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India-US Relations under the Joe Biden Administration

Special Issue

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Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, or that 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.* Six experts had commented in the debate, titled "The Advent of the New Administration in the USA: Global and Bilateral Ramifications".

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)

Notes:

* [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)

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Indo-US Relations under the Biden Administration: Predictable Difficulties Ahead

Chintamani Mahapatra*

There are expectations all around that Indo-US strategic partnership will remain robust during the next four years of the Joe Biden Administration in the United States. This expectation is derived from India's experiences with previous Democratic administrations, especially starting with the early years of the 21st Century.

The foundation of the bilateral strategic partnership between India and the United States was laid when Democratic President Bill Clinton made a path-breaking visit to India in March 2000. It was trailblazing because President Clinton had strongly responded to Indian nuclear tests in 1998 by imposing sanctions, and withholding cooperation with India in a number of areas. In less than two years after the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government declared India to be nuclear weapon power soon after the Pokhran nuclear tests, the Clinton Administration decided to restore cooperative ties with India. Clinton's India trip, however, was more than just the restoration of normalcy in Indo-US ties. Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Clinton signed a Vision statement to lift the bilateral relationship to new heights; and the work towards shaping up a strategic partnership between the two countries soon started.

The next Democratic President after Clinton was Barack Obama. Despite some initial glitches and diplomatic strains arising out of the Devyani Khobragade incident, the Indo-US strategic partnership expanded and deepened further during the Obama Administration. President Obama has, so far, been the only US president to have visited India twice during his tenure. His administration made India the "linchpin" of the US strategy of "pivot to Asia" that subsequently came to be known as the "Asia Rebalance" strategy.

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With this historical backdrop, analysts anticipate that the third Democratic President of the United States in this century would continue to carry forward the foreign policy goals and orientations of the party and, thus, there is little to suspect there will be any major disruption in US policy towards India in next four years of the Biden Administration. Significantly, Joe Biden had long innings in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and was also the Vice President during eight years of the Obama Administration, in which he played a significant role in building his country's flourishing cooperative ties with India.

The second reason that has generated constructive expectations of US policy towards India is the appointment of several Indian Americans in crucial executive positions in the administrative structure of the Biden Administration. While these officers will unquestionably seek to promote American interests, there is hope that they will be proficient communicators in bilateral Indo-US dialogues, and can better comprehend and appreciate Indian views on critical issues.

The third factor that has propelled hopes of healthier ties between India and the United States under the Biden Administration is a series of statements issued by Joe Biden himself during the 2020 presidential election campaign, later as president-elect, and then since his inauguration as the 46th president of the United States. In addition, several supportive statements about India-US ties were also made by his Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defence, and the National Security Adviser - Anthony Blinken, Lloyd Austin, and William Burns, respectively - during their confirmation hearings in the Senate. In fact, some of the key members of the Biden national security decision making team, including Kurt Campbell who has been designated as a special envoy for the Indo-Pacific, are expert India hands who have extensive knowledge of India, and have long experience in dealing with the Indian officials and leaders.

Now the main question is: are all the above three factors sufficient to project that the Indo-US relationship under the Biden Administration will be more constructive, cooperative, profound, and wide-ranging? In answer, one could say that, realistically, one need not be overly optimistic. While it can be anticipated that the areas of US-Indian bilateral cooperation will gather more steam in coming years, it would be more pertinent to foresee and focus on the challenges, complications, and probable impediments that may lie in the way.

What then could be the principal challenges in this relationship? First, it is essential to be cognisant of the fact that post the COVID-19 pandemic, international relations will no longer be the same in the coming years. The

COVID-19 pandemic has immensely disrupted the economic relations among nations that were built over the years through evolving rules, practices, a dynamic regionalism, and acceptable norms of economic behaviour. Restoring normalcy in the patterns of trade, investment, and foreign assistance in the post-pandemic world is neither going to be simple nor quicker in time and pace. In the process, new hitches and concerns are likely to arise that will require progressive solutions to resolve differences and ease economic transactions. India and the United States are, at present, outside economic groupings, such as the CPTPP and RCEP. Bilateral friction over issues such as IPR, market access, tariff rates and rules, ease of doing business, protection given to foreign direct investment, etc. are probable, and likely to pose significant impediments for a smooth bilateral affinity to emerge. There will also be some spill over bilateral differences over residual issues deriving from the Trump era, such as tariff and GSP.

Secondly, some Democratic legislators in the US House of Representatives and Senators, who often raise their voice over issues, such as human rights, governance, and religious freedom, will most likely be on the go to make anti-India statements during congressional hearings or otherwise, and kick up political dust. In this age of social media, with almost unhindered access of individuals to express opinions, political differences between the leadership of the two countries can generate controversies that may sometimes spiral out of control. Only in the recent past, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar had to cancel a meeting with a Congresswoman, Pramila Jayapal, to avoid bitter exchanges or unnecessary controversy. Statements made in the US, on Kashmir, NRC, CAA, or farmer protests, are particular concerns that need to be handled carefully.

Third, India and the US will continue to have a broad convergence of interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Both would like to oppose Chinese expansionist activities and predatory economic practices. Both would continue to defend the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue process, popularly known as the Quad. Both would keep supporting the principle of “ASEAN centrality”. However, real challenges will, no doubt, crop up in the details. As of now, the Biden Administration has made it amply clear that the Indo-Pacific strategy of his predecessor would continue to be in his foreign policy agenda. President Biden has expressed his resolve to act tough against Chinese policies and practices aimed at building Beijing’s hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. By repeatedly announcing that “America is back”, Biden has signalled his willingness to face the over ambitious Chinese in cooperation with the Trans-Atlantic allies as also with allies and strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

It is not clear yet how the US allies would react and respond to the Biden Administration's expression of interest to return to the world stage to play its traditional leadership role. The mistrust generated by the Trump Administration has not disappeared in the allied countries. The signing of an investment treaty between the European Union and China, and the decision of Japan, Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand to join the RCEP are indications that the traditional allies will not treat Biden's invitation to easily restore the old relationships of the pre-Trump era.

It is important to underline that both India and the United States are not party to the RCEP, or even the CPTPP. In the meantime, China's bellicose posture at the Line of Actual Control has made India toughen its stance over economic cooperation with China. The US hopefulness that economic engagement with China would make this country a stakeholder in the West-led international order has been belied. Similarly, the Indian belief that economic engagement with China would ensure a peaceful border and make for dispute resolution through dialogue and negotiations has also not fructified. Neither the US nor India support the Chinese stand on Pakistan-sponsored terrorist activities.

There are many such developments that make it appear logical that India and the USA should now be alliance partners. The signing of the four foundational agreements, such as BECA and LEMOA; regular and increasingly sophisticated joint military exercises by the Indian and American armed forces; procurement of billions of dollars' worth of US military hardware by India; and growing strategic convergences amidst fast changing geopolitics - all make it appear reasonable to alleviate Indo-US strategic partnership to the level of an alliance.

However, what appears to be rational and logical may not be realised in the foreseeable future. Rather, a coordinated Indo-US strategy, though required, will be hard to agree upon. The most complicated diplomatic challenge would be to devise a strategy that would allow India to retain its strategic autonomy, prevent Chinese aggression and, at the same time, enable it to leverage its equation with the US at the time of Chinese assertiveness.

It is a good development that, in less than a month since it came to power, the Biden Administration has hinted at its strategy of fiercely dealing with its "strategic competitor" - China. President Biden has announced that "America is back"; has reinforced the US commitment to NATO; and has assured the US allies in the Indo-Pacific - all with an aim to deal with an aggressive China along with the allies and partners. In a very rare pro-active

step, the members of the Quad have had an online meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers, emphasised the need for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, and underlined the principle of “territorial integrity” and “freedom of navigation”. While the gesturing is clear, the details are as yet unspecified.

Will QUAD emerge as a mini-NATO type Pacific Pact? Will it be enlarged to include other willing countries of the region? Will it turn into a military grouping of nations? Will it openly turn into a mechanism to contain or constrain China? Will it take steps to undo the Chinese occupation of islands in the South China Sea? These are all difficult questions that may impinge upon future negotiations and the deliberations of interlocutors of India and the United States.

Fourth, Indo-Russian relations will set certain limits to Indo-US defence cooperation. While Russia is no Soviet Union, successive US administrations have not been able to live comfortably with President Putin’s Russia. The resurgence of Russia as an influential actor in the geopolitics of Eurasia has made it difficult for Washington to reverse Moscow’s actions in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, Crimea, and even Iran. India has a close strategic partnership with Russia, and would not like to end its arms trade with that country. The US Congress has enacted CAATSA to prevent third countries from having arms trade with Russia. It has already imposed sanctions on China for purchasing S-400 missiles from Russia. The Trump Administration refrained from imposing sanctions on India, but did not give the waiver either.

The Biden Administration has a difficult choice to make, and this issue will influence the course of Indo-US ties as long as the issue is not kept off the table of decision-making on sanctions. It may so happen that President Biden will stay away from imposing sanctions related to the purchase of Russian S-400 missiles by India. But what will Washington ask for in return? Will India be able to concede to American demands? These matters are beyond any speculation at the moment.

Fifth, India has come a long way from the time when Pakistan was a constant factor constraining Indo-US relations. India has managed to tackle Pakistan-sponsored terrorist activities in various sensitive regions of India. The Indo-US cooperation in counter-terrorism operations has been undoubtedly beneficial. But it would be rash to write the obituary of terrorism in India and its neighbourhood. As long as a nuclear powered, unstable, and backward country like Pakistan exists, and a rising superpower like China backs it for strategic reasons, India cannot afford to relax. In the process, the US role remains crucial. And the US role will be hindered to a significant extent as long as the US troops remain in Afghanistan, and US dependence on Pakistan

for safety and security of its forces persists.

The Biden Administration is currently in the process of reviewing the Trump Administration's deal with the Taliban. It is a welcome development since the Taliban did not live up to its commitment to abjure violence. Moreover, the Afghan government was kept out of the Doha Deal. The situation in Afghanistan, where India has invested nearly 3 billion dollars, is so volatile that the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces in the present circumstances will culminate in the victory of the Taliban. The second Taliban regime in Kabul will be a distinct failure of the USA and its allies, and the potential behaviour of the regime post the withdrawal of Western forces is anybody's guess. Alternatively, if the standoff between Western forces and the Taliban carries on, Pakistan will be the main beneficiary. The Pakistan lobby in Washington is already at work to team up with those political elements which raise questions on India's domestic issues, including human rights in Kashmir, religious freedom, CAA, NRC, and even farmers' protests.

Sixth, India will have to navigate the arduous waters of geopolitics in the West Asian region when the Biden Administration begins to address the issues related to the Iran Nuclear Deal, the Saudi-Iran cold war, the Shia-Sunni divide, the continuing stalemate in Syria, persistent civil strife in Yemen and Libya, and many other similar complicated developments.

West Asia is a region that houses millions of Indian migrant workers, provides the crucial energy resources that are so significant to fuel the Indian economy, and has had historical, social, and cultural linkages with India for centuries. India and the United States will continue to have critical differences on some of the issues in the region. The challenge before Indian diplomacy will be to ensure adequate and safe energy supplies, and deftly manage its differences with Washington.

One may thus conclude that India-US relations under the Biden Administration will witness further constructive cooperation in the trajectory of a burgeoning strategic partnership, but the difficulties and challenges will remain enormous as well. The Big Picture of Indo-US relations in next four years will be quite imposing, but the challenges that come in the way will be the real test for Indian diplomacy.



India - US Relations: Continued Convergence, New Vistas, Managing Differences

Arun K. Singh*

Four factors have historically impacted India-US relations: the US perception of its global role and challenges, and the resulting choice of strategy and partners; the relevance of Pakistan in this context, and its search for political, military, and strategic advantage against India; the prevalence of the cooperative or the adversarial in the assessment of China; and the strength of the bilateral economic, defence, and political relationship. The new US Administration faces the additional complexities of a COVID-19 ravaged economy, and a Trump-ravaged domestic political context.

In his post-election victory speech on 7 November 2020, then President-elect Joe Biden identified four priorities for his government: dealing with the pandemic; reviving the economy; addressing systemic racism in US society; and responding to the challenges of climate change.¹

The new National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan, has said explicitly on a number of occasions, that US foreign and domestic policy would be linked. He feels “there [i]s need to put America’s middle class at the centre of foreign policy debates and decision-making”,² and that “right now, the most profound pressing national security challenge for the United States is getting our own house in order”.³ Clearly, the fact that 74 million Americans voted for Trump in 2020 (11 million more than in 2016, when he won the electoral college count by 306-232), will have a bearing on the external economic, technological, and political choices for the new President. Their impact domestically on jobs and global technological leadership would influence the control of the US Congress in the 2022 midterm elections (with consequences for the President’s legislative, economic, and judicial agenda) and, of course, the 2024 Presidential election itself.

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(This article was received from the author on February 8, 2021)

Donald Trump continues to hover in the background. His supporters, and those who seek political careers riding on the coat tails of his “Make America Great Again” rallying cry and divisive slogan, with its embedded dog-whistles to racism and ‘white nationalism’, will condition the battle playing out within the Republican Party, between them and the “traditional Conservatives”. The outcome will affect the Republican approach to the Biden domestic and foreign policy agendas, at times forcing or constraining choices.

Global Role

Accompanied by Vice President Kamala Harris, Biden made a visit to the US Department of State on 4 February 2021, his first to any cabinet agency. It was a deliberate message against Trump’s derision and undermining of the role of the organisation. Biden also declared that “America [wa] s back”, that American diplomacy was back, and that the USA would reinvigorate its alliances and partnerships, and re-engage with the world.⁴

The credibility and acceptability of the message will only be tested by time. Other countries have noticed the deep division within the US regarding its external role as well as its multilateral commitments. In May 2017, following Trump’s questioning of US commitments to NATO and its allies, German Chancellor Angela Merkel had said that Europe must take its fate into its own hands.⁵ The EU finalised a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China in December 2020 during the transition, ignoring National Security Adviser designate Jake Sullivan’s tweet at the time that “the Biden- Harris administration would welcome early consultations with [their] European partners on [their] common concerns about China’s economic practices”. In a conversation with Atlantic Council on 4 February 2021, French President Macron said that Europe must work for its “sovereignty” in decision making,⁶ since the US response to Libya in 2011 and Syria in 2013, even in the pre-Trump era, had shown that US domestic politics and resulting foreign policy choices were not always aligned with those of Europe, in which France, Germany, and the UK were inclined towards a more robust intervention for regime change in those countries.

The large voter turnout for Trump, and his continued hold over the Republican Party will, for now, reinforce questions regarding the post-Biden administration’s sustainability of the new US approach. Biden’s call for “Buy American”, his declaration that the US would not enter into any fresh trade agreements till the competitiveness of the US worker is restored indicate that he has absorbed some of the reasons for Trump’s victory in 2016.⁷

Divisions in the US about its external commitments have been sharpened by the mistakes made, and the ignoring of, till 2016, the negative impact on the “American middle class”. Since 1990s, post the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US had led the world towards the globalisation of trade and production. It was the “hyper-power” without any peer. The “End of history” was projected, with victory of democracy and liberalism over communism and authoritarianism.

In the resulting hubris, US leaders failed to account for the limits of their influence, leading to overreach through a military intervention in Iraq in 2003, and “taking the eye off the ball” in Afghanistan during 2005-06, resulting in the revival of the Taliban. Subsequent interventions, even though done with some reluctance, in Libya and Syria created vacuums of governance, ceding space to extremist and terrorist groups as well as the ISIS declaring a Caliphate. More than twenty years of “forever wars” has had a deep impact on US society, through lives lost, disabling injuries, and disrupted families.

To this has been added the economic impact. The US GDP overall benefited from globalisation, despite the 2008 global financial crisis and the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The elite in the US benefited, with the top 1 percent now accounting for around 40 percent of income and wealth.⁸ However, the fabled middle class and manufacturing in the US took a hit. Income levels for 35-40 percent of the population stagnated for nearly three decades, longevity came down, and death rates and drug addiction went up. This was the vote that Trump tapped into, along with those motivated by racist and anti-immigrant sentiments. They were energised by the slogan of “take our country back” from the growing power and presence of minority and immigrant groups. Trump walked out of the 2015 Paris climate agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership on trade; raised tariffs on imports from China as well as European and Asian allies and partners; decried US global commitments; pushed European allies into spending more on their defence; forcing Asian allies to pay more for American bases; and worked to end US military involvement in Syria and Afghanistan. All this kept his voting base with him, and added to his numbers in 2020.

The Biden team is aware of this. But they are also aware that the world “does not organize itself”;⁹ others will seek to fill any vacuum, and set rules, norms and standards geared to their own interests. They will, therefore, seek to redefine the US role, “for the world as it is and not as it was before 2016”. As this effort is made, there will be some continued convergence and some new opportunities for the US-India relationship.

At the State Department, Biden also said that the “American leadership must meet this new moment of advancing authoritarianism, including the growing ambitions of China to rival the United States and the determination of Russia to damage and disrupt our democracy”. Iran, North Korea, Climate Change, and terrorism have been listed as the other priorities for the incoming administration.

Continued Convergence

The Indo-Pacific will provide for the continued convergence of interests of India and the US.

