. This marks a notable step in building interoperability. Of the three domains, maritime engagement has attracted maximum attention. Regular conduct of India- US Maritime Security Dialogue, Malabar exercise, and positioning of liaison officers (LOs) by India and the US at Bahrain, US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) and Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), Gurugram (India) respectively, are some of the notable engagements in this field.

In defence trade, considered a significant constituent of the strategic partnership, India has acquired defence hardware worth approximately USD 18 billion from the US since 2008, with USD 3.4 billion worth of equipment being acquired in 2020 (According to the US Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). At present, the US-sourced equipment in service with the Indian armed forces includes C-130J, C-17, P-8i, Apache Attack helicopters, Chinook heavy-lift helicopters, MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones (on lease), M-777 Ultra-Light Howitzers, Harpoon missiles, GE – F404 and F- 414 INS6 engines (for LCA Mark II). The process is underway to acquire 24 MH-60 R (Seahawk) Multi-Mission helicopters for approximately USD 2.6 Billion, USD 1.86 Billion, National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System- II (NASAM- II) and the unarmed/armed drones. Numerous other weapons and munitions are also under consideration.

Besides the fields indicated above, there is wide-ranging multi-domain cooperation, including for counterterrorism, cyber and space. A robust structure of interaction at all levels -- from the ministerial 2+2 to the single service executive steering groups and the joint working groups in the field of service-specific and technology cooperation-- are

already functional. It would thus be evident that practically all the building blocks required for institutionalised defence cooperation are firmly in place. What is now required is their operationalisation.

## Differing Perspectives

The overall trend of India- US relationship has remained positive, but there exist areas of differing perceptions, as given below:

### US Concerns

#### i) *India's Approach towards China*

The US perceives that India, while clear about China being the primary threat to its national security, is under balancing it and remains Pakistan-centric in its defence posture. India seems (excessively) reticent, in calling out China directly, despite repeated intrusions across the LAC in recent years and the loss of lives of soldiers. The US suspects India's resolve to do 'heavy lifting' against China; and remains apprehensive that India would continue to hedge in maintaining Asian balance. According to an American analysis, "*there is a chorus of voices in Washington from both the left and right expressing anxieties about whether the value and sustainability of US engagement with India has been oversold*"<sup>9</sup>.

#### ii) *The Priority of Operational Domain.*

For India, defence along the land borders is an existential necessity to safeguard territorial integrity. The US, however, believes that the centre of gravity of defence preparedness and force application should lie in the maritime domain, exploiting India's vital geographic location in the Indo-Pacific. It views India's prioritizing of resources for land-centric operations as a territorial fix and 'India's strategic trap'. It perceives this as diluting naval and air capability against Chinese vulnerabilities in the Indian Ocean. Conscious of this dichotomy between the fundamental necessity of territorial defence and the vision of sharing regional responsibility, and as a net provider of security, India is making efforts to accord appropriate weightage to developing maritime and aerial domain capabilities. The challenge, however, is of developing these – *with (Indian) boots on the ground* along disputed borders, in a troubled neighbourhood, within limited financial resources<sup>10</sup>.

#### iii) *Developing Capability and Interoperability.*

The US emphasis is on developing interoperability and operational synergy between the armed forces, particularly between the navies. India's priority, however, is on developing its capabilities. Also, the perception amongst some in the US seems to be

that interoperability is a function of commonality of platforms and equipment while India believes that this can be achieved, at least at this early stage, even with diverse origin equipment, by streamlining command and control, communications, procedures, and drills. The US rationale is often perceived to be commercially motivated.

*iv) India-Russia Defence Relations.*

The US perceives Russia as a 'revisionist power'. For India however, Russia remains a crucial and long-standing defence partner. The US is also concerned over India's enduring dependence on Russian defence equipment. It perceives India's utilisation of multiple sourced equipment as a threat to its technology security.

*v) Irregular Defence Budget Allocations and Arduous Acquisition Process*

There are concerns over India's irregular and inadequate defence budget allocations, inordinately long acquisition cycle and apparently unplanned capability development. The recent thrust at indigenisation (*Atmanirbharta*) is viewed by the US as a manifestation of 'protectionism' and an act of diminishing opportunities for the industry. Defence budgets and acquisition process remain matters of concern even within India, and an endeavour is underway to streamline the process of defence acquisitions, budget planning and optimise allocations<sup>11</sup>.

