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Defense News Conclave

Stories of U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership

Dialogues on Deliverables to Deliveries

WORKSHOP REPORT

Summary

With the inauguration of the Age of Reforms in India in 1990, Indian Foreign Policy has imbibed a distinct pro-liberalization stance that manifested itself in altered mutual perceptions on the part of both India and the United States. 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 geopolitical focus on the Indo-Pacific region in recent years and related geo-strategic and geo-economic developments such as the coming together of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. into a Quadrilateral group, and the initiation of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, have further reinforced this partnership. This is corroborated by the Joint Statement of the United States and India following the official state visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the U.S. in June 2023 which highlighted inter alia 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 organizing five workshops covering consular districts of the U.S. Consulate Generals. 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 among diverse media professionals and relevant stakeholders. Each workshop is designed to 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 the project deliverables, an attempt is made to look at the milestones set and achieved, and policies and gaps to be addressed in order to secure a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

Introduction

In his Opening Remarks, **Purushendra Singh**, Assistant Director, CUTS International highlighted that the U.S.-India defense and strategic partnership in the current phase commenced with India's nuclear tests in 1998 and has grown from strength to strength ever since. The robustness of the Indian economy which is expected to surpass the US and China by 2075 is one of the key drivers of this partnership. Today, the U.S.-India bilateral partnership is anchored on terra firm that is underlined by trust, mutual understanding, and bonds of friendships.

Delivering the welcome remarks, **Jennifer Larson**, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General Hyderabad said that the US-India defense partnership has seen significant progress over the past two decades, with the US becoming a significant supplier of defense equipment to India and India's largest military exercise partner. The bilateral defense trade with India has grown exponentially, from zero in 2008 to about \$ 25 billion at the end of 2023. Many U.S. aerospace companies have established partnerships with Indian counterparts, facilitating technology transfer and enhancing indigenous defense production capabilities. The diversity and workforce of these partnerships are commendable.

The growth in trade and interoperability has been propelled by the vital role of the Indo-Pacific region for the future of both India and the U.S. The Secretary of State and President both liken America to a Pacific nation and express faith that the Indo-Pacific region will shape the trajectory of the world in the 21st century. The US-India major defense partnership has become a pillar of global peace and security, achieving its full potential across various human endeavors, including health, energy, education, and security.

The US and India are working together to address global issues such as climate change, upholding a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific, and maintaining a rule-based order grounded in international law with respect for human rights.

Session I: Innovation and Industrial Bridge: U.S.-India Partnership

Chair & Moderator

- **Stuti Banerjee**, Senior Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs

Panelists

- **Lt. Gen. Anil Kapoor** (Retd.), Board Member, Technology Innovation Hub Governing Body & Professor of Practice, IIT Tirupati
- **Maj. Gen. Pawan Anand** (Retd.), Head, AtmaNirbhar Bharat Initiative, United Service Institution of India
- **Capt. Sarabjeet Parmar** (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow, United Service Institution of India
- **Parveen P A**, Director, Aerospace & Defence, Government of Telangana
- **Harinder Sekhon**, Former Intelligence and Strategic Analyst, National Security Council Secretariat, Government of India and Distinguished Fellow, CUTS WDC Center

This session focused on the synergies in innovation and defense industrial cooperation between the U.S. and India. It also assessed bilateral partnerships in defense supply chains and emerging technologies.

Cooperation in Innovation

India and the US are prioritizing innovation cooperation in their bilateral relationship, as highlighted by Prime Minister Modi's joint statement in June 2023. The partnership includes collaboration between universities in defense, innovation, and commercialization, as well as initiatives in AI, next-generation telecommunications, and biotech.

India's growing commitment to play a prominent role in the international arena, including the Indo-Pacific, makes it imperative to include India in any discussion on these issues. The Quad Summit in India held this year provides an opportunity to continue the dialogue on defense and security. However, there are potential limits and gaps in the cooperation and India's expectations for the US in the larger India-Pacific matrix.

The Indo-US Playbook is a contemporary and futuristic approach to the 21st-century strategic partnership, emphasizing mutual dependence and aspirations. The partnership is based on shared

democratic values and a rule-based global order, with a focus on defense preparedness, mutual aspirations, and a common operating picture.