Since the George Bush administration, there has been a growing sense in the US of the potential challenge from China, and the resulting need also to reinvigorate the India relationship. The India-US Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, finalised in October 2008, enabled the lifting of technology restrictions and, starting from near zero then, India has now contracted for US\$ 20 billion of defence supplies from the US.

As the Biden administration was coming in, questions were raised about its China policy, and whether or not it would continue with the adversarial approach articulated by the Trump administration since December 2017. At his confirmation hearing on January 19, Secretary of State designate, Tony Blinken, said that he agreed with the substance of Trump’s policy on China, and his predecessor Mike Pompeo’s formal characterisation of Chinese actions against Uyghurs in Xinjiang as “genocide”.¹⁰ Secretary of Defence designate, Lloyd Austin, said, at his own hearing the same day, that Asia would be the focus of US effort, and he saw “China, in particular, as the pacing challenge”.¹¹ Following Blinken’s February 5 call to Yang Jiechi (Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chinese Communist Party), the spokesperson of the State Department said that, ‘Secretary Blinken stressed the United States will continue to stand up for human rights and democratic values, including in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, and pressed China to join the international community in condemning the military coup in Burma. The Secretary reaffirmed that the United States will work together with its allies and partners in defence of our shared values and interests to hold the PRC accountable for its efforts to threaten stability in the Indo-Pacific, including across the Taiwan Strait, and its undermining of the rules-based international system’.¹²

Questions were also raised about the Biden approach towards an “Indo-Pacific” strategy. The term had been brought into more general use under the

Trump administration, which had also renamed the Hawaii based Pacific command as the Indo-Pacific command - a signal that India was an integral part of US strategy in the region. After Blinken's call with his Indian counterpart, Foreign Minister Jaishankar, on January 29, the spokesperson of the State Department noted that "the Secretary underscored India's role as a preeminent US partner in the Indo-Pacific".¹³

Following Biden and Blinken's calls with their counterparts in Australia and Japan, there has been support articulated for the Quad with India. Austin also reiterated (on January 19) that he would "seek to deepen and broaden our defence cooperation through the Quad security dialogue".

Clearly, while some rhetoric and tactics may change, there is no going back for the new administration from the essence of the Trump Administration's China strategy.

China was recognised as a major global rival in the National Security Strategy Report of December 2017,¹⁴ after some flip flops in the earlier part of the year. Chinese President Xi was invited to Trump's Florida resort at Mar-a-Lago in April 2017, and Trump visited China in November of that year. Post December, there was broadly a 'whole-of-government' approach, with the Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence, National Security Adviser, Attorney General, FBI Director, and a host of subordinate officials coming out with a series of coordinated policy pronouncements. Exceptions to this were the Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, and Adviser to the President, Jared Kushner, who was seen as continuing to focus on advantages from cooperation.

There was also a 'whole-of-society' approach with the Administration's messages directed at US businesses, universities, Governors, think tanks, and the entertainment industry, to recognise the dangers emanating from China, and not give in to blandishments, or short term financial or profit needs. China's authoritarian system under President Xi was described as a challenge to US espoused democratic values; its predatory economic and forced technology transfer practices were described as a challenge to US technological leadership; and its unilateral military assertions in East and South China Sea and elsewhere were assessed as challenge to a rules based international order. A series of measures were adopted to deny technology and financing access targeting Chinese technology companies; those linked to its military; and those involved in internationally illegal construction activity in the South China Sea. Constraints were placed on the operation of Chinese media and Confucian Institutes in USA, its Consulate in Houston was closed, and sanctions were

placed on Chinese officials involved in the crackdown and human rights violations in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, and higher level US government contacts authorised with Taiwan.

The Obama-Biden Administration, over 2009-16, had also vacillated on China, initially calling for “strategic reassurance”, but eventually gravitating to “pivot” and “rebalance”, recognising the growing economic, technological, and military challenge, including Chinese unilateral assertions in the East and South China seas, and the militarisation of certain features.

There are, nevertheless, differences among US policy makers about the specifics of the strategies to be adopted. Unlike the approach to the former Soviet Union, “containment” is ruled out because of the deep Chinese linkages with the Western and global economy. In an article he had co-authored in September/October 2019 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan, had argued that while the “era of engagement with China has come to an unceremonious close ... each will need to be prepared to live with the other as a major power ... coexistence will involve elements of competition and cooperation.”¹⁵

The specifics of the new administration’s China policy will, therefore, only congeal over time, and in responses to emergent challenges. Its European allies, including Germany and France, are also canvassing against a solid anti-China front, hoping to keep opportunities open for their business interests. Western countries and their allies have also, so far, not shown a united front against the Chinese selective targeting of Norway, Sweden, Australia, ROK, Japan, at various times, through coercive economic measures. US and European businesses have not cut down on investments in China over 2020, despite the pandemic, and various measures adopted by the Trump administration.

Given the challenges in its own relationship with China, India will find convergence with the US approach, but will have to be prepared for US decisions guided by its own interests and domestic advantages.

New Vistas

In a COVID impacted world, the search is on for “trusted and secure supply chains”, going beyond the earlier globalisation driven imperative of least cost suppliers. With the experience of 2020, the nature and location of work is bound to change. New frontiers of technologies in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cyber, digital, and biotech are going to fundamentally change how we live and work. All these will create new opportunities for

India-US relations, as leaders on both sides seek to build on the convergence of interests and values.

A base has been laid for the next leap. Bilateral trade now stands at US\$ 147 billion, a seven-fold increase since 2000. There is deep interlinkage in IT.¹⁶ A significant part of India's output in this sector is exported to the US. While visiting Silicon Valley, one can see that the Indian origin skilled work force and tech entrepreneurs are an integral part of US global leadership in innovation. This sector has grown impressively even amidst the pandemic, and will continue to provide the backbone for post COVID economic restructuring.

Both countries have agreed to cooperate in defence innovation and technology, and Indian companies are beginning to be a part of the global supply chain of US defence manufacturers. They have signed agreements in defence, providing for reciprocal logistics support, communications compatibility and security, and exchange of geospatial data. US has declared India as a Major Defence partner in 2016, and later placed it at STA 1 (Strategic Trade Authorization Level 1) for highest level technology releases. They now do more military exercises with each other than with any other country bilaterally and, in 2018, initiated a 2+2 dialogue at the level of Defence and Foreign Ministers. They also meet in a trilateral format with Japan, and further in the Quad with Australia.

President Biden has been a consistent supporter of the India relationship: calling for the removal of sanctions against India in 2001; piloting the Civil Nuclear Cooperation agreement through the Senate in 2008; visiting India as Vice President in 2013; and describing the relationship as a “defining partnership” of the 21st century. In an interview in 2006, he had said that his dream was that, “in 2020, the two closest nations in the world will be India and the United States.” In a special message on India's Independence Day in August 2020, the campaign had asserted that a ‘Biden Administration will also work with India to support a rules-based and stable Indo-Pacific region in which no country, including China, is able to threaten its neighbours with impunity ... Biden will deliver on his long-standing belief that India and the United States are natural partners ... Biden believes there can be no tolerance for terrorism in South Asia – cross-border or otherwise.’¹⁷

Managing Differences

There will inevitably be differences, since each country takes decisions based on its own interests, compulsions, historical legacies, and geopolitical imperatives.

Empathetic management of these differences will facilitate continued consolidation.

India cannot align with the adversarial US approach to Russia, since more than 60 percent of its defence inventory is still of Russian origin; there is significant reciprocal investment in energy; and it must be prevented from aligning with China on India-China issues. India would expect that the US will see it to be in its own interest not to impose CAATSA sanctions for the purchase of S-400 - otherwise the US would be perceived here as an unreliable partner.

India would hope that in its review of the agreement with the Taliban, the US will insist on the Taliban meeting its commitments on ceasing support to terrorist groups; keep its military drawdown conditions-based; and support the Afghan government to ensure a peaceful political reconciliation. Pakistan's feet will also need to be held to fire to ensure that it stops providing safe havens and support to terrorist groups active against Afghanistan and India, despite its current relevance for enabling agreement with the Taliban.¹⁸

There could be nuances in the reaction following the recent military coup in Myanmar, with the US emphasising the overthrow of a tentative democratic power sharing,¹⁹ and India keeping in mind also the strategic imperative with a neighbour,²⁰ wherein anti-India insurgent groups have found safe havens and support in the past, and disengagement could open the space completely for Chinese domination.

India began a new two-year term at the UN Security Council in January this year. In the past, India's position on preferred responses to many global crises has differed from that of US. It will be a test for both countries how they reconcile differences that still persist.

The Biden Administration has come in with a very progressive and proactive approach to issues of Climate Change. India would expect that as reinforced efforts are made to cap global warming, and it has taken initiatives through the International Solar Alliance, calls for disaster resilient infrastructure, ambitious domestic plans for renewable energy, its differentiated responsibility as a developing country is recognised, and support is provided through finance and technology access.

US leaders have expressed concerns over human rights issues on some of the actions of the Indian government in Jammu and Kashmir, or on NRC and CAA, etc. US has its own challenges in systemic racism and voter suppression. These would need to be discussed, as a dialogue among friends,²¹ recognising that each society has its own challenges, and keeping in mind the broader strategic frame of the partnership, especially in the context of the current global flux.

Prognosis

It can be expected that the new phase in India-US relations, initiated with the Bill Clinton visit in 2000, and sustained in an upward trajectory under the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations, will be further consolidated under President Biden. He has himself claimed credit for the progress in the Obama-Biden administration over 2009-2016.²² There is now reinforced convergence with the common challenge from China. Global economic, trade, and technological ferments will create new opportunities for both countries. The mature handling of divergences, and giving each other some necessary geopolitical space will prevent unnecessary turbulence.

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India and the Biden Presidency

Annurna Nautiyal*

The change of guard in the US with Donald Trump's departure from the White House, after the bloody mayhem created on Capitol Hill by his supporters, highlights the fact that the Democrats under the Presidency of Joe Biden will have to pave a realistic way for healing the wounds of the American people, and rebuilding America's image in the world. No doubt it will be a very tough challenge to unite a badly fractured society, secure and ensure its diversity, and repair America's tarnished image worldwide, especially with the Trump Administration's inept handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the unusual acrimony and unpleasantness witnessed during the presidential election in one of the oldest democracies like the US has done its image more harm than good. Now, as things are settling down in the US, anguish is slowly giving way to compassion; order is returning; and the vaccination drive against the COVID-19 pandemic is working slowly to changing the internal mood in the country. Inevitably, discussion and debate about the US role and its relationship with countries like China, Russia, India, and Pakistan has also started to surface.

Joe Biden's Assurances

President Biden's decision to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord, withdraw all support to Saudi Arabia's military intervention in the Yemeni War and take appropriate action against Russia's cyber attacks on the US departments and institutions are clear indications that his administration will alter some of the policies of his predecessor which, in effect, were not serving the national interest of the United States. Instead of resetting relations with Russia, President Biden has indicated a new strategy of deterrence, after the US and Russia formally approved the five-year extension of the New START treaty - then the only surviving nuclear arms control treaty between the two countries.

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President Biden has also changed President Trump's attempts to force NATO nations to enhance their burden sharing and to redeploy 12,000 US troops stationed in Germany. President Biden declared that the US has no plans for such troop withdrawal and proposed stronger alliance relationships to deal with Russian and Chinese expansionist policies.

President Biden, moreover, has assumed leadership role to deal with humanitarian and health crisis, such as COVID-19 pandemic that can be better addressed in cooperation with other nations. President Biden has displayed his clear support to multilateralism in place of his predecessor's tendencies to resort to unilateralism.

Obstacles and Opportunities

Significantly, promotion of democracy not only in the US but throughout the world has also been listed as a priority by President Biden.¹

The recent military coup in Myanmar, and the arrest of democratically elected leaders by the military junta, and the Russian government's harsh treatment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny have posed a challenge to this goal of promoting democracy. President Biden has urged the military in Myanmar to hand over power to the civilian government, and also threatened both the military junta of Myanmar and Russian leader Vladimir Putin of consequences if democracy is not restored in Myanmar at the earliest, and if Russia does not put an end to its provocative activities worldwide. However, it is yet to be seen how these warnings of the US are taken by these countries. Importantly, President Biden has also underlined the need to engage even with adversaries and competitors diplomatically in the interest of the security of the American people. On the one hand, President Biden's message assures that the US foreign policy will be charted to fulfil the needs of the American people; but on the other hand, he also knows that the US will have to compete from a position of strength by improving domestic politics, work with allies and partners, and renew its role in international institutions so that its credibility, leadership position, and authority to deal with shared challenges is established again.

For this, the US will need the proper coordination and support of the world's democracies, and also a favourable consideration towards their concerns and interests. Presently, the US has many more partners and allies throughout the globe than does China. But China's attractiveness through its trade, infrastructure loans, and Belt and Road initiative projects have increased its reach in all parts of the globe. It is also being predicted that China's economy

will be the world's largest by the end of the decade and, therefore, President Biden will have to persuade his allies to have a coordinated approach to that country to overcome challenges. This becomes more important in view of the European Union's decision to sign an investment accord with China despite US concerns and anxieties against such deals.

Although democratic countries are quite fearful of Chinese designs, Beijing's growing footprints through trade and infrastructure development projects have lured many democracies to fall into its debt trap. In such a situation, President Biden will have to develop much closer understanding with like-minded democracies like India. At the same time, the Biden administration may also seek ways and means to work amicably with China. China's trade and aid policies have earned it a degree of acceptance with quite a few nations of the world and, therefore, the use of deft diplomacy in place of coercion would be the best course of action for the US to disengage the democracies from the influence of China. As China's rise and expansions cannot be easily reverted, coordinating with democracies and taking them along to manage China would be the best option. Although it is also true that many US partners aspire for economic benefits from expanding more trade and commerce with China, they are equally very worried and suspicious of China's intentions.

India's Role and Expectations

India's role in the Asia-Pacific was recognised clearly by Barrack Obama and Hilary Clinton, and they both promoted cooperation with India on issues, such as counterterrorism, enhanced trade, collaborations on Climate Change and also cultural issues. The Trump Administration also followed through on some of these areas of cooperation. Since Sino-Indian differences over border and territorial issues, India's opposition to China's encirclement tactics, do not make it difficult for the US to have Indian support to handle China on some issues. As a matter of fact, almost all of India's neighbours have cordial ties with China and are generally supportive of its developmental aid policies. The Chinese encirclement of India through its Belt and Road Initiative, and the luring of all its neighbours through loans for the development of roads, railways, and sea port networks is a major source of worry for India. India is trying to counter anti-India moves by China through aid and development diplomacy, conducting joint naval and military exercises with partner countries, playing a pro-active role in the QUAD, and expanding connectivity from east to west through its Act East policy, Sagarmala, and Spice route projects. The security of its land and sea borders, increasing its reach and say in world

affairs, and managing relationships with its neighbours is very important for India to maintain its global image.

In fact, in its second term, the Modi led government is facing various challenges which were absent in his first term. Management of international reactions to the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, the CAA, and the farmer's movement can be cited as examples of these challenges. While the Biden Administration has advised that the democratic right of protest should remain unhindered, it has also supported three farm laws which have been passed by the Modi government. And, it is also noteworthy that, despite hurdles and problems, India is moving with confidence and courage in international forums, and diversifying its friends. This has been exhibited by the purchase of Rafale fighter planes from France, and other weaponry from Russia and the US. India is also showing clarity in its preferences by broadening its options, and choosing like-minded democracies as its partners.

The development of an Indian vaccine against the COVID-19 pandemic, and free distribution of vaccines to many countries, including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Maldives have earned considerable goodwill for Indians in the international community. India's deft handling of the pandemic at home by imposing a timely lockdown, saving a large number of lives, and managing the economy ravaged by the pandemic has also enhanced its international image.

India's export of hydroxychloroquine to willing importers, its commitment of around US\$ 2 million to the WHO, and its early call for a cooperative fight against the pandemic are some other goodwill gestures made by the Indian leadership. During the G-20 summit in Osaka (28–29 June 2019), Prime Minister Modi succeeded not only in hammering out the fact that Climate Change and Terrorism were two common enemies of mankind but also promoted a trilateral understanding among Japan-US-India to deal with Chinese illegal expansionism in the Indo-Pacific. However, India continued to be part of the India-China-Russia trilateral as a mechanism to promote a multilateral world order.²

India is not only making attempts for fast paced reforms in the economic sector for achieving the goal of becoming a US\$ 5 trillion economy by 2024, surpassing the current US\$ 2.8 trillion, but it is also working hard to create many "smart" cities, villages, to improve public amenities, and enhance quality of education in higher education. The extraordinary connection of Prime Minister Modi with the Indian Diaspora and his popularity was seen during the Howdy Modi programme organised in support of the mercurial US President Trump in Houston Texas and a similar event in for President Trump

before the 2020 US presidential elections. They clearly indicated Prime Minister Modi's ability to maintain a very close relationship with the US despite President Trump's unpredictable policies, and his criticism of India's trade policies and specific curbs on H-IB visa issues.

The Way Forward

The USA under President Biden can benefit from India's experience of dealing with China, which continues to exploit the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang; destroyed democracy in Hong Kong; and has made unfriendly moves towards many countries in the Indo-Pacific, including Australia, Japan and India. President Biden should work together with the US's alliance partners and other democracies to deal with the aggressive China.

