



DEFENSE NEWS CONCLAVE: STORIES OF U.S.-INDIA DEFENSE AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIP Dialogues on Deliverables to Deliveries

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Wednesday

10:00-15:20 hrs (IST)

Sarovar Premiere
Jaipur, India

WORKSHOP REPORT

Summary

With the inauguration of the Age of Reforms in India in 1990, Indian Foreign Policy has been marked by a distinct pro-liberalisation stance that manifested itself in altered mutual perceptions on the part of both India and the U.S. In subsequent years, India's designation as a Major Defense Partner of the U.S., signing of foundational defense-related agreements, and a large number of joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific region have taken the U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership to new heights.

The shift in geopolitical attention to the Indo-Pacific region and related geo-strategic and geo-economic developments such as the coming together of Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. into a Quad, the initiation of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, have further reinforced this partnership. This is corroborated by the Joint Statement of the U.S. and India following the Official State Visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the U.S. in June 2023 which highlights the desire to secure a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

Background & Context

Under the Defense News Conclave Project, supported by the U.S. Consulate General Kolkata and the U.S. Department of State, CUTS International is organising five workshops covering consular districts of the U.S. Consulate Generals to be followed by a concluding event in New Delhi. They aim to create a group of informed stakeholders in India to strengthen the U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership by generating the necessary awareness of diverse media professionals and other relevant stakeholders. Each workshop will consist of two sessions focusing on good practices of the U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership, in general, and its relevance for the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership in the Indo-Pacific region, in particular.

Through these exercises, an attempt is made to look at the milestones set and achieved, and policies and gaps to be addressed to secure a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

Introduction

The workshop was flagged off by **Pradeep S Mehta**, Secretary General, CUTS International. In his opening remarks, he mentioned that the U.S.-India defense cooperation started almost 25 years ago, in the aftermath of the nuclear tests conducted by India in May 1998 when a series of dialogues between the Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, and Former External Affairs Minister of India, Jaswant Singh were held. This was to understand strategic compulsions and explore domains of convergence. Such endeavours culminated in U.S. President Bill Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 which set the countries on a new path of trust-based cooperation.

During the recent G20 summit on September 09-10 under India's Presidency, India and the U.S. reaffirmed their commitment to deepen and diversify their already expansive major defence partnership through expanded cooperation including new and emerging domains such as space and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as well as accelerated defence-industrial collaboration. Mehta alluded to the significant role of the U.S. in India's vision to shape up as a developed country by 2047.

Aaron J. Cooper, Air Attaché, Embassy of the U.S. in India highlighted, in the course of his deliberations, the deepening interconnectedness between the U.S. and India, not only in terms of official partnerships but also through people-to-people connections, with many Indians living, and working, or studying in the U.S.

Cooper noted the pivotal importance of the Indo-Pacific region in the emerging international economic order with its significant population, economic power, and military presence and reiterated that India plays a central role in shaping this region's future. The U.S. has a strategy for the Indo-Pacific region and emphasises cooperation with its allies and partners to maintain a free, open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient region.

The U.S. and India share common values, democratic principles, and open economies, and are collaborating on global challenges like health, climate, and security. Cooper further explained that it is important to build trust and reinforce partnerships in advance, rather than waiting for crises to surface, highlighting that India and the U.S. are "Better Together" than otherwise.

Session I: Scope of Bilateral Frameworks and Growing Areas of Convergence in U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership

Chair

- **Lt. Gen. Subrata Saha** (Retd.), former Member of the National Security Advisory Board and Deputy Chief of Army Staff

Panellists

- **Lt. Gen Anil Kumar Ahuja** (Retd.), former Indian Co-Chair of the U.S.-India Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) Inter Agency Task Force and Distinguished Fellow, CUTS WDC Center
- **Col. Manvendra Singh (Retd.)**, Editor-in-Chief, Defense and Security Alert
- **Manjari Singh**, Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of International Studies, Amity University.
- **Nayanima Basu**, Editor, Foreign Affairs, Strategy and National Security, ABP Live (ABP Network)

The session highlighted the key milestones of the India-U.S. defence relationship, such as the Agreed Minute on Defense Relations in 1995, the end of the Cold War, and the signing of various agreements, including the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002 and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016.