## **India's Concerns**

Besides the above stated mutual concerns, there are certain issues which cause decision dilemma in India:

*i) Perception of Loss of Strategic Autonomy / Compromising National Security.*

Despite having largely overcome the hesitation of history, there remain misgivings regarding 'assured support' from the US. The impact of Iran sanctions, peace talks with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the looming threat of secondary sanctions under CAATSA upon acquiring S-400s from Russia tend to raise doubts among the policymakers about the total reliability of the US for Defence cooperation. Simultaneously, on the US side, perception prevails that despite being the long-sought goal of numerous US administrations, close military to military cooperation has not been achieved. Also, it is perceived that in quest of strategic autonomy, there is a tendency on part of India to plug-in and plug-out relationship, i.e., become closer during a crisis and to withdraw once the crisis is past<sup>12</sup>. Suffice to state that, while on the Indian side it would be worth considering a fresh perspective of strategic autonomy that would emanate once India emerges militarily stronger; the US side would do well to be guarded in accepting such far-reaching (sweeping) deductions, made on a

weak rationale.

ii) *The apprehension of Enhanced US-China Cooperation (G2).*

While the US remains apprehensive of India hedging China, India remains equally apprehensive of the uncertain nature of the US-China relationship, as seems evident. This is fundamental to the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US and the emerging architecture in the region. It also impacts India's capability development programmes and the course of its relations with other nations.

iii) *Likelihood of Greater US Accommodation Towards Pakistan.*

While the US-Pakistan relationship is unlikely to go back to the stage of giving Pakistan billions of dollars of military aid, suggestions are emanating for this relationship to be rebuilt for multiple reasons. The rationale revolves around its relevance to the US in Afghanistan, to prevent it from totally falling into the Chinese camp and to maintain leverage in managing India- Pakistan imbroglio<sup>23</sup>. Apprehensions also exist of the 'Kerry influence' on the administration and the NSC, in favour of Pakistan. While the course of this relationship would be determined on consideration of US national interests, India would expect not being hyphenated once again in this relationship. It would be undesirable for the US to ignore the terrorist threat emanating from Pakistan, with its history of complicity in supporting the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and continued waging of proxy war against India<sup>24</sup>. It would also be a serious flaw, and detrimental to India's security, if its capability development, for meeting challenges/taking on responsibilities in the region is calibrated from the perspective of not upsetting the India- Pakistan force parity.

iv) *Inadequate Sensitivity to India's National Interests (particularly vis-a-vis Russia).*

In developing a closer partnership, the US continues to voice concerns over India's defence relationship with Russia and its continued acquisition of Russian origin weapon systems. The aspect of nearly 60% of Indian armed forces' inventory being of Soviet/Russian origin is well known to the US. Besides, India has also highlighted the traditional, geopolitical nature of its relationship with Russia and the regional dynamics around Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Russia-India-China Grouping (RIC) and BRICS. The US needs to understand that this engagement is without prejudice to the shared Indo-US geostrategic vision and convergence in the Indo-Pacific.

v) *Transactional Approach of the US in Sharing Technology*

A perception prevails in India, based on experience that the US is excessively transactional in defence trade and sharing technology. The US (particularly under Trump)

believed that 'preferential' defence trade is inherent in the strategic partnership. Even the US defence industry has expectations of non-competitive access to the Indian defence market and tends to believe that India is low on any 'gives'. In contrast, on the Indian side, it still needs to be fully appreciated that there would be a cost to capability development. Some costs would need to be paid in financial terms while others come in the form of strategic concessions. This seems to be an inevitability in India's journey to capacity building and self-reliance!

### **Steering Bilateral Defence and Security Relationship**

It has often been said that "India and the US have (indeed) overcome the hesitation of history..." Both sides realise the value of this relationship, particularly in the field of defence and security. This positive trend has fuelled further expectations for much more and much too soon! There is an enthusiasm to hasten the pace, enhance the scope, and to iron out divergences-- perhaps at speeds to which the two democracies are not tuned in. This part addresses some of the nuances of transacting this relationship without unbalancing it.

There is an emerging narrative that defence and security cooperation has become the principal load-bearing pillar of the bilateral relationship and that the Biden administration would like to rebalance it, away from a disproportionate focus on security issues. A suggestion is made that the India-US relationship be built on a broader bilateral relationship that is not disproportionately dependent on defence and security ties and encompasses a wider array of topics including trade, global health, energy, climate change and technology cooperation<sup>15</sup>. While this rationale is based on the premise of 'an overburdened pillar', the author, with his hands-on experience of handling India-US defence relations would like to put forth the rationale of this relationship being the 'spinal cord' of India-US bilateral relations. In this author's perception, the impressive results that have been achieved over the last five years or so are attributed to our ability to keep the security relationship reasonably insulated from turbulence in other fields. A resume of events leading to the twice postponed inaugural 2+2 dialogue held in India in September 2018 and the outcome and growth in the relationship (amidst prevailing noise around trade, Iran sanctions and CAATSA then) suggests that, at least between India and the US, the strong bond of security relations does help iron out differences in trade and other fields. Choosing the right approach to be followed, between the two options, is critical to steering this relationship.