The level at which India is currently playing out its foreign policy is certainly adding to India's diplomatic and political capacities. One issue that India would not like the US to interfere is Kashmir. If the Biden Administration stays off it, it will facilitate unhindered political cooperation between the two countries. India's insistence on the non-acceptance of third-party intervention in India's internal matters is part of its long-standing principles. India will continue to hold the position that, talks and terrorism cannot go together. The Indian Defence Minister's statement that talks with Pakistan - and that too only on POK - can be held only after it stops terrorism of all kinds is a message to all third countries, including the US. The displeasure shown by India in a very mature and measured manner against the former US President Trump's desire of mediation in the India-Pakistan dispute, and getting support from Russia and Saudi Arabia for bilateral resolution of disputes with Pakistan symbolise the apt handling of foreign relations by the Modi government. The support from neighbouring countries (like the Maldives) which termed the issue of Jammu and Kashmir as India's internal matter is also a success of Indian diplomacy. The USA understands China's tactics, which include its greedy geo-economic and geo-political ambitions which are opposed to the ideas of the free world. The absence of clarity of US positions on global issues, and the isolationist tendencies of the Trump Administration actually made China bold enough to expand its reach and influence. In India's perception, an economically and geo politically powerful China is not only an obstacle for India's dream of becoming a leading power in Asia but also crushes the freedom and security of weaker nations of South Asia and South East Asia. China's constant moral, economic, military, and infrastructural support to its all-weather friend, Pakistan; Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal after the

Chennai connect; the cementing of many agreements (including those of a trans Himalayan corridor between China and Nepal (CNEC), and a railway line to connect Tibet and Kathmandu); its engagement in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; its expansion of naval power across the IOR; and its focus on connectivity and infrastructure development through BRI - all confirm India's apprehensions of an expansionist China. India thus has enough reasons to coordinate its diplomatic and other strategic moves with partners, such as the United States to deal with the emerging Chinese threat to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. However, despite showing firmness not to support BRI, and the attempts to save neighbours from the debt trap, India has carefully crafted a policy that would not enhance hostility with China. During the fourth meeting of the QUAD (in Bangkok in May 2019) while supporting the idea of partnerships to promote a transparent, rule-based approach to trans boundary challenges, India avoided issuing any statements which could offend China. India is also collaborating with Vietnam, Japan, and other regional powers, but without annoying China. The unresolved border dispute; frequent scuffles with Indian troops; the Kashmir issue; the trade imbalance; the growing power disparity between India and China; and the unpredictability of US support have also forced India to play its cards with precision. Despite knowing that China is eating into Indian Territory in Ladakh, and Pakistan's support to various terrorist outfits, a face-saving exit from Afghanistan forced the US under the Trump Administration to ignore all these, even at the cost of India's national interests. The helplessness of India in such situation - sandwiched between China and Pakistan and no assurance of support from either the US or Russia - has made the challenge more serious. Therefore, India has to have a balanced and nuanced approach towards China. During the Trump Administration, the US and Indian governments seemed to have moved closer. The two countries signed certain agreements and cooperative frameworks which made ties stronger. Such a projection of stronger ties gained importance in the wake of the China-India stand-off in Ladakh. In view of the current pace of growing Indo-US relations, it is unlikely that there will be major changes in Indo-US relations under the Biden Presidency.³ It can also be assumed that, in the larger global scenario, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, the US concerns about countering China's power which directly affects America's global role, will require closer relations with India as it is the fulcrum in Asia and can help in establishing a power equilibrium. And, the USA requires a friendly country which is interested in burden-sharing and checking China's growing aggression - a role which India can fulfil easily as it is not dependent on other countries.

While China cannot be thrown out from the international scene, the US can, however, deny it technology, scientific research, investment in sensitive US companies - all of which will adversely affect China. According to some analysts, Atma Nirbhar Bharat issues can affect India-US relations, but good communications between the interlocutors can remove misunderstandings. The US also intends to replace Russia as India's biggest defence partner. However, this will not be possible despite best efforts by the Biden Administration in the foreseeable future. The Modi government is also apparently under political pressure for alleged curbing of religious freedom in India by enacting the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA); discriminating against Muslims; and building up the Hindu agenda - all of which are not true. But as the Democrats are pro-active on Human Rights related issues, and use them as pressure tactics tools of foreign policy, India is apprehensive about US policies under the Biden Administration, and is watching developments in this regard carefully. However, presently the US is also a divided society, and the movements for the protection of the civil rights of people of colour and diversity will not allow the US administration to use this card comfortably. In view of this, it will be too early to make any judgement about the future course of US policy towards India, Pakistan, China, and the Indo-Pacific despite US concerns about Chinese expansion and aggression. However, it can be hoped that the US will not act against India's interests.

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India and the United States in the Emerging Global Order

Arvind Kumar*

Contemporary geopolitical debates on the post pandemic world order point to certain indicators on the nature of the emerging global order. Whether the new global order will be led by China, and also what will be the role of India and the USA in shaping the emerging global order has formed a major part of the discourse. It must be emphasised here that the shifting of the centre of gravity from the ‘West’ to the ‘East’ has been severely impacted by the ongoing pandemic. China’s desire of becoming unipolar power in Asia in a multi polar world will be too difficult to realise in the changing dynamics of geopolitics. China’s growing efforts to attain supremacy and primacy in the international system is being reflected in its behavioural patterns. India’s rise has become a dominant factor in checkmating China’s strategic aspirations.

After a series of tumultuous events in the US, Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States of America on 20 January 2021. How the United States is going to shape its orientations towards India is featuring in all the major debates among members of the academic and strategic community. The narrative that the USA has done fairly well in building a constructive engagement with India during Republican President Donald Trump’s Administration needs a closer examination. One can come up with a counter narrative by saying that the strong foundations for bilateral cooperation between India and the USA were built during the Presidency of President Clinton who was a Democrat. The Democrats slowly and steadily changed their perception about India. The last phase of the Clinton years was a turning point in Indo-US relations, though the Indo-US defence cooperation agreement was signed in 1995 during President Clinton’s first term. The day President Clinton stopped using his famous phrase, “cap, rollback and eliminate” in the context of India’s nuclear weapon programme, there was a sea change in

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mutual perceptions. All the existing misperceptions paved the way for the evolution of a robust bilateral strategic engagement. President Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 was, undoubtedly, a new beginning in Indo-US relations.

The United States was aware of India's predicament and deteriorating regional security environment. The rationale for India going nuclear was very well understood by the United States. Until then, India's nuclear weapon status was seen as an irritant in the bilateral relationship; but it finally became a cornerstone in the existing strategic engagement. The credit goes to Clinton's Presidency for providing a platform in the form of the Strobe Talbott-Jaswant Singh Dialogue. The benchmarks for the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) were based on the bilateral understanding, and reflected a willingness to work on mutually identified core strategic areas, such as nuclear, outer space, defence technology, and the harmonisation of export control regimes.

Over the years, a strong foundation has been built in Indo-US relations which are marked by multifaceted dimensions, such as political, economic, strategic, nuclear, and diplomatic. The Indo-US strategic engagement has come a long way, and is predicated on the changing dynamics of geopolitics where it seems China's rise features prominently in the current dynamics. The evolving global disorder because of the "Wuhan Virus" has provided an opportunity to both India and the USA for further strengthening their relationship. India will emerge on the top of the US priorities because of geopolitical compulsions.

President Biden certainly will not take any stand which would prove antithetical to the growing bonhomie in Indo-US ties. India and the United States have converged on a number of issues impacting global peace and stability. India is being perceived as a responsible and potential major power in the making. The bilateral strategic engagement between the US and India has witnessed a greater emphasis in this emerging world order. NASA-ISRO Cooperation has reached new heights in outer space matters. India and the United States have set up the Mars Working Group. Raytheon is playing an important role in India's Gagan navigation system.

The US will obviously be continuing with its supply of conventional weaponry to India. It might even become integral to India's 'Make in India' campaign. India would very much like to transition itself from a net importer of conventional weaponry to a net exporter of these weapons. The Inter Agency Task Force, which has been a part of the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), has been seriously engaging in identifying the

parameters for such defence cooperation. India has been contemplating the possibilities of co-production of F-16 and F-18A combat aircraft. Defence co-production involving the critical technology will remain a challenge; but the commitment shown on the part of the USA towards India is worth mentioning.

It would be in US interests if the Biden Administration has continuity in its foreign policy orientation towards India. Indo-US counter terrorism cooperation has provided good dividends to both sides by realising the containment of threats emanating from terrorism. The military-to-military exercises have experienced a very positive phase in the maritime domain. India's role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture is going to be vital along with that of the USA. The role of the Indian Diaspora in President Biden's Administration will become dominant in the key policies domain.

India and the USA together will have to assume responsibility, and lead world affairs. India's growing significance in almost all the domains - whether it is maritime or outer space - is being understood by the rest of the world in general, and the US in particular. The China factor also has to be dealt with, especially in view of its aggressive posturing around the world.

No doubt, China will feature on the top of the radar in US foreign policy agenda because of the changing dynamics of geopolitics. The US national security strategy, its defence strategy as well its military strategy has categorically mentioned China as America's primary threat. China's aggressive behaviour through the militarisation of space, and in the South China Sea, its "wolf warrior" diplomacy, and its military aggression on the India-China border have raised questions regarding peace and stability in the emerging global order.

Afghanistan stands at a critical juncture, and India should be included in any form of US-led negotiations on resolving the Afghan issues. The dice was rolled when the Trump Administration signed the peace deal with the Taliban in Qatar early in 2020, paving the way for the treacherous intra-Afghan talks. There will be continuity in terms of eventually reducing American troop presence in Afghanistan, and focusing more on a leaner force presence which will be devoted to counter-terrorism operations coupled with reconciliation activities. These were Joe Biden's preferences while serving as Vice President.

The future of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, and the contours of US-Pakistan ties will be an important development to watch. Pakistan has continued to play a dubious role in the war on terror, inviting criticism from many in the

US policymaking community. Afghanistan will remain a challenge for the Biden Administration, especially when the Taliban is not showing any signs of adhering to the obligations made in all the peace dialogues. Indo-US efforts in building peace in Afghanistan might give a new direction to the regional order.

Another foreign policy challenge in the emerging global order will be Iran's nuclear ambitions. Iran has always featured in the list of American adversaries since the Islamic revolution in 1979. The animosity increased substantially because of the divergences over the Iran's controversial nuclear programme. The Obama administration was able to come up with a multilateral negotiation with Iran that resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, the Trump Administration abrogated the JCPOA, and the killing of Iranian commander, Qasem Soleimani, has brought US-Iran tensions to its height. As such, despite his best intentions, to what extent President Biden and his team will be able to recalibrate the relationship with Iran is crucial. How India will manage the existing contradictions between the United States and Iran remains a part of the challenge for the emerging global order.

A number of other challenges will persist for the current Biden Administration. One of them is managing its complex relationship with Russia. India will have to manage its equations with Russia in a manner that does not impact its strategic partnership with the US in the emerging global order. Moreover, the broader question of moving ahead and managing ties with American allies also remains a matter of importance. As President Biden said in his inaugural speech, "We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again." Furthermore, with the former Secretary of State, John Kerry, entrusted with leading America's Climate Change diplomacy - after eschewing President Trump's questionable approach to the issue - it will be worthwhile watching America's steps in this regard. The India-US bilateral engagement will be vital for the success of the Climate Change negotiations. This will also remain critical in the emerging global order.

Besides bilateral issues in the India-US relationship, how the Biden Administration approaches these foreign policy questions will be of consequence to India's dealings with the USA. India has a complex relationship with China; its role in Afghanistan is crucial; it has deep ties with Iran as well as Russia; it plays a pivotal role in the Indo-Pacific in partnership with the United States; and is an inevitable factor in the global drive against Climate Change. The broader arc of stability in the India-US relationship, the election of Kamala Devi Harris as Vice President, and the appointment of a number of Indian Americans in the Biden Administration has given much optimism, and

raised expectations as far as the India-US relationship is concerned. However, India will need to be pragmatic and forward looking in terms of how it can leverage its multifaceted relationship with the United States for securing its national, regional, and global interests.

The United States on remaining the leader in advances in science and technology will obviously ensure the means of continuing to negotiate from a position of strength with the rest of the world. Its increasing presence in outer space will provide a distinct edge as compared to the rest of the world. Undoubtedly the US will face impediments in maximising its interests in a multipolar world. The challenges which US allies confronted during President's Trump Administration will have to be addressed by President Biden. The trust deficit between the United States and its allies will need to be bridged. Hopefully, President Biden will be able to help US allies in regaining confidence. The USA will need India on its side in the complex geopolitics of the emerging global order.

Will President Biden be successful in keeping the USA a pre-eminent power? Will the US under Biden Administration be accepted as a world leader? These questions are being much debated among the academic community in the USA. President Biden has had good experience in understanding the complexities of the world system in his role as the Vice President for eight years. The reversal of President Obama's policies by President Trump on a number of pertinent issues impacted global peace, stability, and Climate Change, and weakened the US role in global affairs.

Since the signing of Indo-US defence cooperation agreement in 1995, both countries have augmented efforts in creating a conducive atmosphere for a win-win situation. India has worked with four Presidents since 1995 (Bill Clinton, George Bush Jr., Barack Obama, and Donald Trump) who were both Democrats and Republicans. During this period, the USA found India to be both a responsible and a reliable partner in the evolving dynamics of geopolitics. India has figured prominently on the US radar across Presidencies on almost all key decisions taken in defence cooperation.

Even during the concluding days of the Trump Administration, the US Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo, and the US Secretary of Defence, Mark T. Esper, visited India for the "2+2" Dialogue between the Defence and Foreign Ministries of the two countries. One of the most notable developments of this visit was the signing of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) on geospatial intelligence sharing - it was the last of the foundational agreements. This is in addition to the earlier signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), and the Communications, Compatibility

and Security Agreement (COMCASA), both of which have given a new direction to growing interoperability between the militaries of India and the USA.

Almost 15 years of the implementation of the New Framework for the US-India Defense Relationship Agreement of 2005 has produced a number of tangibles, making the United States one of India's most robust defence partners. Whether it is in the realm of defence sales and purchase, or the growing sophistication of military-to-military exercises, or the potential for the co-production of defence equipment, the cooperation has been outcome oriented. There is no denying the fact that cooperation in the defence sector has become the highlight of the India-US strategic partnership. Evolving threat perceptions from an aggressive China in the Indo-Pacific region have accentuated the imperative for greater synergy in the defence partnership, which stands on a strong footing as the Biden Administration sets out to take the baton of the India-US relationship.

There has been a discernible broad arc of positive continuity as far as India-US defence cooperation is concerned. India has been named a major defence partner of the USA, and convergences on both the global and regional security environments have given rise to growing cooperation in capability enhancement and capacity building. The renaming of the US Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command reflects the growing recognition of India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region. This has brought a sharper focus on maritime cooperation between India and the US, which is visible in both greater defence sales and purchases as well as augmented maritime information sharing to increase India's maritime domain awareness. The Indian Navy and the naval arm of the US Central Command (NAVCENT) have together shown a greater sense of joint purpose and action for maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean.

As military-to-military engagement across all the services and the sophistication of their exercises increase through the implementation of the foundational agreements, it might be incumbent upon both the countries to create greater synergy in traditional as well as non-traditional areas of operations. How different military commands of the US operating around the globe can engage further with the Indian military across different domains will remain a matter of priority in times to come. The inclusion of the Australian Navy in the latest Malabar exercise has added a new dimension to the trilateral arrangement between India, the US and Japan, and given new heft to the Quadrilateral Security Initiative (QUAD).

India and the USA have come a long way as far defence trade is concerned. In a very short period, India has emerged as one of the major destinations of high-end US defence equipment despite India not being a traditional ally of the USA. The defence equipment purchased from the USA is meant to enhance India's capabilities on land, sea, and air-based assets. For instance, the US origin equipment, including long range maritime patrol aircraft, are being seen as instrumental in enhancing India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities in the Indian Ocean. In recent times, the focus has been to shift from a buyer and seller relationship to that of greater technology sharing, joint innovation, co-production, and co-development.

In this context, the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) has been a mainstay of the level of cooperation achieved and envisioned. Four joint working groups, under the aegis of the DTTI, have been focusing on cooperation on land, naval, air, and aircraft carrier technologies. Other significant initiatives include the meeting between the Indian Defence Innovation Organization (DIO-iDEX), the US Defense Innovation United (DIU), and the Industrial Security Annex (ISA) mechanisms.

Much has been achieved in a short span of time in India-US defence cooperation; but much also requires to be done to create all round synergy between the two militaries as well the respective defence industrial bases in the two countries. The dynamics of the global and regional security environment would require India and the USA to constantly revisit standard operating procedures, and innovate new areas of defence cooperation in order to create a robust joint deterrent capability across the Indo-Pacific region.

President Biden will most likely maintain continuity in his foreign policy orientation and intensify defence cooperation. India has also reached a stage where it can negotiate with the United States from a position of strength. The United States will play a dominant role in helping India realise its dream of Make in India through joint ventures and co-production. India's "buy and make" proposition with defence offsets obligations will obviously be the priority in the emerging scenario. How President Biden will drive the course of action in building synergy with India will form a major part of the discourse.