Key Deliverable- iCET

The initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) is a key deliverable of the U.S.-India innovation partnership, focusing on integrated support in critical and emerging technologies. The initiative consists of three pillars: product, skill, and program strategy. The product lens focuses on development, capability development, national development, and mutual support. The program strategy should be joint, inclusive, and focused on industrial collaboration. The skill pillar focuses on creating 700 million job-ready individuals and professionals in India and abroad.

The initiative also highlights the importance of brain circulation in bridging the gap between futuristic technologies and the US. The indexing initiative, which focuses on becoming a deliverable program, is an appropriate example of how-to pick-up innovation. There is need for a national R&D Fervor, a model for incubation and acceleration, based on successful programs in the US, Israel, and other countries. They suggest that DARPA could create a catalytic transformation bridge for a national R&D organization, leveraging youth bulge and R&D setups to create a national R&D Fervor. This could be achieved through a mutual agreement, strategic partnership, or a joint venture.

Joint Intelligence Assessments

Joint Intelligence Assessments are crucial for understanding the direction of the U.S.-India defense and strategic partnership between the U.S. and India. Such Joint Intelligence Assessments involve not just information sharing but also the sharing of processed information with possible outcomes that impact policy or operations. Intelligence assessments can be categorized into OSINT open-source intelligence and HUMINT human intelligence. OSINT brings out hard data, while HUMINT brings in the human element, which can corroborate what technology provides.

Tactical intelligence, which is actionable and needs to be given to concerned people in a specific time frame, is crucial for cooperation between the two countries. The understanding and sharing of strategic intelligence at the top level will ensure a smoother relationship between the two countries.

Leadership and functional-level issues also play a role in this process. The U.S. has shown positive trends in leadership over in the past, but bureaucratic and red tape issues often hinder this cultural fit. The urgency of the situation calls for regular meetings by officials and academics to address

data safety and sovereignty issues. The bottom line is that a two-way approach is necessary for implementing these mechanisms effectively.

To bring together trust, the Five Eyes system, which includes English-speaking anglophone countries, should be expanded to nine, including non-anglophone countries. India's role in these systems should be explored, as it could fit into the system more effectively. Technical coordination, cybersecurity coordination, and communication coordination should be constant and addressed every day to ensure data safety and sovereignty.

Focus on co-producing high-quality assets

The US-India relationship and its current state focus on two key aspects: quality and affordability. Quality can be achieved through technology transfer from the U.S. or by utilizing India's abundant trainable youth manpower. A coalition of both countries can produce high-quality assets that are affordable to countries worldwide.

Ghosts of the past, such as allegations against India by Canada and the U.S., may dampen the cooperative spirit between the U.S. and India. But, in the past, the two democracies have managed to work together for many years, despite their differences in approaches. Initiatives like the development of jet engines for India's Light Combat Aircraft Tejas and logistics agreements for the repair of U.S. ships have been concluded, which is a clear indication that the two countries have not let their differences triumph the spirit of cooperation.

India's current situation requires a more mature, open-door policy, strategic autonomy, and a more acceptable approach from the U.S. At present, we have no cogent strategy in place to address the issues at hand.

Experience of American OEMs in India

The importance of industrialization, job creation, and investment in the U.S. aerospace and defense industries is paramount. Experience of U.S. OEMs in the state of Telangana suggests that many of these companies do not have any restraints in financing their supply chains. The problem is with smaller suppliers who since the COVID pandemic are facing a shortage of manpower.

India is in a good position to support these indigenization goals, as it is increasingly getting into the indigenization mode. The American OEMs are aggressively increasing their supply chain, and there are many areas where Indian MSMEs, IT firms, and electronic manufacturing firms can support these goals.

There is a resurgence of MSMEs in India, particularly in Hyderabad, which has close to 1000 MSMEs dedicated to aerospace and defense. These companies are mature enough to take on technology, and the Telangana state government is progressively increasing the number of technologies that were restricted for domestic supply. This presents a great opportunity for US companies through Electronic Manufacturing Services (EMS) and supply chain partnerships.

The Indian government has implemented an aggressive policy to attract investments in the aerospace sector, offering customized climate policies for mega projects. This has led to a large number of investments coming to India, despite the push for corridors and other resources. The Union government has also focused on increasing skilling partnerships, creating an OEM center of excellence, and partnering with global universities like Cranfield University, among other universities in the US. The industry in Hyderabad offers better rates and more reliable rates, which are certified by most OEMs.