Another contentious issue whose shadow has transitioned from the Trump to the Biden era is of Indian apprehensions (and US threat) of imposing sanctions on India under 'Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)', in the event of India

acquiring five regiments of S-400 Air Defence System from Russia. A pragmatic analysis of the origin and intent of this bill, rooted in sanctions directed towards Iran, North Korea, and Russia-- for its actions in Crimea and Ukraine, for cyber-attacks and interference in US elections-- would suggest that a blanket imposition of sanctions under the act would be misplaced and counterproductive for India-US relations. As aptly highlighted during

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the US legislative debate, this would complicate relations with US partners and allies that traditionally transact significant military relations with Russia (e.g., India, Vietnam). An inadequately thought-out action also has the potential of undoing years of efforts to build mutual trust and cooperation. Apprehensions are often expressed over the increased risk of compromising US defence systems if operated alongside Russian origin equipment. This well may be real (or exaggerated) and is best reconciled by setting up a joint technical group analysing operational employment of different origin systems and the nature of their actual interface. In its absence, speculations in India of this being a ploy to further the interests of the US defence industry cannot be wished away. Prudence suggests resolving such apprehensions professionally, through experts. Also, it merits consideration that the Indian military inventory is large enough to have near independent segments for the Russian and the US/Western sourced weapon systems. Assurance concerning firewalling of differently sourced technologies has repeatedly been given by India, in letter and spirit.

It would also help if a subtle distinction were made between 'partners' and 'allies'. While India is a 'Major Defence Partner' of the US, but even this stature is somewhat different than that of an 'ally'. India does not impose the burden of its security-- financially or in terms of troops deployment-- on the US, as inherent in a treaty. A natural outcome of this should be in moderating expectations, particularly when it comes to obligations under secondary sanctions imposed by the US. Making this distinction would help to forge a better understanding.

Another area of concern on both sides is the multiplicity of relations, with countries not perceived favourably by the other side. India will remain particularly sensitive to how the US transacts relations with Russia, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Likewise, the US will also remain sensitive to the nature of India's relations with Russia, Iran and China, India's engagement with Quad and actions in Western Pacific, etc. Both sides would do well to note that the countries of our size and stature would confront, compete, and cooperate in different spheres with other countries, all at the same time, in keeping with their national interests. Differences over such engagements can be minimised by understanding and

'empathy'; which can be created by transparency, mutual trust and dialogue. Overflow of differences from one field to another needs to be minimised. A methodology suggested in the Atlantic Council's recently published, "The Longer Telegram: Towards a New American China Strategy"<sup>16</sup> maybe relevant. This policy paper suggests a hierarchy of issues of national interest with a graduated response: a shortlist of 'red lines' which are focussed, non-negotiable and enforceable; areas of 'major national security concerns'- which warrant a response but not necessarily military; areas of 'strategic competition'- which are neither existential nor critical and where conflicts can be resolved by means other than the threat or use of force; and finally, areas of 'strategic cooperation'- where engagement in bilateral or multilateral strategic cooperation, even with adversaries, may continue. This 'ladder' could well indicate the acceptable (or unacceptable) levels of engagement by India and the US, with third countries.

The biggest impediment in carrying forward strategic relations seems to be the inability of the two countries to evolve an 'overarching framework of strategic partnership' or acceptance of the reality of issue-based cooperation. This would help define a 'predictable trajectory of defence relationship', in the absence of which the engagement remains ad-hoc and sporadic. This would also give mutual assurance of convergence of vision and create greater confidence on both sides.

### Concluding Thoughts

The most important factors in forging defence and security cooperation is 'predictability and reliability. The ongoing discourse in some think-tank deliberations and re-evaluation of America's relationship with India appears to be focused on India's current fiscal limitations, the perceived drift towards 'illiberal majoritarianism', or the nature of response towards China<sup>17</sup> in the context of the current standoff. This is not in keeping with the stated aim of building long -term strong relations with India or in helping India build its capability to stand up to the China challenge. What matters to the Indo-Pacific and in particular Indian Ocean security is the emergence of a strong India, irrespective of the dynamic nature of India's/US' relations with China. Also, in becoming strong, the source of acquisition of weapons and equipment should not be of concern, so long as there is a convergence of vision for security, between India and the US.

**The most important factors in forging defence and security cooperation is 'predictability and reliability.**

Transitions are always uncertain and do create anxieties over the unknown. This is particularly so when it is in the most powerful office in the world and where the stakes between the two countries are high. While the overall trend of India

– US relations remains positive, it is imperative to take note of issues of concern on both sides and set-course by addressing them mutually. Prima facie, this relationship needs only a marginal review and reinvestment, rather than any major re-set; but both are urgently required. It also merits understanding that there will never be 'iron-clad' guarantees and that there would not be any 'altruistic' defence and strategic partnership. Pragmatism, empathy, and transparency would help.

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