India and the United States will be more prone to confronting strategic risks if they do not converge, and become proactive in assuming the leadership role in the emerging global order. The USA has finally understood India's importance in the global arena. The elevation of India's status, both at the regional and global levels, is a testimony to the fact that both India and the US will work together in ushering in a rule based global order. The emerging

global order is not going to be led by a specific country but by a set of countries where India and the US will play a dominant role in the international system. China's rise will obviously have an impact on the complexities of the permutations and combinations of the emerging global order. The intensification of the Indo-US strategic partnership will remain pivotal to the new emerging global order. The sharing of technological knowhow will be emphasised to build a robust strategic partnership in a number of domains, including outer space, counter-terrorism cooperation, and enhancing India's potential in gathering intelligence information with the help of technology.



India-US Relations under the Biden Administration: Future through Prism of the Past

Sanjukta Bhattacharya*

In the globalised world of the 21st century, inputs that shape bilateral foreign relations come from multivariate sources. While personality matters, as was evident from the administration of US President Trump, relations are between States, and not Heads of States. Here other dynamics come into play: for instance, the quest for military and strategic supremacy; global supply chains and economic power; ideology and values; climate and environment; domestic constraints; and, in the current situation, a raging pandemic. The latter has resulted in huge casualties that have led to a global economic slowdown, and has focused money and attention on immediate health issues internationally. Further, the domestic and foreign policies of one country may have ripple effects worldwide. For instance, China's rise to economic power, and its expansionist policies are perceived as a direct challenge by the US which has a global leadership role since World War II. This has been partly responsible for the formation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) which China views as an Asian NATO (targeting China), and Japan as an 'Asian Arc of Democracy' (Prime Minister Shinzo Abe). Chinese incursions across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) pushed an initially less committed India into further commitment to the Quad, and a closer security relationship with the US.

However, personalities should be factored into international relations because the perceptions and attitudes of people at the helm help shape foreign policy. So, while there has been continuity in a good India-US relationship since the 1990s - with each successive US President building on the legacy of his predecessor - perspectives may change, although given common challenges, relations are expected to prosper under the Biden Presidency.

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The present US administration is too young yet to invite comment on India-US relations over the next four years, However, an idea may be formed by looking back at President Biden's campaign pronouncements on India, China, the Indo-Pacific, Climate Change, Human Rights, and America's leadership role in the world, along with his important actions as a Senator and Vice President, as well as his early Executive Orders, Memorandums, and Proclamations.

First, it must be emphasised that he has a long experience in American politics and foreign policy, having served as a Senator from Delaware from 1973 to 2009, and as US Vice President from 2009 to 2017. He served in the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee for several terms, twice as Chair (2001–2003; 2007–2009), and has longstanding personal relations with world leaders, including Prime Minister Modi. As Chairperson of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when the Indo-US nuclear deal was being debated, he played a crucial role in pushing it through the Senate.

He has been criticised in former Defence Secretary, Robert Gates' memoir, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (2014) as being “wrong on nearly every major national security and foreign policy issue over the past four decades”¹. Gates cites instances like voting against Operation Desert Storm; opposing many elements of President Reagan's defence build-up; and voting against a request for US\$ 1 billion in military and humanitarian aid to South Vietnam in April 1975 - the same month that Saigon fell. However, one must weigh Gates' words against the historical backdrop as well as Biden's own views, and temper them with the fact that Biden had voted against the nomination of Gates as CIA Director in 1991, and opted not to vote when he was confirmed as Defence Secretary in the second Bush Administration. Regarding the US\$ 1 billion bill, Biden, like many of his peers in America at that time, was against the Vietnam War and, in any case, the Bill died in Congress.

President Biden has always opposed nuclear proliferation. In 1991, he was not the only one who opposed military intervention in Iraq: after a long debate, the Senate passed it 52-47. His record highlights integrity in thinking. However, one must not mistake it for an anti-war stance. Biden has always been on the side of self-defence: he wanted the arms embargo lifted during the Serbian war so that Bosnians could get arms for self-defence, and asked for US military assistance for Bosnia in 1992 to help it defend itself against Serbia. Again, when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, Biden wanted to send weapons to Ukraine for its self-defence. On the other hand, he challenged President Obama's military surge in Afghanistan as well as the military overthrow of Libya's Colonel Gaddafi in 2011. On balance, Biden appears as a man of values, with a strong sense of what is right for his country.

This view is reinforced by his statements on foreign policy during the run-up to the election in November 2020. Unlike President Trump's unilateralist 'America First' rhetoric that withdrew America from key multilateral agreements and platforms, Biden stated his belief in shared western democratic values, and believes that America's strength lies in re-joining traditional alliances to combat transnational threats. He wished to end 'forever wars', and has noted that US foreign policy must be powered not only by diplomacy and multilateralism but with a view to strengthening the economic basis of middle class America.

His early Executive Orders and statements point in the direction of a more pragmatic and multilateralist foreign policy - for instance, re-joining the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Paris Climate Change Accord, reversing Trump's restrictions on entry to the USA for passport holders from seven Muslim-majority countries, and revoking Trump's order justifying the separation of immigrant families at America's borders.

In his first foreign policy statement on 4 February 2021, President Biden spoke of facing international challenges in cooperation with allies using the tool of diplomacy "rooted in America's most cherished democratic values". He then stated, "Defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal rights, respecting the rule of law and treating every person with dignity. That's the grounding wire of our global policy, our global power".²

Given this background, what can be expected for India-US relations during the Biden administration? Many Indians had hailed the Trump Presidency for taking the relationship to a new level, largely because of the two massive rallies held in the USA and India for the two leaders: 'Howdy Modi' and 'Namaste Trump', with Narendra Modi undiplomatically calling for "*Agle Baar, Trump Sarkar*" in the USA, and Trump publicly saying at Ahmadabad, "Prime Minister Modi is a friend of mine, and he is doing a very good job". These are actually statements of personal chemistry between the two leaders.

In more concrete terms, India-US relations were elevated to a "comprehensive global strategic partnership" in 2020, and the two countries held the first 2+2 defence and foreign ministers' dialogue in 2018, India being the second country to have such a dialogue. The two countries signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA), by which the two penned all four of the foundational agreements to bolster defence ties. The two countries also concluded the Strategic Energy Partnership, and currently, pharmaceutical companies from both countries are cooperating on vaccine development, and expanding critical supplies to counter Covid-19.

However, on the flip side, the Trump administration terminated India's preferential trading status under the Generalized System of Preference. There were tensions over each other's tariff policies, and even a limited trade deal did not materialise. Negotiations under prior US administrations on a Bilateral Investment Treaty were stalled; visas remained a sticking point as also did India's commercial relations with Russia and Iran. Thus, despite all the bonhomie and flattery of the personal relationship between the leaders, Indo-US relations during the Trump administration rested largely on only one pillar of a comprehensive bilateral relationship: security and defence. These promoted both Trump's and Modi's interests in strengthening India in the face of China's challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

President Biden has always been considered a friend of India, and his views on China ensure that the bilateral security relationship will continue to grow in the coming years. During the campaign, he had called India a "natural partner", and in a telephonic conversation between Modi and Biden shortly after the November election, both reiterated their commitment to the India-US strategic partnership, and discussed shared priorities including the commitment to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. However, as noted, President Biden has a strong sense of values, which includes Human Rights, and his action in re-joining the Climate Change accords implies that the other pillars of bilateral relations will not be ignored.

But first, President Biden's observations on China and the Indo-Pacific need to be examined. He has publicly denounced China's President Xi Jinping as a "thug", and vowed to enforce the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act (2019). Further, he has described China's mass detention and re-education policy targeting the Uyghurs "genocide", and expressed a wish to meet the Dalai Lama. He has promised to "fight like hell" to defend America's global standing against China's growing power. Post-election, he has again slammed China for 'abuses' in trade, technology, and Human Rights, and noted that America can best pursue its goals through "security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region" when it is "flanked" by like-minded allies and partners. His use of the term 'Indo-Pacific' as against 'Asia-Pacific' - which is preferred by China - is significant, as is his call for a "Secure and Prosperous Indo-Pacific" instead of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" - a strategic construct coined by Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

In the context of security, the Trump administration favoured making the Quad the security architecture to check China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. There are signs that the new administration will build on this: the new National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, said at a function in late

January 2021, that the USA sees the Quad as “fundamentally a foundation upon which to build substantial American policy in the Indo-Pacific region”. The new Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, had earlier stated that one objective of a future Biden administration would be to engage China from a position of strength, and “India has to be a key partner in that effort”. Some analysts note that President Biden’s prioritisation of Climate Change and nuclear proliferation by North Korea will need China’s cooperation, and his administration may have a more conciliatory approach than Trump’s. However, his appointment of Kurt Campbell, a China hardliner, as China coordinator, and John Kerry as climate envoy, may signal otherwise. Senator Kerry has pledged not to sacrifice military or economic priorities for a climate deal.

All this augurs well for India. China being perceived as the common enemy, Indo-US security relations are bound to strengthen, and India’s position as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific and the Quad appear to be undiminished, especially now that Pakistan has agreed to provide China naval base facilities in Sind, in addition to the existing one at Gwadar in Baluchistan. In fact, even before being elected, President Biden had stated, at a July virtual event, that India is critical to US national security: “That partnership, a strategic partnership, is necessary and important to our security”.

However, security is not the only parameter that should be considered; his statements made during his campaign on certain internal issues of India - like Kashmir, CAA etc are also relevant. On the other hand, in an Indian-American paper Op-Ed article, he wrote: “The U.S. and India will stand together against terrorism in all its forms, and work together to promote a region of peace and stability where neither China nor any other country threatens its neighbours”, and continued, “[we will] confront other international challenges together, like climate change, global health, transnational terrorism and nuclear proliferation”, but then added, “We will meet every challenge together as we strengthen both democracies - fair and free elections, equality under the law, freedom of expression and religion, and the boundless strength both nations’ draw from our diversity”.³ While unproblematic at first glance, ‘freedom of expression and religion’ and ‘diversity’ may appear nuanced to some analysts, given his views mentioned earlier on ‘restrictions on dissent’, etc.

Vice-President Kamala Harris too has been vocal on the Kashmir issue. Responding to a question on ‘human rights abuses’ in Kashmir in October 2019 following the revocation of Article 370, she said that Kashmiris need to be reminded that they are not alone, and “There is need to intervene if the situation demands”.

There is also a sticky situation that needs to be remembered: during a visit to the USA by Indian Foreign Secretary, S. Jaishankar, in December 2019, the Indian government communicated to the US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairperson that Jaishankar would not attend a meeting of the Committee if Pramila Jaypal, the first Indian-American to be elected to the US House of Representatives, was present. The reason for this was that she had co-sponsored H.Res.745, urging India to end restrictions on communications and mass detentions in Jammu & Kashmir, and preserve the religious freedom of all residents. The Chairperson, Eliot Engel, refused to concede to this demand, saying that it was totally inappropriate for any foreign government to dictate which members may participate in Capitol Hill meetings, and that it was a sign of weakness in any great democracy to refuse to allow those who are critical to participate in a meeting. Harris sided with Jaypal in the face-off with Jaishankar, as did many other Congress members. Jaypal has since been elected Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus in the current 117th Congress.

While these statements and actions will not go away since the government in India remains the same, most analysts feel that as President and Vice-President, Biden and Harris will temper public criticism of India. The slew of Indian-Americans who have been nominated for key posts in the Biden administration is unprecedented, and augurs well for better understanding and good relations between the two countries.

Presidential actions to date that directly affect Indians also promise hope. The Biden administration has announced that it is delaying the H-1B policy of the Trump administration by continuing with the lottery system until 31 December 2021. The H-1B visa allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations; typically, 75 percent of such visa holders are from India. Trump's policy would have affected Indian IT professionals who had been granted this visa for the fiscal year 2021. Now they get some breathing space while the new administration works out how best to boost jobs for Americans and draw from the best talents worldwide.

Although Trump and Modi called each other friend, international relations go far beyond personal relationships in modern times. Prime Minister Modi was quick to post three tweets in quick succession post the inauguration, congratulating President Biden and expressing hopes for strengthened India-US ties. External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, has had a telephonic conversation with his American counterpart, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, reiterating Indo-US commitment to a strategic partnership; and India's Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, has had a similar conversation with the US Defence

Secretary, Lloyd Austin. But again, this focuses on only one pillar of the relationship: security. Nothing has been said on Human Rights or Climate Change with regard to India.

Nothing has also been said on trade, which is a major lubricant in bilateral relations. As Vice-President, Biden had visited India's financial hub Mumbai in 2013, ostensibly to improve bilateral trade ties. However, trade relations became acrimonious during the Trump administration, with the two countries failing to sign a trade agreement, and the talks stalled over the import of American dairy products and medical devices like coronary stents. With the economic slowdown making both America and India focus on domestic growth, trade relations will, perhaps, continue to bedevil India-US relations, especially since the Indian and American agendas for reform and liberalisation have always differed. Prime Minister Modi's call for an "*Atmanirbhar* Bharat", a slogan lacking in details, is also bound to confuse the new administration on the way forward.

The Biden administration's early actions also raise doubts. The President had indicated that he wished to revive the Iran nuclear deal; but, in early February, he turned down an Iranian initiative at simultaneous return to the agreement, demanding that Tehran return to compliance before the US nixes the sanctions that Trump re-imposed. On 3 February, the USA went to court seeking to seize two million barrels of oil in a Greek-owned ship that it claims came from Iran. This indicates a continuing hard-line policy vis-à-vis Iran, despite campaign statements. The H-1B policy does not mean an elimination of Trump's stance; it only provides some breathing space.

In his first major foreign policy address on 4 February 2021, President Biden addressed current domestic crises in two countries: Myanmar and Russia. He said that he was working on a bipartisan approach to urge Myanmar to release detainees and end the coup. His National Security Advisor, Jack Sullivan, has also mentioned that the USA is working with international partners on sanctions for individuals and entities controlled by the military in Myanmar. On Russia, while renewing the START treaty for five years in accordance with his commitment to arms control, President Biden said that he had made it clear to President Putin that the days of interfering with elections, cyber-attacks, and poisoning its citizens are over.

While these have little to do with India (although an easing of sanctions against Iran would have benefited India's energy sector), they reflect that the Biden administration is going to be tough where US interests are concerned. This implies that India should wait and watch. Interestingly, while several countries, including Japan, Australia and South Korea, were mentioned as

“partners” in restoring democracy, India was not. One wonders if the restoration of 4G internet services in Kashmir by the Indian government, and the granting of interim bail by the Supreme Court to comedian Faruqui - who had been incarcerated for over a month on allegations and refused bail, both on 5 February - are feelers to the new US administration!

In conclusion, a comprehensive relationship covering all pillars - from the economy to democratic values - is something to wish for beyond a strategic partnership focusing on security which is, of course, essential in contemporary circumstances. Both India and the US strongly value national interest: the US is keen on re-establishing its global leadership while India robustly defends its autonomy. There are bound to be differences in perceptions between the two countries as always, but India and the US need each other to confront many common challenges: to fight the pandemic; to oppose China’s expansionism; to contest Climate Change, to help economies recover, to face international terrorism, to develop new technologies in science and medicine, etc. India-US relations, as in the past 20 years, can only go forward with accommodation as well as agreements to disagree. After all, both countries are vibrant democracies, and this itself make them “natural partners”.

Notes :

- ¹ <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/518548-joe-biden-has-foreign-policy-ideals-that-can-work-in-this-chaotic-world>
- ² “America is Back”, Joe Biden Speech on Foreign Policy, 4 February 2021, at <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/joe-biden-speech-on-foreign-policy-transcript-february-4-america-is-back>, accessed 6 February 2021.
- ³ “A More Prosperous Future for the Indian American Community: Op Ed by Vice President Biden for India-West”, India-West, 22 October 2020, at https://www.indiawest.com/blogs/a-more-prosperous-future-for-the-indian-american-community-op-ed-by-vice-president-biden/article_91434690-143a-11eb-8c0f-d33f2c48d683.html, accessed 31 January 2021.



The Biden Administration: Elevating America's Shared Strategic Future with India

Monish Tourangbam*

In the last two decades, a broad strategic convergence has evolved between India and the USA, which is centred around managing the geopolitical ramifications of a rising China. The mutual understanding established between the political leaderships of the two countries has continued, irrespective of the change of guard in both New Delhi and Washington. The positive arc and the stability in the India-US relationship has remained firm even during the disruptive four years of the Trump presidency. In fact, new heights of understanding were achieved as far as the co-management of the Indo-Pacific region is concerned. These include the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Initiative (Quad), renaming of the US Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command, and the conclusion of the India-US foundational agreements that will lend greater interoperability to the militaries of the two countries. Hence, for the Biden administration, the task for carrying forward the India-US relationship may not involve dramatic shifts. It will rather mean cementing a rapidly growing and multifaceted partnership, and ironing out the irritants to elevate a shared strategic future in the Indo-Pacific.

