

Indian Foreign Affairs Journal
(a Quarterly of the Association of Indian Diplomats)

***Special Issue on
India-US Relations under the Joe Biden Administration***

A robust bilateral strategic partnership with India has been backed by successive United States administrations. It enjoys strong bipartisan support from the two main political parties in the US the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Special focus on prioritising India-US relations can particularly be observed since the Clinton Administration, with increasing importance given to it by successive Presidents since then. A range of factors have contributed to this ascendancy in the bilateral relationship between India and the US, most importantly, the acknowledgment of India's growing economic and strategic importance and its rising weight in global and Asian geopolitics today. As Joe Biden assumed office as the 46th President of the United States with a formal inaugural ceremony on 20 January 2021, questions about the nature of India-US relations under a new US administration have become pertinent. This issue of the Journal focuses on various aspects of India-US relations under the Biden administration.

During his campaign, President Joe Biden had declared that if he won the November elections, strengthening relationship with India-- a "natural partner", would be a high priority for his administration. Laying further emphasis, he added that the India-US strategic partnership is "necessary and important in our security."

The established structural framework between the two countries, such as Indo-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership; the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue; India's designated status as a Major Defence Partner of the US; strong bilateral trade in the defence sector undergirded by a mutual democratic spirit and strategic convergences in the Indo-Pacific region are likely to continue to provide momentum to the bilateral relationship. Unlike the approach of the Trump administration, the Biden administration is not expected to be transactional in its relationship with India. Besides, India would naturally expect more poise by the Biden administration on issues, such as the H1B Visa.

Although the road ahead for US-India relations is expected to be largely stable under the Biden Administration, global recalibration of the US role may impact the modus operandi

that may avowedly seek to undo some of the policies of the preceding administration. Since the campaigning of the 2020 US presidential elections, India has maintained a deft political poise befitting its foreign policy orientation. It is one that allows a politically comfortable bandwidth to work with either a Democrat or a Republican President in the US. This approach in India's foreign policy orientation has been appreciated by recent administrations in the US, allowing for a broad range of issue-based cooperation while still keeping fundamental differences on core interests at bay. This mutual understanding is likely to continue to guide India-US relations under President Joe Biden. India should, however, watch out for any unintended consequences of the Biden administration's undoing of Trump's foreign policy legacy that may impact US-India relations, or indeed India's regional or global interests.

Among the first few global leaders to congratulate Joe Biden on his win, Prime Minister Modi made a telephone call to congratulate the incoming US President on 17 November 2020. Both leaders reiterated their "firm commitment to the Indo-US strategic partnership, and discussed ... shared priorities and concerns, COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region." PM Modi's congratulatory message to Vice President designate, Kamala Harris, also set a tone for India's readiness to engage the new US administration, even as Prime Minister Modi emphasised (in his message to her that he was, "confident that the vibrant India-US ties will get even stronger with [her] support and leadership."

With the aforementioned changing political landscape in the US, this issue of the Journal focuses on issues and challenges to India-US relations under the new Biden administration. What will US-India relations under Biden Administration look like? Will the fundamental levers driving India-US relations get further strengthened? Will Biden's approach to India be fundamentally different from Trump's? Will it be, by and large, the same? How will the impact of the pandemic influence the future course of this strategic partnership? Will the understanding between the two countries on the Indo-Pacific persist?

The Journal has, periodically published 'debates' on India-US relations. The last one was four years ago, in 2017.¹ Six experts had commented in the debate, titled "The Advent of the New Administration in the USA: Global and Bilateral Ramifications".

1 [http://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol12/12.1/12\(1\)-ejournal.html](http://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol12/12.1/12(1)-ejournal.html)

For this special issue, the Journal invited a few experts on the subject to comment on the above issues. Their views are published in the following pages

January 21, 2021

(The views expressed by the authors are their own, and do not reflect the views of the Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, or that of the Association of Indian Diplomats)