The elevation of India as a major defence partner and the importance of the two-plus-two ministerial dialogue have been significant landmarks in the India-U.S. defence partnership. Since 2008, there has been a significant increase in defence acquisitions from the U.S., amounting to nearly US\$20bn.

Drivers of this Partnership

The importance of the strategic convergence between India and the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region is driven by concerns related to China's disposition and its impact on critical raw materials and technology.

The U.S. aims to strengthen India's capabilities to serve as a credible alternative and counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific region. Both nations concur on the centrality of the India-U.S. partnership in maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

India and the U.S. require a skilled workforce to bridge the technology gap with China rapidly, emphasising the importance of collaboration in technology development and upgrading. The attractiveness of India's market, both in the defence and private sectors, serves as a key driver for the U.S. This includes opportunities for defence and private sector engagement.

The significance of the “Major Defense Partner” status ascribed to India, allows for a smooth transition to a cordial relationship regardless of political changes. This has been built upon the trust and interoperability between the military forces of India and the U.S., reminiscent of the early special forces exercises between the two countries as a testament to this trust.

Importance of Trust in Partnership

While military trust has grown from strength to strength between the U.S. and India, bureaucratic and policy-level trust and cooperation have unfortunately not progressed at the same pace. Even in terms of military cooperation, opportunities for advancing the relationship have gone fallow with India's reluctance to contribute forces during global crises like the fight against ISIS.

There is a need for a more software-centric approach to the Indo-U.S. partnership, focusing on shared values, joint research and development, and policy alignment rather than just hardware sales for enhancing the India-U.S. Defense partnership.

There must be joint research and development (R&D) to enhance the defence relationship rather than exclusive reliance on hardware and equipment sales. Indus-X is an initiative aimed at accelerating the defense ecosystem by involving various stakeholders from business, defense, academia, think tanks, and government. This inclusivity is seen as vital to the holistic development of the U.S.-India Security partnership.

Transformation of Relations

The transformation of the defense relationship from non-alignment to a strategic partnership has highlighted the importance of India maintaining strategic autonomy while becoming a partner rather than an ally of the U.S.

India and the U.S. have entered into a trans-regional partnership, focusing on addressing both traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. This includes concerns about supply chain disruptions and the need to manage the rise of China.

One can identify three phases in the evolution of the India-U.S. defense partnership. The first phase involved defense procurement, the second phase focused on co-production and co-development, and the third phase constituted a comprehensive global and strategic partnership, emphasising democratic peace theory as a foundation for cooperation.

Need for a More Balanced Partnership

The challenges include the need for timely delivery of initiatives, achieving a more balanced partnership, and the role of the Indian diaspora and the U.S. Congress's India caucus in strengthening the relationship and stressing the importance of focusing on delivery in the unfolding years.

The evolving Indo-U.S. defense relationship has expanded into various domains and there is a need for a comprehensive approach to address regional and global security challenges.

India in seeking support from the U.S. during the 1962 India-China war set the context that has shaped the India-U.S. relationship in the following decades. The military relationship between the two countries has developed a transactional aspect, characterised by the recent defense deals and agreements, particularly in the domain of critical and emerging technologies.

Challenges Related to Bureaucracy and the Impact on Defense Transactions Between India and the U.S.

Dealing with the U.S. can be more challenging due to bureaucratic hurdles compared to Russia. The U.S. aims to reduce India's dependence on Russian imports, and this may pose challenges as India seeks to balance its relations between both countries.

The potential for increased intelligence sharing between India and the U.S. could be valuable to their defense and strategic relationships. While India seeks to strengthen its defense ties with the U.S., it is unlikely to completely sever its relations with Moscow.

Session II: Significance of U.S.-India Strategic Partnership

Chair

- **Ritu Sharma**, Senior Editor, The EurAsian Times

Panellists

- **Lt. Gen. Arun Kumar Sahni**, (Retd.), former General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, South Western Command
- **Maj. Gen. Sudhakar Jee** (Retd.), former Colonel of the Mahar Regiment, Defense and Strategic Affairs Analyst
- **Cmde. Mukesh Bhargava** (Retd.), former Member of the Board and Vice President, L&T Defence and Consultant/Advisor, Defence & Aerospace
- **Prabudh Sharma**, President, Raytheon India and South Asia
- **Dipanjana R. Chowdhury**, Diplomatic Editor, The Economic Times

At the outset, this session highlighted the historical context of U.S.-India relations. This history includes events such as the Tibet crisis in 1957-58, where the U.S. offered India assistance to raise an armoured brigade for territorial occupation, which was declined by India. One thus notices the complex nature of U.S.-India relations, the past replete with periods of cooperation and divergence.