To make a sense of what may happen under the Biden administration, the legacy of the Trump era needs to be put in perspective. The assessment and analysis of what the Trump presidency has meant for the broader direction of US foreign policy, its multilateral ties, and its bilateral relations with allies, partners, and adversaries is imperative; only then can one arrive at any propositions regarding the shape of thing to come in the Biden era. As the dust settles down in Washington, and President Biden and his team gets into the act of administration, Trump's foreign policy and what it meant for rest of the world will need to be soberly understood by not only external watchers but also by the Biden administration itself. Such an approach will be required to effectively strategise and implement any new direction in America's ties

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with the rest of the world. In general, Trump's personal approach to policymaking and communication has drawn the ire of many across the world as well as within the USA. There has been an overriding sense of disbelief and dismay over the conduct of American foreign engagements under the Trump administration. As the Trump administration set out to put 'American First', a number of countries around the world continued to assess and analyse its import in their own terms of engagement with the USA. Trump's presidential style began to be branded as transactional in nature, and his policy approaches as largely disruptive to America's traditional diplomacy and the inter-agency process in the American beltway. This led to the proliferation of mostly negative reviews regarding US foreign policy during the Trump presidency. However, does the same pessimism apply to the developments in India-US relations during Trump's presidency? From India's point of view, the Trump presidency was, it could be said, largely an era of continuity rather than change.

The year 2020 saw a more aggressive face of rising China - and that too, right in the midst of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic. Recalcitrant Chinese behaviour was witnessed across the spectrum in its military adventurism in the South China Sea, the India-China border, and through its 'wolf warrior' diplomacy against any criticism of its handling of the Corona Virus pandemic. From a trade war with China to the return of great power competition in the Western Pacific, the Trump administration oversaw a rising confrontational streak in US-China relations. On the other hand, the military crisis at the India-China border brought down whatever confidence was built between the Indian and Chinese leadership through the informal summits in Wuhan and Mamallapuram. The downturn in US-China relations and in India-China relations has provided more ballast to the strategic rationale for a growing India-US defence partnership.

As the USA was undergoing a political transition, bringing an end to the Trump era and unfolding a new era in US foreign policy and domestic politics under the Biden presidency, the institutional linkages that had been set up under the India-US defence framework showed tangible results. Towards the end of the Trump administration, the US Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo, and Secretary of Defence, Mark T. Esper, visited India for the third '2+2' ministerial dialogue.

Moreover, Australia's inclusion in the latest edition of the Malabar Exercise adds more heft to the quadrilateral understanding between India, the USA, Japan, and Australia pertaining to the management of Indo-Pacific affairs amidst rising threat perceptions from China. The rebirth of the Quad took place during the Trump administration and, judging by the evolving geopolitics

of the Indo-Pacific, the Biden administration, in all likelihood, will double down on the Quad. The increasing sophistication of the military-to-military engagement in peace time is aimed at creating a robust deterrence against any sort of unilateral activities. In both service-to-service exercises as well as the newly started tri-service exercise, an institutional synergy has been created between the militaries of India and the USA that will continue during the Biden administration as well.

All major US strategic documents have reflected an overriding sense of growing strategic competition with near peer competitors like China. China's growing military muscle and economic push in the Indo-Pacific region became a common cause of growing worry between India and the USA. Even as the USA under the Trump presidency was called out for discomforting allies and partners, New Delhi saw its hard stance towards China's aggression and Trump's willingness to play hardball with Beijing as comforting to its own strategic intentions and objectives.

Therefore, even as the Biden administration promises to bring back pre-Trump America, some of US foreign policy grandstanding executed by President Trump against China seems to have been welcomed in India. Hence, New Delhi will keenly watch Washington's approach to dealing with the China challenge under the Biden team. That there continues to be a formidable China challenge remains unchanged, irrespective of the change of guard in the White House. However, the team that President Biden has brought together to confront the China challenge has to traverse a wide and complex field, cutting across politics, security, economics, and the issue of bringing America back into the diplomacy of Climate Change. Which issue areas will call for a more hard-line approach with China, and which ones will require Washington to move with a more cooperative approach will remain a task cut out for the Biden team. The ramifications of this complicated juggling of concerned areas to protect and promote American interests will have implications for the course of India-US bilateral relationship.

India was named a major defence partner of the USA during the Trump administration which envisioned providing access to American defence equipment and technology in ways that are only accorded to America's North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) partners. A relationship beyond merely buyer-seller, and a move towards greater cooperation in co-development and co-production is being envisioned under the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI). Four joint working groups under the aegis of the DTTI have been focusing on cooperation on land, naval, air, and aircraft carrier technologies. Going ahead, the task before the Biden administration will be to

create synergy between the defence industrial bases of the two countries. Can the USA offer what India needs for its defence preparedness? On what terms and arrangements will this happen? These remain critical questions in the context of India's own drive of turning 'Make in India' into a reality. Moreover, with greater interoperability being operationalised after the signing of the foundational agreements - the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) - the sophistication and the scope of the military-to-military exercises between the two countries have been increasing. The Indian Navy and the naval arm of the US Central Command (NAVCENT) have been showing a greater sense of joint purpose and action for maintaining peace and stability in the Indian Ocean. How different military commands of the USA operating across the globe can engage further with the Indian military across different domains will remain a moot concern in the times to come.

In recent times, India's partnership with the USA had yielded tangible outcomes in its efforts at enhancing maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Defence acquisitions from the USA have been instrumental in India's growing anti-submarine warfare capabilities. The India-US partnership towards capability enhancement in the IOR is significant, given regular entry of China's submarines in the IOR and its strategic investments among the Indian Ocean littorals. Here, it is worthwhile recalling the India-US Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. Without naming the Indo-Pacific, this vision - released during President Obama's visit to India in 2015 as the Chief Guest of India's Republic Day celebration - sealed a bilateral understanding in the region.

Although President Trump was known for undoing a number of high profile Obama-era policies, the convergence between India and the USA regarding the management of China's rise was on firm grounds, and continued to enjoy bipartisan support in the USA. Since the last days of the Clinton administration, an intention on both sides began to emerge to create a strategic understanding that was effectively taken forward by the George W. Bush administration through the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP), and the momentous negotiations leading to the India-US civil nuclear agreement. The implementation of the nuclear agreement in terms of deliverables has often been questioned. However, upon sober analysis, the rationale for the nuclear negotiations were much broader, and were aimed at creating confidence and trust by generating habits of cooperation over one of the thorniest issues in India-US bilateral relationship.

It is against the backdrop of this understanding, that more tangible outcomes were realised in a number of areas, most effectively in the realm of defence and security cooperation. Over the years, both the countries have developed a better understanding of the dangers relating to terrorist and extremist violence in the region. Although there could still be limitations to the extent in which any two sovereign countries can cooperate and share intelligence on security matters, marked institutional linkages that have been created over the years will have their impacts. Even during the pandemic, the 17th meeting of the India-U.S. Counter Terrorism Joint Working Group was held. Both at the bilateral and at multilateral levels, there are now more concerted efforts to designate and sanction terror groups and individuals, counter terrorist financing as well cross-border movements, and the use of the internet by terrorist groups. A cooperative working ecosystem between the US Department of Homeland Security and India's Ministry of Home Affairs through the Homeland Security Dialogue already exists, and such webs of convergences will continue to form the nuts and bolts of the India-US relationship under the Biden administration as well.

President Biden has a legacy waiting to unravel in South Asia - the endgame being played out in the war-torn country of Afghanistan. The war that started during the Bush administration as a response to the 9/11 attacks has morphed into a low intensity conflict, draining US attention and resources in the last two decades. Dealing with the Taliban has been a conundrum for not only the USA but also for a country like India. Despite being an undesirable outcome of the Afghan imbroglio, Washington has had to shift its redlines, start negotiating with the Taliban, and give priority to its withdrawal. The US-Taliban peace agreement that the Trump administration engineered, and which paved the way for the intra-Afghan talks, has given a new direction to the peace process, lending political legitimacy to the Taliban. As the Afghan government engages the Taliban for the future of power rearrangement in the country, how the Biden administration handles the Afghan situation will have immense consequences for the role of regional countries, like India.

Afghanistan is in India's neighbourhood, and what the Biden administration chooses to do in Afghanistan will have serious implications for peace and security in the country, and hence, for the nature of India's involvement there. Since 2001, India has played a significant role as one of the highest donors of civilian aid and assistance to bolster the Afghan reconstruction. However, as uncertainty hangs over the future of Afghanistan, and New Delhi is forced to develop a thick skin in dealing with the Taliban, Biden's strategy in Afghanistan will be keenly watched. His preference for a leaner counter-

terrorism oriented force is well known. On the other hand, Afghan government representatives - including President Ashraf Ghani - has urged the Biden administration to revisit the terms of the deal with the Taliban. Although President Biden's decision on Afghanistan, like on any other issue, will essentially be guided by keeping "America First", the specifics of the American withdrawal is bound to have consequences for India's future role in Afghanistan and, as such, it is imperative for New Delhi and Washington to establish better communication regarding Afghan affairs.

By corollary, how the Biden administration approaches Pakistan will have implications for India. From India's point of view, the Trump administration started by making all the right noises by calling for holding Pakistan's feet to fire when it came to their role in Afghanistan, and in fighting terrorism. Despite being at the receiving end of the American aid as a major Non-NATO ally in the war on terrorism, Pakistan has been accused of playing a double game, and of being selective in confronting terror groups. While the Trump administration was, by and large, seen to be more upfront about America's political tilt towards India, its stance towards Pakistan in the later stages, changed when the USA began opening channels of negotiation with the Taliban. Despite the diminishing returns from its ties with Pakistan, American political leadership has often been found wanting in its efforts to extricate itself from its complex relationship with Pakistan. A case in point is the Bush administration's much debated policy of de-hyphenating America's bilateral relations with India and Pakistan. Therefore, how the Biden administration will handle Pakistan and what it will mean for US-Pakistan relationship, will be a matter of significance for New Delhi.

How New Delhi and Washington align their respective threat perceptions, and work around differences will bear significance for the relationship. Particularly in this category are two countries: Russia and Iran. India has very close ties with both the countries and, despite ups and downs, India's relationship with them will remain important from multifaceted points of view. However, irrespective of the change of administration in the USA, Iran and Russia have been consistently ranked as the two states that are among the most threatening to American interests. Despite efforts to reset ties with both Russia and Iran, the outcomes have been rather dismal; both Russia and Iran have ended up being the targets of the Countering American Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). This creates challenges for India, which still has a deep defence cooperation with Russia, and a substantial relationship with Iran, particularly in the areas of energy security and in connectivity projects. Therefore, as the Biden administration sets out to reorient US foreign policy

at large, and its relationship with countries like Russia and Iran in particular, India will require to be nimble footed in terms of protecting and promoting its own interests. It will need to juggle its ties with American adversaries like Russia and Iran, at the same time as it goes about elevating its shared strategic future with the USA in the Indo-Pacific.

Outer Space and the Cyber domains are fast emerging as new areas of cooperation between India and the USA. Given the emerging technologies shaping the contours of the cyber world and the Outer Space, it is prudent for India to engage with the United States for shared concerns and opportunities. India and the USA have started engaging in an India-US Cyber Dialogue, including in the defence realm as well. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the USA, have been cooperating for greater space situational awareness. Projects like the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite are being accorded priority in the times to come, with intentions to go forward in terms of discussing cooperation relating to potential space defence. A couple of areas that might see some change in the Biden administration are in trade and commerce, Climate Change, and immigration. Including expectations of a mini trade deal between the two countries that did not fructify, the economic relationship remained far below potential. President Trump's obsession with balance of trade and tariffs, seemed to have missed the forest for the trees by not realising the importance of the strategic aspect of India-US economic cooperation.

Moreover, Biden's overall approach to immigration issues and Climate Change is bound to bring a substantial shift when implemented - something that New Delhi will need to assess objectively. Another dimension in the Indo-Pacific affairs that needs to be assessed will be how India and the USA coordinate with like-minded countries towards implementing multi-stakeholder, transparent, and high-quality infrastructure projects through the Blue Dot Network in the midst of China's ambitious and ambiguous Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In the final analysis, as the post-World War II financial and security order that the USA orchestrated weakens, and the new order is yet to emerge, US engagement with the rest of the world has been going through dynamic shifts. The threats that the US confronts in the 21st century are significantly different from the ones it faced earlier, leading it to recalibrate the way it approaches its military alliance network, and how it looks for new sets of partners, like India. India and the USA share the vision of a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific order amidst the uncertain strategic repercussions of

China's rise. This relationship has come out much stronger, despite the disruptive times of the Trump presidency. Therefore, in all likelihood, the Biden administration will continue to build on the positive strategic arc of the India-US relationship while ironing out and managing any irritants that come with the specific mechanics of a relationship between two complex democracies.



A ‘Climate Handshake’: The India-US Green Strategic Partnership

Pramit Pal Chaudhuri*

Responding to Climate Change has the potential to become a major pillar of the Indo-US bilateral relationship, one with the potential of becoming economically and technologically transformational for both countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden see Climate Change as an existential threat. Both see greening their economies as crucial to their nations’ future. And, both are wary of Chinese attempts to establish pre-eminence in the technologies and products in these sectors.

The two leaders are aggressive in promoting their Climate agendas. Prime Minister Modi has repeatedly increased his government’s renewable energy target to the point that it is among the most ambitious in the world. In his second term, even more difficult green energy programmes - such as the National Hydrogen Mission - have been announced as a part of the February 2021 annual budget. Prime Minister Modi sees weaning the Indian economy off fossil fuels as a crucial element of his New India vision. Complementary developments, such as promoting the manufacture of solar power equipment, the use of electrical vehicles, and reducing the country’s chronic air pollution problem, fit well with his *Atmanirbhar* and *Swach Bharat* (self-reliant and clean India) initiatives. “Climate adaptation,” as he said recently, “is more significant today than ever before and ... is a key element of India’s developmental efforts.”¹

President Biden began issuing executive orders signalling the USA’s desire to secure a leadership role in Climate Change within days of assuming office. He shares Prime Minister Modi’s economic vision regarding renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, and that it is a source of future job creation as well as a means to secure the lead in the technologies of the future. President Biden has another pressing reason to get these measures embedded in the US

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policy framework. There is no political consensus on Climate Change in Washington, and the Republican Party is vociferously hostile to many elements of President Biden's Climate policy. His administration has a slender legislative majority which is guaranteed for only two more years, and a Republican capture of the US Congress in 2022 and a recapture of White House in 2024 is not inconceivable. President Biden wants to implement policy on Climate Change, both at home and abroad, as quickly as possible. But it will not be an easy task.²

Then, there is the overriding incentive that the world is in a race against time to reduce its carbon emissions before irreversible and drastic changes to its environment take place. President Biden's special envoy on Climate Change, John Kerry, on his first day in his new position, said coal needs to be phased out five times faster than is being done today, renewable energy adopted six times faster, and the transition to electric vehicles 22 times faster.³

India's Ambitious Green Economy Goals

There are four elements to India's ambitious green economy goals which require considerable foreign assistance. They also require India to become more involved in global rules making and finding like-minded international partners.

First is the rapid transformation of India's coal-dominated power sector into one more dependent on renewables, with natural gas serving as the transition fuel. New Delhi has massively increased India's solar power capacity; but there have been numerous teething issues. One perennial problem is the unwillingness of India's state-owned distribution companies to charge a market rate for the electricity they provide their customers, ensuring that electricity production is always saddled with enormous amounts of debt which percolate through and distort the entire power sector. The Modi government recently announced its third attempt to resolve the discom dilemma.⁴ The other related issue is attracting sufficient quantities of funding to pay for this transition, a bill that would run into hundreds of billions of dollars. Foreign and domestic private capital, in particular, are essential if India is to accomplish its publicly declared green economic goals. The two are related: resolving the discom issue would be the best means to ensure a continuous and sustainable flow of investment into the renewables sector.

Second are the ambitious plans to promote electric vehicles, and electric mobility in general. The idea is not merely to promote their use but to create sufficient demand so that many of these vehicles come to be made in India.

The government has already begun the process of electrifying fleet vehicles and building charging infrastructure; but the progress is slow. There has been a regular dialogue with the country's automobile industry about making the difficult and expensive shift to electrical vehicle production. Again, India needs partners to help finance these plans, partners to develop and access the necessary know how, and markets to export components and cars if it is to reach the kinds of scale needed to be competitive in this field.⁵

Third, there is the National Hydrogen Mission, newly announced but unusually ambitious. Green hydrogen is seen as the future fuel for heavy industry and commercial vehicles, the former needing baseload power of a kind solar and wind presently struggle to provide. The hydrogen mission would require enormous capital expenditure, a complete overhaul of India's power sector, and cooperation on many levels with international stakeholders.⁶

Fourth, India has steadily expanded its multilateral Climate efforts. The International Solar Alliance, which India co-founded with France, has expanded its ambit, and now envisions a One Sun One World One Grid cross-border transmission network as well as a World Solar Bank. India has also launched the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure which is largely about Climate preparedness. Both bodies have done well in terms of membership, but continue to struggle to leave a mark on the international system. India needs major global partners with deep pockets in all these endeavours. India plans a US\$ 600 million equity commitment for the World Solar Bank, but envisages a total equity capital of US\$ 10 billion at its inception. The USA is a part of the CDRI, and will be a necessary partner once the body begins laying out standards, and tries to get them accepted around the world. There is an obvious pairing to be made here with a USA that was deliberately absent from global Climate efforts during the Donald Trump Presidency and, under President Biden, is seeking to make up for lost time.⁷

Every estimate of the funding needed by India to accomplish its stated Climate goals arrives at an enormous figure. The Environment Ministry has calculated that India would need US\$ 2.5 trillion in investments, with the next five years alone requiring US\$ 280 billion in expenses. Almost all of this would have to be raised from private capital markets, and most of it in the form of debt, with a smaller chunk being raised through equity.

However, getting private capital to put money into India's solar power projects, let alone more speculative projects, like electrical vehicle start-ups, has proven difficult. India's underdeveloped bond market means most "green bonds" by Indian firms are raised on the London Stock Exchange, and incur hefty interest rates and underwriting fees. Barely US\$ 7 billion worth of Indian

green bonds were raised in 2018 - a fraction of what is needed, a fourth of what China raised, and a sliver of the US\$ 250 billion worth of green bonds issued globally. At present, for example, green energy projects in India are unable to secure investment-grade credit rating, meaning institutional investors must stay away from them.⁸

The obvious match would be US institutional investors who are sitting on US\$ 23 trillion in funds, looking for positive returns, and with an appetite for socially responsible investments. Multilateral financial institutions and the government of India would be other sources of capital; but their resources are more limited and their red tape burdensome. The Biden Administration is expected to infuse billions of dollars more into institutions like the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank with Climate spending in mind. It has declared its intention to fulfil the USA's earlier promise of putting US\$ 3 billion into the Global Climate Fund as well as in similar funds for poorer countries laid out under the Paris Agreement. In private conversations, US officials have indicated President Biden plans to massively expand the green portfolio of the new US Development Finance Corporation, and of his government's main overseas aid agency, USAID, and make these responsible for large-scale financial investments in the green sectors of emerging and developing economies. But the only game in town for such a risky and expensive project is private capital. The involvement of the multilateral financial institutions and aid donors would ultimately be about making India's green economy more palatable to US private investors.⁹

Green Technology and Related Materials

Green technology is rapidly becoming a matter of strategic concern. The struggle for green-related minerals, like cobalt or lithium, are already replacing the earlier pursuit of oil and uranium. The USA is moving to a policy of technology denial towards China, a policy that would result in the severing of many supply chains between the two economies. The USA cannot go it alone and is, therefore, beginning to map out techno-alliances in a number of key technological areas. Early think tank proposals for such coalitions name India as an obvious member of such a coalition.

India has already begun a process of reducing China's commercial presence in sensitive parts of its economy, including the green, digital, and media sectors. It also hopes to attract some of the supply chain links that are leaving China, and looking for alternative sites. A US-led technology coalition in sensitive green technologies could prove advantageous to India, depending on how

well it negotiates the terms of its membership. Curtailing the Chinese economic presence in India and elsewhere would be a bonus. The policy remains nascent; but it is quite possible that important green technologies, such as those involved in electrical mobility, will become an element. There is a convergence here with India's use of tariffs and local content to revive solar cell and module production in India, and reduce imports from China.¹⁰

At the very least, such technological blocs could determine common standards, regulations and so on so that private manufacturers and investments would collectively trade and invest among member-states. The implicit assumption is that this would counter any China-centred set of technology standards. Beijing already has a head start in this field, thanks to the huge infrastructure projects of its Belt Road Initiative, and the standards and regulations - for example, in digital technology - that accompany BRI agreements.

If India decides to non-align itself in a green geopolitical world, it will find it harder to avoid coercive tactics by the USA and other major economies. For example, Washington will soon follow Brussels in imposing carbon-based tariffs to discriminate against imports made through Climate unfriendly processes. If frustrated at the rate of Climate progress India is making according to the US time line, a certain degree of coercion will follow. For example, Kerry is a great advocate of net zero emissions targets, where a country promises to ensure its economy produces a net of zero carbon emissions by a certain year. This is something India has declined to embrace because of the high level of economic disruption this would entail. At the very least, it would require carbon capture and storage technology that India lacks, and cannot afford. Another problem area will be if the Biden Administration decides to block development assistance or penalize private investment into natural gas infrastructure, a fuel that India sees as crucial to its transition to a greener energy future.¹¹

The difficult part of a de facto Indo-US green strategic partnership would be the time required to put together this complex interrelationship. India continues to struggle to create a financial marketplace acceptable to large-scale and long-term foreign investment, especially in the green sector. It is uncertain whether it has the capacity to absorb hundreds of billions of dollars of assistance or investment. New Delhi is still finding its feet when it comes to multilateral Climate action - its own creations, like the International Solar Alliance, have just begun to try and negotiate global rules and norms. And, there will be a fundamental contradiction in both President Biden and Prime Minister Modi using limited protectionism, and using incentives to keep green

investments within their borders that will have to be resolved.

President Biden will have to resist the temptation to use more sticks than carrots on India to persuade India to go green. Prime Minister Modi does not need to be convinced of the importance of tackling Climate; but he cannot be seen kowtowing to the demands of a foreign government. New Delhi needs to up its Climate game in terms of converting ideas into plans, and plans into tangible changes on the ground. If things do gel, both leaders will be able to lay the groundwork for arguably the one of the greatest of Indo-US collaborations. It would be one that would ensure that the future economic rise of the world's fifth largest economy is done in a sustainable manner, unlike the black smoke ridden trajectory of China. It would be one that would cement a bilateral technological partnership that could serve as a model for the rest of the world. Environmentalist Arunabha Ghosh has already declared that the synergies are so evident that Prime Minister Modi and President Biden need to hold a 'Climate Handshake' this year, and pave the way to a green strategic relationship.¹²

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The Biden Presidency: Some Indian Concerns

G. Balachandran*

With the election of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States, after four years of personalised foreign policy initiatives by the 45th President Donald Trump, speculations have broken out across the globe about how the US relations with various countries would evolve under President Biden.

Under normal circumstances, a change in the US administration, even if under a different party, would not have resulted in so much international scrutiny since the two major parties have, by and large, held similar views on international affairs, especially with regard to alliance partners, international organisations, and adherence to international obligations. However, President Trump's extremely personalised mode of conducting domestic and foreign policy - especially foreign policy - had caused considerable disquiet among US allies and the general international community.

President Trump did not care much for international norms and conventions. With his "America First" strategy, he alienated traditional US allies in Europe, Japan, Canada, South Korea, Australia, Mexico, and many others. He withdrew from JCPOA, which was negotiated by the USA, as well as the Paris Climate Agreement. He withdrew the USA from WHO and from the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership) negotiations, and nearly crippled the functioning of WTO.

Notwithstanding the damage that President Trump caused to international norms and conventions, President Biden's victory was welcomed with relief in democracies in Western Europe and elsewhere. However, certain countries viewed his election with concern. The Indian reaction to the Biden victory, perhaps, fell in the latter category. Indeed, it is quite possible that some of the positive reactions to President Biden's victory may have been due to his choice of Vice-President, Kamala Harris - the daughter of an Indian immigrant to the US.

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Unlike many other countries that were adversely affected by President Trump's foreign policy actions, India did not feel any major negative impact during the Trump Presidency. It was not, therefore, surprising that international public opinion polls showed that Donald Trump had high favourable ratings in India. The last Pew Global survey on favourable ratings of Trump and other world leaders, carried out in 32 countries in early 2020, showed that while Trump had a global favourable rating of 29 percent, in India he had a favourable rating of 56 percent (the fifth highest, exceeded only in Israel, Kenya, Nigeria, and the Philippines). Indeed, many Indian analysts felt that a Biden Presidency may be less favourable towards India. And, among world leaders (Trump, Merkel, Macron, Putin, and Xi) President Trump had the highest favourable rating of 56 percent, followed by Putin at distant 42 percent. To what extent Trump's high favourable rating was due to right-wing Populist Party supporters (and by extension in countries with right-wing populist governments) is not clear.

The only commonality in the analysis of the advice of various countries to President Biden on how he should reset US foreign policy was about how it should be in line with that country's preferences for continuity, reformation, and new equilibria. India is no exception. A recent advice for US President Biden was: "... to actualise the unrealised potential of US-India ties, it would be prudent for the US to adapt its expectations to Indian predispositions over its prioritisation of defence ties, constraints on commercial avenues, and management of multiple strategic alignments."¹

It must be realised that President Biden has long experience in foreign policy making processes, and has influenced American foreign policy initiatives from time to time. He entered the US Senate at the very young age of 29, becoming the sixth youngest senator in American history. He became a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) in 1975, becoming the ranking minority member in 1997 and remaining in SFRC as either ranking member or Chairman till January 2009, when he became the Vice President. He was the Chairman of SFRC during 2002-03 and 2007-09 when India and the US were resetting the relationship through implementation of the India-US NSSP (Next Steps in Strategic Partnership) and dialogues to promote the India-US Nuclear deal. And, of course, as Vice President he was intimately involved with the conduct of US foreign policy during the Obama Presidency during 2009-16.

The major areas of foreign policy are: (i) Defence and Security; (ii) Economy and Trade; and (iii) non-traditional areas, such as Human Rights, Climate Change, and democracy promotion in which the USA has been a

major global player. Through Executive Orders, President Biden has been able to repair some of the damage caused by his predecessor. The USA has re-joined WHO, the HRC, the Paris Climate Agreement, and also indicated its plan to re-join the JCPOA. However, President Biden faces a daunting task on the domestic front to undo the damage that President Trump had done during the four years of his Presidency, culminating in the attack on the Capitol on 6 January 2021.

Fortunately, President Trump had not taken any action of serious negative consequences for India, except for a few actions of minor consequences in the area of economy and trade. Since President Trump was not an advocate of such concepts as Climate Change, Human Rights, democracy, etc., his administration was quite inactive in these areas and, in some instances, to the advantage of India.

Given these facts, what are the future prospects for India-US relations under the new Biden Administration?

Defence and Security

India-US defence and security relations have had bipartisan support in the US Congress during the past decade. As Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken remarked (during his senate confirmation hearing) that, “India has been a bipartisan success story of our successive administrations.”²² During the Trump Administration, India signed the two remaining foundational agreements among a total of four - COMCOSA and BECA. Following on the successive moves to relax technology exports by earlier administrations, the US elevated India to STA1 (Strategic Trade Authorisation) status, granting high technology access to India at par with those granted to its closest allies in Europe and Asia. Administratively, there is not much that needs to be done by the USA to allow India access to high technology exports controlled by the Commerce Department under the EAA (Export Administration Act). However, so far, India’s use of the STA 1 privilege has been inadequate, and far from its potential use. There is little that the Biden Administration can do in this regard. It is entirely India’s responsibility to take advantage of the STA 1 status. Therefore, one can expect the India-US defence and strategic relations to continue progressing, the pace being more dependent on India’s desire to deepen its engagement with the USA on these issues.

However, there is one potential action by the USA that could seriously affect India-US defence and security relations. This is the imposition of sanctions on India under the provisions of CAATSA (Countering America’s

Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) which permits the US President to sanction countries that engage in “significant transaction” with targeted Russian defence companies. The USA has so far imposed sanctions on China and Turkey for their import of S-400 system from Russia. India too has ordered the S-400 system, although it is yet to be delivered. While the CAATSA legislation had left it open for the President to determine what constitutes “significant transaction”, the recently passed legislation NDAA 2021 specifies that, (i) “The acquisition by the Government of Turkey of the S-400 air defence system from the Russian Federation, beginning on 12 July 2019, constitutes a significant transaction as described in section 231 of CAATSA”, and (ii) “Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the President shall impose five or more of the sanctions described in section 235 of CAATSA with respect to each person that knowingly engaged in the acquisition of the S-400 air defense system” (Sec. 1241 of NDAA 2021).³

There is a certain degree of ambiguity here. It is not entirely clear whether the S-400 transaction is by itself a significant transaction, or whether it is significant because it may compromise the security of US military technology or because the purchase of S-400 by Turkey is fundamentally inconsistent with Turkey’s obligations as a NATO ally.

It is very unlikely that the Biden Administration would sanction India under CAATSA. The India-US caucus in the Congress is the biggest of such national caucuses. During the passage of the NDAA, the Congress debated CAATSA sanctions, and why and how India should be spared such sanctions. It also incorporated a CAATSA waiver clause to take care of such a contingency. While it is true that some of the CAATSA sanctions have the potential to completely halt the India-US defence and strategic relationship, there are a number of others that would allow the US Administration to continue such a relationship to its full possibilities even if it decides to impose CAATSA sanctions.

Economy and Trade

President Trump started his administration by imposing additional duties on the imports of steel which affected steel exports from India. His approach to trade was purely transactional (He forced Canada and Mexico to renegotiate NAFTA). He took a number of additional measures to restrict imports from India.

In June 2019, he terminated preferential tariff benefits being granted to India under its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) scheme. India had exported goods worth USD 6.3 billion (as per USTR data) to US under the

GSP programme during the calendar year 2018, which was 12.1 percent of India's total export to USA in that year. The GSP termination was alleged to be because of India's failure to provide the United States with assurances that it will provide equitable and reasonable access to its markets in numerous sectors.

In February 2020, the US designated India as a "developed country" and made India (along with Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, and South Africa) ineligible for the 2 percent *de minimis* standard, notwithstanding that, based on the most recent World Bank data, each country had a per capita GNI below US\$ 12,375 (the World Bank's dividing line between developed and developing countries).

Under its countervailing duty (CVD) law, in order to conform to its obligations under the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM Agreement), the US gave special treatment to WTO Members that have not yet reached the status of a "developed country." They are entitled to special treatment for purposes of countervailing measures. Specifically, imports from such members are subject to different thresholds for purposes of determining whether countervailing subsidies are *de minimis*, and whether import volumes are negligible. India's designation as a "developed country" denies India the privileges allowed under the SCM Agreement.

President Trump had a phobia about Balance of Trade (BOT). The US has negative BOT in goods with many countries, and a huge negative BOT in goods in aggregate as well. However, it enjoys a surplus in BOT in services with almost all countries, and in aggregate as well. However, it has a negative BOT with India, both in goods and services.

This negative BOT in services is primarily on account of the deficit on computer services. In fact, India's surplus in services is only on account of the surplus of computer services. India accounts for nearly 40 percent of US global imports of computer services. In 2019, India's surplus on account of all services was US\$ 5.425 billion. The surplus on account of computer services was US\$ 13.174 billion! This surplus on account of computer services was primarily because of the huge number of H1-B and H-4 visas that Indians get each year. Indians account for more than 75 percent of all H-1B visas issued, and more than 85 percent of H-4 visas.

In April 2020, President Trump issued a proclamation "Suspending Entry of Immigrants Who Present Risk to the U.S. Labour Market During the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak." This effectively suspended and limited the entry of any individual seeking entry pursuant to an

H-1B or H-2B visa, and any individual accompanying or following to join such individual. This proclamation was extended subsequently up to March 2021. The effect of this was dramatic. During April-December 2019, 1,10,582 H-1-B visas were issued to Indians. During April-December 2020, this fell down to 5335! A similar drop was seen in the number of H-4 visas issued as well. These proclamations have been rescinded by the Biden Administration.

Trump's order limiting entry of H-1-B and H-4 was done under Executive Orders, orders which are presidential written directives to agencies on how to implement the laws. Executive orders are not the last word in policy. New presidents can as easily revoke previous orders as Biden did to remove Trump's executive orders. On the other hand, the rule by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) designating India as a "developed country" was done under a federal law that specifies certain differential treatment for imports from developing or least-developed countries and obligates USTR to update the designations periodically. While the issuance and entry of H-1-B and H-4 visas have been restored, it is not clear if President Biden, through simple executive orders, would be able to restore either the GSP privileges or rescind the designation of India as a "developed country."

Other Issues

As stated earlier, President Trump had minimal or no interest on issues relating to Climate Change, Human Rights, democracy, etc. As a consequence of his indifference to such issues, some of the Indian government's actions, which may have invited attention from earlier Administrations, were ignored by President Trump - although not by some democratic members of the Congress. In early December 2019, Ms. Jayapal had introduced a resolution "recognizing the severity of challenges faced by India in J & K, the resolution urges India to employ certain measure to uphold human rights."⁴⁷ It was co-sponsored by 66 Democrats and 4 Republicans. When India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, was scheduled to meet members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in a closed-door meeting, he cancelled the meeting since Ms. Jayapal had been invited. At that time, the Leading Democratic presidential aspirants -Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren - and two other US lawmakers, including senator Kamala Harris, came out in support of Ms. Jayapal. "It's wrong for any foreign government to tell Congress what members are allowed in meetings on Capitol Hill," said Kamala Harris, who had dropped out of the Democratic presidential race at that time, and is now the Vice President of USA.

Unlike President Trump, President Biden has an entirely different approach to Human Rights. Antony Blinken, the current Secretary of State, appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reaffirmed President Biden's pledge to put the strengthening of democracy and the protection of Human Rights at the centre of US foreign policy. A recurring theme throughout Blinken's testimony was that Human Rights represent a compelling basis for US action. Blinken also affirmed the new Administration's commitment to strengthening the Global Magnitsky Sanction regime during his confirmation hearing. Blinken also lauded targeted Human Rights and anti-corruption sanctions, and committed to strengthening those efforts, saying, "We've gone from Magnitsky to global Magnitsky to different countries now adopting their own Magnitsky-like laws, and now just recently the European Union. So I think this has been a tremendous success story in actually bringing the democratic countries of the world together, and giving them an effective tool to actually push back against abuses of democracy and human rights."

The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act authorises the President to impose economic sanctions, and deny entry into the US to any foreign person identified as engaging in Human Rights abuse or corruption. It includes any foreign person that the President determines is responsible for "gross violations of internationally recognized human rights", (as defined at 22 U.S.C. §2304(d(1)), which includes ... "prolonged detention without charges and trial of those persons working to obtain, exercise, defend, or promote human rights and freedoms, including rights to a fair trial and democratic elections."