Indian Startup Ecosystem

India's startup ecosystem has experienced significant growth, with over 2,000 Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) operating in critical and emerging technology sectors. These startups are becoming global leaders in areas such as AI, robotics, and 3D printing. However, there is a need to harness the burgeoning talents and innovations in these domains to augment India's growth.

Critical and emerging technologies are also reshaping the character of modern warfare. These technologies, including AI, advanced defense systems, and the Internet of Things (IoT), are revolutionising military operations and suggest the need for constant adaptation. India's vibrant startup ecosystem plays a pivotal role in advancing these technologies and should be leveraged to strengthen the nation's defense capabilities.

India and China in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region's geopolitical and economic significance stems from its population, critical technology supply chains, abundant natural resources, and the presence of major economies. As global dynamics continue to evolve, this interconnected region is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of international relations, trade, and security.

China has cultivated diplomatic relations with Indian Ocean countries, often transcending political affiliations. It has leveraged relationships with political parties, provided financial assistance, and turned a blind eye to human rights violations to secure its interests.

China's financial muscle and the BRI have allowed it to invest in infrastructure projects in the region. These investments often come with significant debt burdens, creating a form of economic leverage over these countries.

China has deployed nuclear submarines to the Indian Ocean, indicating its intent to deny access to this vital waterway. This move has raised concerns about regional security.

India has responded to China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region through a multipronged strategy. India has embarked on diplomatic efforts to build relationships with Indian Ocean countries, promoting cooperation on shared interests such as security, trade, and connectivity.

India has taken steps to bolster its security alliances, such as the Quad, which includes the U.S., Japan, and Australia. These partnerships aim to maintain a rules-based international order and counterbalance China's assertiveness.

India is expanding its economic engagement with Indian Ocean countries, offering assistance in infrastructure development, disaster relief, and capacity building.

India faces several challenges in countering China's influence in the Indian Ocean region. While it may not match China's financial resources, India can leverage its technical expertise, diplomatic outreach, and regional alliances to protect its interests. The Quad, in particular, has emerged as a significant platform for regional cooperation.

China Factor in India-U.S. Relations

The China factor has played a significant role in bringing India and the U.S. closer. For instance, the India-China border standoff at Doklam in 2017 can be cited as the first instance when the U.S.'

played a crucial role in addressing a regional issue, which helped build trust between the two countries.

Trust in this bilateral relationship is a crucial factor like in any strategic partnership. The Five Eyes intelligence alliance is a trust-based cooperation. However, the abrupt U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan raised concerns and fostered doubts about the reliability of the partnership. Despite differences in approaches to certain countries, especially in India's Eastern neighbourhood, the future of the relationship is not seriously questioned. This issue of sanctions is identified as a source of discomfort in the relationship, as they can hinder India's global interests. The need for India and the U.S. to form a task force or joint working group on sanctions is believed to address this issue effectively.

Challenges in the Indian Defense Market

Challenges arise due to FDI restrictions that prohibit foreign-owned subsidiaries from participating in certain Indian tenders. The speaker highlighted the need to address the limitations to encourage partnerships.

Achieving the required indigenous content in defense projects is challenging. Discussions are ongoing to redefine the criteria to promote co-development and co-production.

Technology Transfer: The release ability process for U.S. technologies under Foreign Military Sales (FMS) regulations needs alignment with Indian defense procurement procedures to facilitate a smooth technology transfer.

Recent high-level meetings and discussions show a commitment to developing a more cooperative framework for technology transfer, co-development, and co-production. Initiatives include increasing indigenous content, engaging in joint projects, and fostering partnerships.

The challenges in the Indian defense market are being actively addressed, and there are promising prospects for enhanced Indo-US defense cooperation in terms of technology transfer and collaborative projects. Under the circumstances, the future of Indo-U.S. relations seems to be optimistically poised.

The session concluded with closing remarks from Arnab Ganguly, Associate Director and Centre Head, CUTS Calcutta Resource Centre who emphasised the importance of the India-U.S. defense partnership as a pillar for global peace and security in contemporary times and are better together.