In making sanctions determinations, the law requires the US President to consider information provided jointly by the Chairperson and ranking members of certain committees -Senate Banking and Foreign Relations, and House Financial Services, and Foreign Affairs - as well as credible information obtained by foreign countries and nongovernmental Human Rights organisations. A separate provision, Section 1263(d), requires the President to respond within 120 days to requests from the aforementioned committee leadership to determine whether a foreign person has engaged in sanctionable activity under the law, and whether or not the President intends to impose sanctions.

As of 21 January 2021, the USA has designated 112 foreign persons (individuals and entities) pursuant to the Global Magnitsky Act for serious Human Rights violations. In the current 117th Congress where the Democrats hold the majority, the Democratic Progressive Caucus, whose political ideology is centre-left to left and which Ms. Jayapal heads, is the largest democratic grouping, with more than 100 members. Ms. Karen Bass, a prominent member

of the Progressive Caucus, heads the House Foreign Affairs Sub-committee on Human Rights. Therefore, it is not unlikely that there will be hearings on the Global Magnitsky Act wherein alleged violations of Human Rights in India may be matter of discussion. Given the strong emphasis of President Biden on Human Rights, such discussions will have the approval of his Administration.

Conclusion

Thus, there is a strong bi-partisan support for India in the US, and there is reason to believe that the India-US partnership will advance during the Biden Presidency. However, the negative perceptions of the Biden Presidency are, in addition to its stress on Human Rights, primarily on account of apprehensions about whether President Biden will be less aggressive towards China than was President Trump.

Notes:

- ¹ Kashish Parpiani, Sukanya Sen, “US-India Ties under Biden: Recognising New Delhi’s Predispositions”, at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/us-india-ties-under-biden-recognising-new-delhis-predispositions/>
- ² “India a ‘bipartisan success story’ for US, the ties can be deepened in many ways– Blinken”, at <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/india-a-bipartisan-success-story-for-us-the-ties-can-be-deepened-in-many-ways-blinken/588757/>
- ³ See, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/6395/text>
- ⁴ <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/resolution-tabled-in-us-congress-asks-india-to-end-internet-ban-free-detainees-in-kashmir>



India-US Relations: Will Continue to Flourish but in a More Structured Manner

Shreya Upadhyay*

The post-Cold War world has witnessed India and the United States engaged in a strategic embrace. In the first four decades after India's independence, the relationship was fraught with mistrust and tension. However, as the Cold War era came to an end, the ties between India and the United States also started to become warmer. There were various reasons for this change. India was emerging as an impressive financial market. Indian foreign policy adapted to the changing world order of US uni-polarity. The two countries began to notice commonalities in democracy and pluralism, and began to consider each other as "natural allies".¹ The coming years saw deeper strategic engagements taking place between political leaders on both the sides.

The foundation of the Indo-US strategic relationship was laid by President Bill Clinton when he visited India in March 2000. The visit ended a turbulent period in the ties that followed US' strong reaction to India's nuclear tests in Pokhran in May 1998. A year before that, during the 1999 Kargil skirmish between India and Pakistan, President Clinton had pressurised Pakistan to withdraw troops from Indian territories seized by Pakistan. His visit to India, 22 years after the last US Presidential visit, ended India's pariah position. It was a significant turn away from the American Cold War time alliance with Pakistan, towards a strategic future with India. President Clinton's charm offensive in India was for everyone to see as he danced to folk tunes with Rajasthani women. His visit gave the feeling that the United States was genuinely looking for a partnership with the India that was emerging, and full of hope.

The relationship was bolstered further in the aftermath of 9/11 when the Bush Administration's 'global war on terror' dovetailed neatly with India's position on security issues and terrorism related concerns. Some of the major

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developments that followed in this regard were the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership announced in 2004; this was designed to increase cooperation in civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programs, high-technology trade, and missile defence. In 2005, a landmark deal was signed, popularly termed as the 'Indo-US civil nuclear deal'. The joint statement issued envisioned a multifaceted relationship, tackling topics such as terrorism, science and technology, agriculture, health, commerce, etc. Military-to-military ties have remained big ticket areas, with joint training, joint patrols, and a gamut of collaborative defence exercises.

Under President Barak Obama, the Indo-US relationship initially began on a rocky start. The two countries struggled to match the successes achieved in the earlier administration. The 2010 Indian Nuclear Liability Law gutted the much talked about India-US nuclear deal. In 2008, the USA was preoccupied with fixing a faltering economy. With respect to South Asia, the Obama Administration's decision backfired as the move to link Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak) with India was criticised strongly in Indian policy circles. The US administration launched the US 'pivot to Asia', with India a lynchpin in this pivot. This turned out to be a non-starter.

Things improved, nonetheless, especially when Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power. Interestingly, there was scepticism regarding his ascendancy to power and the future of India-US relations. Prime Minister Modi had been on a US visa blacklist for ten years. Many assumed that it would be a business-only relationship. However, Prime Minister Modi and President Obama joined forces to tackle Climate Change issues and promote clean energy. In the final two years of the Obama Administration, visits and talks among high level delegations reached a new phase. Both the countries inked several agreements on defence issues and counter terrorism. President Obama codified India as a "major defence partner" - a unique definition that the USA does not use for any other country.² When President Obama visited India in 2010, he dangled UN Security Council membership support in front of India. When Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014, Obama visited India as the chief guest for the Republic Day celebrations.

The relationship, nonetheless, had its share of irritants. President Obama's Af-Pak policy was criticised at length in India. The President's commitment to drawing down troops from Afghanistan did not allow the US Administration to call out Pakistan on the issue of terrorism. There were hiccups relating to visa and trade issues. The arrest of Indian Foreign Service officer, Devyani Khobragade, in the USA on the issue of visa fraud also strained the relationship between the two countries. Even as a parting shot, President Obama lectured

India not to stray from its constitutional commitment to allow people to freely “profess, practice and propagate”³ religion. Yet, the Obama Administration was successful when it came to cementing its relationship with India.

The baton was then passed on to the Trump Administration. Donald Trump as a Presidential candidate never hid his admiration for Narendra Modi. He recognised the potential of the 3.2 million strong Indian American community - a model minority in the USA. He also adopted Modi’s election catch phrase to “Ab Ki Baar Trump Sarkar” (This time, Trump’s government). Parallels were drawn between the two leaders in terms of being outsiders; anti- establishment, and pressing similar types of claims: President Trump’s ‘Making America Great Again!’ and Prime Minister Modi’s ‘Acche Din Aayenge!’

However, after assuming power, President Trump’s understanding of the relationship with India remained transactional at best. There was significant progress in the area of security, defence, and counter terrorism. In the last four years, both the countries reached an enhanced level of strategic convergence on the need to counter China’s role in the Indo-Pacific region. The Trump years witnessed India-US cooperation also growing in the areas of connectivity, and on geo-strategic issues. During the course of different US administrations, India and the USA have inked four foundational agreements to bolster defence ties: the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA); the General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA); the Logistics Support Agreement (LSA); and the Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA).

These agreements led to opening the provisions for more accurate military intelligence, encrypted defence technologies, logistical support, supplies, and services, etc. These further facilitated regular interactions between military services, and cooperation in areas of mutual interest, such as counter-terrorism, maritime security, special operations, and humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief.

In 2020, the relationship was further elevated to a “comprehensive global strategic partnership” with Donald Trump’s visit to India. A recently declassified “US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific” shows confidence that a strong India, in cooperation with like-minded countries, would act as a counterbalance to China. The framework underlines the US objective to “accelerate India’s rise and capacity to serve as a net provider of security” in the Indo-Pacific, with America as major defence partner. During the Trump Administration, the defence deals included the acquisition of 24 MH-

60R *Seahawk* anti-submarine warfare helicopters, AH-64E *Apache* Guardian attack helicopters, *Chinook* helicopters, etc., as well as the transfer of technology from Lockheed Martin to Indian contractors. Between 2008 and 2020, India ordered seven different major US military platforms. The USA is India's fourth largest source of arms after Russia, Israel, and France, with India-US defence trade increasing significantly from US\$ 200 million to US\$20 billion. There are plans in place to acquire anti-submarine warfare P-8I *Neptune* as well.

Chinese aggressive manoeuvres towards India in the Galwan valley have also prompted the Indian establishment to get cosy with the USA. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue - a strategic forum between the USA, Japan, Australia, and India, seen with scepticism by the Chinese government - held its first joint military exercise in November 2020, when Australia joined the other Quad members for India's annual Malabar naval war games. The Blue Dot network - a multi-stakeholder initiative focusing on shared standards for global infrastructure development, and a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative - added a new feather to the convergence of interests in the Indo-Pacific.

On a personal front, the world got to see the camaraderie between the two leaders in the 'Namaste Trump' and 'Howdy Modi' events. However, when it came to deliverables on many fronts other than defence, President Trump's actions did not suit India. He imposed a temporary ban on work visas to boost his 'buy American, hire American' policy. This had an impact on the hiring of the Indian IT service workforce. The rate at which H1B visa was being denied reached a high of 24 percent.⁴ President Trump's trade balance obsession led to the withdrawal of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).

With Joe Biden assuming US Presidency on 20 January 2021, there has been a divided house in policy circles. While some are looking at the Trump Presidency with nostalgia, others are confident that the relationship will continue to flourish, but in a more structured manner. The Capitol Hill violence is a grim show of a deeply divided and a polarised America. There is an understanding that a United States that is isolationist, nativist, and losing an economic war with China is of no use to India. This gives rise to the hope that the Biden administration will bring some semblance of predictability to the USA and, in turn, to its relationship with the World.

Both Biden and the (Indian origin) Vice President, Kamala Harris, have alluded to close links with the Indian Diaspora. The Biden Administration has repeatedly stated to reverse the previous administration's decision to suspend

H1B visas. The new administration has additional plans to expand the number of high skill visas, and also bring in policies whereby students obtaining a doctorate in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Management) subjects would be encouraged to stay on in the USA. During the Trump Administration, there was a decline in Indian students studying engineering and computer science courses in the USA.

President Biden's earlier policies towards India have remained largely positive. In 2008, as a senator he voted to approve the 2008 nuclear deal that had a huge bearing on India-US relations. He was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the time, and led the effort to ratify the agreement. This was despite the fact that Vice President Biden had criticised India for carrying out the nuclear tests in 1998. In 2013, Vice President Biden had visited India with the ambitious aim of raising bilateral trade to US\$ 500 billion.

On the Iran issue as well, President Biden's approach is more flexible. President Trump's Iran policy put India in a difficult position. India relies on Iran's crude oil, and was left scrambling for energy security after President Trump's sanctions on Iran. Even as the US administration offered to replace the loss of Iranian oil, many Indian refineries are configured to process Iranian oil. This had an adverse impact on India-Iran diplomatic relations, even as Indian policy makers have sought to convince Iran regarding the seriousness of the bilateral relations.

The current US administration is renegotiating re-entrance to the JCPOA (the Obama Administration's offspring) which can work out well for India's strategic interests in the Middle East. Notably, in the past, it was US sanctions that left little room for India to trade with Iran, and use its ports. This resulted in the Chinese entry into the region, and an increased bonhomie between China and Iran. If India is able to convince the new US administration to remove sanctions, New Delhi can speed up its work on the Chahabar port which is seen as India's gateway to Central Asia. The port is strategically located near the Gwadar port of Pakistan that is being developed by China. India's presence in Chahabar is, therefore, strategically important for regional power politics.

Under President Biden, there is likelihood of greater cooperation in the areas of climate change, trade, and visa related issues. Nonetheless, it needs to be understood that, at present, the USA faces burgeoning domestic challenges - from healing a divided nation, dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, and handling issues of immigration, the economic downturn, to other domestic

security concerns. The Biden Administration would no doubt also be working on handling China. In the last four years, the relationship between the two countries have worsened. China has become more aggressive, and presents a significant challenge to Washington. Till now, the Biden Administration has not come up with a clear approach towards Beijing. There has been a show in some policy continuity with respect to China's alleged "genocide against Muslim Uyghur's" in Xinjiang. Washington is also advocating the need for a "balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region and cooperation with allies and partners⁵ to address the China challenge. This indicates that India will continue to play an important role in the US scheme of strategy. The new administration is poised to continue on the path of a "strategic partnership". This would mean concentrating on greater policy collaboration and intelligence sharing between India and the USA. American defence companies are looking to up their arms sales to India, with the aim of replacing Russia as India's largest defence partner. This would mean the transfer of high technological systems from the USA to India aimed at enhancing India's defence capabilities.

Despite these successes, there is scepticism over irritants related to US policy towards Pakistan and position on Human Rights issues that could stall the ties between India and the USA from attaining full bloom. Some American analysts have reportedly viewed a rise of right wing majoritarianism in India in the last few years. President Biden had earlier been critical of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the implementation of the NRC in Assam. Similarly, Vice President Kamala Harris, despite batting for strong ties with India, has been critical about the situation that has emerged in Kashmir after the revocation of Article 370. She has stated, "We are keeping a track on the situation. There is a need to intervene if the situation demands."⁶ She had also publicly criticised the External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar's decision to cancel the meeting with the members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. If the US administration continues on its path of criticising the Indian government on internal matters, Indian public opinion might turn against a closer partnership with the USA. Notably, President Trump's repeated offers to negotiate a "peace deal" between India and Pakistan had not gone down well in New Delhi.

Conclusion

It needs to be realised that policy making is an incremental process, involving different stakeholders - the legislature, the state department, leaders from both the sides as well as the shaping of the world order. Many a times,

bureaucracy and diplomacy do not align well. A good example in this regard is the nuclear agreement signed between the two nations hitting an impasse despite great diplomatic push from both the sides. Agreements and their implementations can only be successful if there is a bipartisan approach on both the sides. That is the way democracies function. For now, President Biden's focus on a multilateral, collective approach to regional security issues is expected to align closely with Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on multilateralism and regionalism. The aim will be to create a coalition of democracies to balance China. India, on its part, will continue to work on issue-based coalitions, allowing itself to pick and choose approaches according to its interests.

Notes :

- ¹ "Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Opening Remarks at the Meeting with Speaker of the House of Representatives and Ranking Member of the House", in Washington D.C., 9 November 2001, Government of India, at <https://archivepmo.nic.in/abv/speech-details.php?nodeid=9153>, accessed 13 February 2021.
- ² Raj, Yashwant, "Obama signs into law bill declaring India a 'major defence partner'", *Hindustan Times*. 25 December 2016, at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/obama-signs-618bn-defence-bill-boosting-security-cooperation-with-india/story-tPeP7ljudLW3x4PIYU15vI.html>, accessed 15 February 2021.
- ³ Daniel, Frank, "In Parting Shot, Obama Prods India On Religious Freedom", Reuters, 2015, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-obama-idUSKBN0L00FD20150127> accessed 15 February 2021.
- ⁴ Anderson, Stuart, "Latest Data Show H-1B Visas Being Denied at High Rates", Forbes, 28 October 2019, accessed 15 February 2021, at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2019/10/28/latest-data-show-h-1b-visas-being-denied-at-high-rates/?sh=1f61238354c3> accessed 15 February 2021.
- ⁵ Bhatnagar, Arman, "President Joe Biden: What it means for India, China", *Times of India*, 20 January 2021, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-india-china-should-expect-from-biden-administration/articleshow/80364479.cms> accessed 15 February 2021.
- ⁶ <https://theguardian.com/indian-diplomats-ambivalent-over-kamala-harris-pick/> accessed 15 February 2021.



India-US Relationship under the Biden Administration: Apprehensions and Outcomes

Vivek Mishra*

As the 46th President of the United States, Joe Biden, and his team of officials settle with global policy priorities, some initial apprehensions regarding his administration's India policy are giving way to more meaningful certainties. From the days of Biden's presidential campaign, there have been some apprehensions in India regarding a full embrace of his Administration, going forward. From India's perspective, this can be attributed to both internal and external factors. While externally, the politics and party-line of the Democratic Party in the US make the scrutiny of some issues globally by the US administrations inevitable, internally, India's own legacy and practice of poise in its foreign policy has prevented New Delhi from an immediate rush to embrace the Biden Administration. However, the uncertainty that prevailed in the Trump-to-Biden presidential transition in the US was undergirded by a strong sense of progress, especially in the backdrop of the foundational improvements in bilateral ties which the last two decades have characteristically depicted. Officially, a White House statement by its Press Secretary, Jen Psaki, has assured the Biden Administration's support to successful relations with India. The election of Kamala Harris as the Vice President has only 'cemented' the relationship further.

Already, some key communications between the two sides have sought to establish a regular channel. Prime Minister Modi and President Biden spoke over the telephone on 8 February 2021 to establish communication at the highest level in strategic areas, such as Climate Change, cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, and especially their shared commitment to a rules-based international order. This was preceded by the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval talking to their respective US counterparts. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh spoke to the new US Defence Secretary, Lloyd Austin,

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about the first high-level engagement between the two countries, and exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual interest. In particular, the firm commitment of both leaders to deepen the India-US defence and strategic cooperation was reiterated. This early engagement through serious discussion between the two sides has translated into concrete outcomes for both sides, with reports that the US Defence Secretary, Lloyd Austin, will be visiting India towards the end of March 2021. At stake is one of the most important pillars of India-US relations: the defence sector.

Through a series of communications between the two sides, and a potential visit of the US Defence Secretary to India very early in his term, the Biden Administration has looked to make early gains in broadening the spectrum of the India-US strategic partnership. In this effort, the Biden Administration's early steps depict a tripartite focus on continuity, sustainability, and progress in Indo-US ties. While the US has already underscored the importance of the continuity of ties through strong bipartisan support, it has also potentially identified sectors for the broadening of ties with India. Among the most prominent promises to this end is the expansion of the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. The priority domains in this direction are ties in the defence sector which could reflect immediate gains for both countries; continuity in Indo-Pacific priorities albeit with a different approach from that of the Trump Administration; the elevation of the Quad to the highest level of the governments; and issues of trade and energy which could come in at a later stage for both governments.

These sentiments have also been reflected in other channels of communication between the leaders of the two countries. For instance, during NSA Doval's conversation with his counterpart Jake Sullivan, the former underscored¹ that "as leading democracies, with an abiding faith in an open and inclusive world order, India and the US were uniquely positioned to work closely on regional and international issues, including combating the scourge of terrorism, maritime security, cyber security and peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond." Importantly, the two NSAs maintained the importance of an upward growth trajectory that the bilateral ties need. They sought to achieve this by building on shared values as well as common strategic and security interests. More importantly, the NSAs' conversation promised a roadmap for cooperation between India and the US to jointly address the challenges of the post-COVID international order.

The telephonic conversation between the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, and India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar (9 February 2021) also importantly included discussions on the COVID-19 response, regional

developments, such as like the political turmoil in Myanmar, and developments in the Indo-Pacific region - especially the Quad. While the Biden Administration may have just hinted at policy continuity in the Indo-Pacific, the first ever leaders' summit at the level of the Quad will, undoubtedly, signify a step further in consolidating the four-nation grouping, and in essence, US-India cooperation at the regional level. The likely meeting of the leaders of the four Quad countries - Australia, Japan, India and the US -, depicts an unprecedented elevation of the group's symbolic and potentially actionable relevance to the Indo-Pacific region. The meeting between heads of state of the four Quad nations is a step towards possible institutionalisation of the group. This is yet another important step after the group was elevated to the level of Foreign Ministers, with a meeting on the side lines of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019. More importantly, the current step strengthens common regional resolve between the four countries, particularly vis-à-vis China. China has also figured prominently in the series of bilateral discussions between the USA and India since the Biden Administration took over the Oval office.

Two Critical Domains

From the highlights and the trends in the early discussions between high level officials of the Biden and Modi governments, along with the irreplaceable legacy of India-US ties under preceding US administrations, it is imperative that the immediate twin focus areas under the Biden Administration remain the defence sector and regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The defence sector provides the opportunity to both countries to focus on building concrete gains in the immediate future, riding on the momentum of the Trump Administration's steps, strengthening the joint resolve in the Indo-Pacific through the Quad, and other mechanisms.

The Defence Sector

For both the USA and India, the defence sector provides the most fertile grounds for immediate gains. To this end, a read-out by the US Defence Secretary, Lloyd Austin, has emphasised the US Defence Department's commitment to the US-India major defence partnership, underscoring the importance of shared values, and a common interest in ensuring that the Indo-Pacific region remains free and open. His visit to India announced for 19-21 March 2021, on his maiden trip abroad, underscores the importance and immediacy for building early trust in at least three areas which are

impinged by strong strategic ties between India and the US: military-to-military cooperation; defence trade; and the Indo-Pacific region. A statement released by the Pentagon on US Defence Secretary's visit has said, "In India, Secretary Austin will meet his counterpart, Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh, and other senior national security leaders to discuss deepening the US-India Major Defence Partnership and advancing cooperation between our countries for a free, prosperous and open Indo-Pacific and Western Indian Ocean Region."²

From early indications, the Biden Administration has sought to build on the tangible benefits of India's Major Defence Partner status. While a more holistic view of the implementation of the India-US Defence Agreed Framework Agreement of 2005 will form the basis of India-US ties, a greater leveraging of established channels and frameworks is likely to catapult defence and security exchanges with India to the fore under the Biden Administration. The Biden Administration has inherited a rather robust legacy of India-US defence cooperation, albeit with much scope to further the relationship in this domain. Just before the end of his Presidential tenure, President Trump had pushed for military sales to India. In November 2020, the Indian Navy inducted two MQ-9B Sea Guardian unarmed drones procured from the USA on lease for one year. Then, there was the proposed ramped up sale of defence equipment to India, including armed drones that can carry over 1,000 pounds of bombs and missiles which were earlier restricted. These are likely to be taken forward by the Biden Administration. Among some of the big-ticket items in the defence sector which are in the pipeline with the potential for growth are: a proposal for 30 armed drones (10 for each Service) from General Atomics estimated at over US\$ 3 billion, which is at advanced stages of being cleared by the Indian Ministry of Defence. India is also looking to buy six additional P-8I long range maritime patrol aircraft to add to the 12 already contracted. The US has also been in talks with India for the possible sale of fighter jets for the Indian Air Force and the Navy, besides unmanned aerial systems and mid-air refuellers. All these will also assume importance during the visit of the US Defence Secretary to India. The Biden Administration will also look to take forward the Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 status acquired by India during the Trump Administration, which enables the transfer of sensitive high-tech equipment.

India and the US have already pledged to work collectively to address challenges in the post-COVID-19 era, and further broaden the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. Donald Trump's steps towards amending the rules that hitherto restricted the sale of military-grade drones to foreign partners

like India, could prove to be a new conduit for defence sales between the two countries. The sale of armed drones, which had previously been restricted because of their speeds and payloads, will now be considered alongside surveillance drones for sales to India, adding a much-awaited dimension. The USA's defence sales to India have jumped from near zero in 2008 to over US\$ 20 billion in 2020, and are poised for an upward trajectory under Biden.

The US Defence Secretary's visit to India is going to be one of his first foreign visits, and the immediacy of his visit reflects New Delhi's priority in US defence relations. Importantly, the asymmetry characteristic of a buyer-seller relationship between the two nations is giving way to a partnership spread over a broad spectrum of mutually advantageous domains. That Secretary Austin's visit to India will be on the heels of the Quad leaders' meet is also very symbolic. Besides strengthening bilateral frameworks - such as the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, the 2+2 dialogue; the Major Defence Partnership, the Indo-Pacific, and the Quad - his visit is also likely to figure out India's priorities, compulsions, and the nature of established channels for these sales. For instance, Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) has been a major way for the USA since 2015 to authorise India over US\$ 3 billion in the sale of defence articles. The DCS processes, which licenses the export of the defence equipment, services as well as the related manufacturing technologies controlled under the 21 categories of the US Munitions List (USML).

Accelerating the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) could be another important opportunity for India-US relations under the Biden Administration. The platform for the same has been set up by some of the developments under the Trump Administration. A defence agreement was signed at the end of the 10th DTTI Group Meeting held in September 2020, which was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under this, the USA and India agreed to a Statement of Intent (SOI), under which they have declared their intent "to strengthen dialogue on defence technology cooperation by pursuing detailed planning and making measurable progress"³ on many DTTI projects. The projects under the DTTI are important for developing the next generation technologies. Under the DTTI, projects have been identified as near, medium, and long-term projects, and they include Air-launched Small Unmanned Systems; Light Weight Small Arms Technology; and Intelligence-Surveillance-Targeting & Reconnaissance (ISTAR). Maritime Domain Awareness Solution, and Virtual Augmented Mixed Reality for Aircraft Maintenance (VAMRAM) have been identified as medium-term projects. The two long term projects are the Terrain Shaping Obstacle, and the Counter-UAS, Rocket, Artillery & Mortar (CURAM) system, for the Indian Army.

Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Besides direct businesses and trade outcomes from the US Defence Secretary, Lloyd Austin's India visit, his expected meetings with the External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi are likely to draw the contours of the broader tenets of the bilateral strategic relationship. The visit is being seen as important as it follows on the heels of the first meeting of the heads of state of the Quad countries: US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The leaders of the Quad countries had their first-ever Quad leaders' Summit on 12 March 2021 through a virtual platform, giving the grouping a formal shape. Among the top priorities of this meeting was vaccine diplomacy as well as preserving freedom and a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. The meeting of the heads of states of the Quad is important in many respects. First, it represents the gradually rising profile of the grouping, coming a long way from the initial days of each member's own set of apprehensions vis-à-vis China. Second, the meeting shows that the four countries are now using the Quad as a serious forum for consolidating commonalities and convergences in the Indo-Pacific. Finally, it shows the combined resolve of the member countries apropos China, although without spelling out such strategic compulsions. The Quad leaders' meet could also be seen as an indication that the four countries could come up with a joint statement by the end of 2021, further institutionalising the Quad mechanism.

The Quad promises to become a stronger platform under the Biden Administration, especially in the context of India-US relations for at least two reasons: first, both countries look to consolidating their position, strategy, and vision in the Indo-Pacific, with the Quad forming an indispensable component of that calculus. Secondly, the broadening umbrella of the bilateral and multilateral relations for both the US and India now includes mechanisms, metrics, and channels symbolic of a partnership that is closer to an alliance, and yet not one. Thirdly, both the USA and India face a China that has compelled them to turn strategic corners in dealing with Beijing.

Under the Biden Administration, US-India ties have the potential to further strengthen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific as its pivot. While the Trump Administration had taken steps towards sustaining cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific too, its broader contours were shaped by a sense of asymmetry that the US's own animosity with China characterised. Under President Biden, who has promised more poise in dealing with China, the US has signalled its reliance on a multilateral approach and partnerships to deal with China, as

opposed to President Trump's policy of unilateral confrontation with China. Some of the assurances coming out of the Biden Administration about partnership with India in the Indo-Pacific already signal trust and stability. Ned Price, spokesman for the US Department of State under the Biden Administration has said the following with regard to partnership with India: "India is one of the most important partners in the Indo-Pacific region to us. We welcome India's emergence as a leading global power and its role as a net security provider in the region. We cooperate on a wide range of diplomatic and security issues, including defence, non-proliferation, regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, the environment, health, education, technology, agriculture, space, and oceans. And of course, that list is not exhaustive."⁴

Furthermore, in the first week of March 2021, the US released its Interim National Security Strategic Guidance which states that, "We will deepen our partnership with India and work alongside New Zealand, as well as Singapore, Vietnam and other Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states to advance shared objectives..."⁵⁵

The sentiment further strengthens the ideas of the Quad-Plus and ASEAN-centrality in the Indo-Pacific outlook. These frameworks seek to further strengthen the common vision in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond for the two countries.

The Biden Administration has the privilege to work on an already nurtured relationship between the US and India in the Indo-Pacific. The two countries have moved towards issue-based partnerships, while still maintaining differences and their core interests intact. This dynamic of bilateral cooperation also gets reflected in their Indo-Pacific partnership. The Indo-Pacific represents both convergences and divergences between India and the US. As such, both will have to approach their differences carefully - specifically on the definition of the exact geographic limits and definitive strategic intentions of their respective Indo-Pacific strategy.

At the regional level, reversing some of the US withdrawal initiated by the Trump Administration could be critical in consolidating the Biden Administration's approach to the Indo-Pacific region. Some of these concerns are: the US role in Afghanistan; the possible US return to the TPP; greater and more strengthened implementation of the foundational agreements with partners like India; and the US strengthening its relationship with smaller Indian Ocean nations, like the Maldives and Sri Lanka. In September 2020, the US signed a security agreement with the Maldives, while in July 2020, Sri

Lanka acknowledged that it has entered into a Status of Forces Agreement with the United States. The Biden Administration will look to further consolidate its relationship with its Indian Ocean partners and the nations of the Indo-Pacific more broadly.

The COVID-19 pandemic has broadened the spectrum of bilateral cooperation between India and the US. In particular, are the regional and global responses to COVID-19 through vaccines, scientific cooperation in vaccine development, and the export and import of medicines related to the pandemic, or even general medicines. India is the second largest exporter of pharmaceuticals to the United States and the United States is the largest exporter of medical devices to India. The enormous disruptions in global supply chains brought about by the pandemic, including in the pharmaceutical sector, has provided opportunities for the US-India partnership to work towards building resilient and trusted supply chains. With US support in scientific research and technology, India can bring about the mass production of vaccines and essential drugs for COVID-19, both for domestic and international purposes.

Conclusion

The Modi-Biden talks have set the platform for the launch of a more resolved India-US relationship through stronger strategic and economic ties. Regular meetings and discussions through established channels between the two countries; strengthening ties in the defence sector; increasing the true potential of energy supplies as a binder in bilateral relations; a possible trade deal; and improving other metrics of bilateral trade outside the defence sector are likely to be critical conduits for improving bilateral relations between India and the US under the Biden Administration. In the areas of trade and commerce particularly, the restoration of India's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) status may prove critical in catapulting ties to a new level. Furthermore, a limited trade deal, if not a full-fledged one, along with US support at the WTO on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) related issues could be an opportunity for the Biden Administration. Most recently, some US legislators have urged President Joe Biden to support the move by India (along with South Africa) before the World Trade Organization for an emergency temporary waiver of some TRIPS rules to enable greater production and supply of COVID-19 vaccines, treatments, and diagnostic tests. The move follows India's request to the WTO for a time-limited waiver of the TRIPS agreement. During COVID-

19, this request assumes importance as it would allow countries and manufacturers to directly access and share technologies to produce vaccines and therapeutics without causing trade sanctions or international disputes.

At the broader strategic level, exhorting India to assume greater responsibility in the Indo-Pacific region is also going to determine how the US-India relationship shapes up. There are some speculations that the US Defence Secretary, Lloyd Austin's India visit in March 2021 could also bring the issue of India's role in Afghanistan on the table. While for the Biden Administration restoring some ground control in Afghanistan will be a policy priority for its role in this region - especially in the wake of a hasty withdrawal plan framed by the Trump Administration in the face of worsening security situation in Afghanistan - India will be wary and cautious of how much to commit, and in what way. The dilemma regarding India's role in Afghanistan may get further compounded in the wake of the expected quid pro quo in the face of recent US efforts to facilitate India's inclusion in critical Afghan talks.

India expects that the Biden Administration will be concessional with India on some issues like the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) sanctions for the purchase of Russian S-400 air defence systems and the easing of sanctions on Iran, which could in turn help India resume joint work on the Chabahar port project. To this end, the Indian Shipping Minister has already hinted that India expects to start full-scale operations at Iran's Chabahar port by the end of May 2021. With US\$ 500 million worth investment in the development of the port, India is expecting a thaw in US-Iran relations to further one of its most important development projects, with consequences beyond Afghanistan.

Finally, can increased investment flows from the US be an opportunity for India under the Biden administration? At the height of the pandemic in July 2020, in his Keynote Address at the US India Business Council, Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited US firms to invest in India. His speech is being seen as important for quite a few reasons. First, it was a direct outreach/invitation to the US for investment in India at the highest level on the back of a government move to restrict direct investments from countries sharing borders with India - a move that is being seen as directed against China as India looks to lessen trade dependence on China, and lower its trade deficit with China. Second, the move to invite the US as an investor in a big way is part of India's larger plan to replace supply chains now largely dependent on China. Particularly in this regard, Prime Minister Modi highlighted the

“diversification of trade” as an indispensable requirement. As a long-term strategy, India has drawn a list of 63 countries from Southeast Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa to replace its import and export lines, which are, at the moment, heavily dependent on China. Third, Prime Minister Modi pitched India’s improvement in the ease of doing business to the USA, which has been one of the oldest grouses for US investors in India. Fourth, the idea finds its roots in the “Atmanirbhar Bharat” through which India considers boosting domestic manufacturing in a big way, particularly after the defence sector FDI cap has been raised to 74 percent. India assesses the US role in enabling this process in a big way in coming times - particularly by supplying critical technologies in the defence and security sector. Besides, making the US an investment partner in areas like agriculture will likely end the disputes between the two countries at the WTO level, and make the finalisation of the trade deal easier. Lastly, Prime Minister Modi sees the India-US partnership as having the potential to help the world bounce back from the COVID-19 crisis.

However, despite these early positive signals from the Biden Administration, New Delhi’s cautiousness will persist in its embrace of Washington. India’s partnerships with the USA will be defined by a strong bilateral relationship, but, at the same time, it will be undergirded by both India’s multi-alignment policy and strategic autonomy.

Notes:

- ¹ “Telephonic Conversation between National Security Adviser and Mr. Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor of U.S.A”. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Available at: <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33417/Telephonic+Conversation+between+National+Security+Adviser+and+Mr+Jake+Sullivan+National+Security+Advisor+of+USA> (Accessed February 25, 2021).
- ² “US Defence Secretary on three day India visit from today - full schedule here”. *DNA*. March 19, 2021. Available at: <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-us-defence-secretary-on-three-day-india-visit-from-today-full-schedule-here-2881946> (Accessed February 25, 2021).
- ³ Siddiqui, H (2020). “India-US meet virtually, agree to further strengthen defence technology cooperation”. *Financial Express*. September 16. Available at: <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/india-us-meet-virtually-agree-to-further-strengthen-defence-technology-cooperation/2084548/> (Accessed February 25, 2021)
- ⁴ “Department Press Briefing – February 9, 2021”. U.S. Department of State. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-february-9-2021/> (Accessed February 25, 2021).

- ⁵ “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance”. March 2021. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf> (Accessed March 08, 2021).