The Chinese factor

The historically evolving background that brought India and the US together, focuses on shared security concerns. The China factor has been a driving force in this dynamic relationship, with both countries looking toward each other and reconfiguring their governments. Growing assertiveness of China, both economically and militarily, and the need to counter its technological advances have brought the two countries closer. There has been a further deepening of alliances between the U.S. and India, with the increasingly proximity between Russia and China, despite distrust in Central Asia.

The regional power rivalries, such as the Middle East, Europe, and East Asia, have triggered conflicts and territorial disputes, hence there is a need for collaboration and solutions to these problems, including those pertaining to combating piracy and other issues.

Technological advancements, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and space exploration, have changed the global landscape, and India and U.S. as democracies must find common ground to address these challenges. While China was ahead in the space race, the US and India have decided to tackle these challenges, with India's Mars mission being a heartening example of emphasizing the importance of addressing shared global challenges and fostering a healthy disagreement between India and the US.

Session II: Significance of U.S.-India Naval Collaboration

Chair & Moderator:

- **Pooja Bhatt**, Independent Analyst & Maritime Governance Researcher

Panelists

- **Dinakar Peri**, Senior Associate Editor, The Hindu
- **Sanjay Pulipaka**, Chairperson, Politea Research Foundation
- **Shrishti Pukhrem**, Deputy Director, Academics & Research, The India Foundation
- **Swasti Rao**, Associate Fellow, Europe and Eurasia Center, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses

The second panel discussed the importance of the Indo-Pacific region in the 21st century, replacing the Atlantic region in trade and economic relations. India's national security apparatus includes maritime security in the Indian Ocean region and strategic defense partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region including like-minded countries like Japan and even the EU. The session also highlighted the relevance of the small Indian Ocean Island nations in the ongoing defense collaborations between India and the U.S.

Maritime focus of Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is a diverse entity with various cultures, languages, political, and economic systems. This diversity makes it an important geopolitical strategy region. The focus of the region is on the maritime domain, as trade flows cheapest in this area. However, this has brought challenges, such as economic developmental concerns, historical issues, and the rise of climate change.

Countries in the region have tried to avoid great power rivalries between the U.S., China, and Russia, in an attempt to cooperate with great powers and find new cooperative mechanisms. China's approach in the Indian Ocean region, which includes developing navies and ports for military purposes, is a threat. Chinese ships and research vessels are also present in the Indian Ocean, adding to the region's stability and prosperity.

Non-traditional threats, such as climate change, piracy, and maritime crime, have multiplied the already fragile ecosystem of the Indo-Pacific region. Cooperation is essential to address these threats and ensure the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

Chinese investments in the Indian Ocean region

The locus of economic power has shifted from the West to the East, with China being the dominant power. The Indo-Pacific region is experiencing growing economic integration but also faces territorial conflict. This is due to the growing demand for regionalism and concerns about regional framework functioning.

The Indo-Pacific is a large region with diverse challenges, including the emergence of China in the Indian Ocean, which is causing security concerns for India. Chinese investments in the Indian Ocean region are not occurring in isolation but are planked on linkages to access natural resources. Port infrastructure is being used in various ways, such as capturing a beat for China and other countries. China's increasing influence in the Indian Ocean states is also affecting the Indian Navy, as they must monitor and account for these submarines on a daily basis.

Regional frameworks such as the Asia-Africa growth corridor need to be scaled up and coordinated. There is a need to address issues like illegal drug trafficking and strengthen the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

Transformation in Operation of Militaries

The transformation in India's defense cooperation with the US has been transformative, with significant progress made in recent years. The transformation has been driven by the need to fundamentally upgrade the operations of militaries.

Cooperation in minor corporate areas, such as retail intelligence cooperation, has also been scaled up. For example, in 2020, India requested broad geographical data and satellite imagery from U.S., which helped them improve their operations in Ladakh along the Sino-Indian border. Another example is the CISCO Communications agreement, which has led to the installation of Citrix Systems in the Indian Naval headquarters and other regional headquarters.

India has been trying to have a marker for their relationship with the US, but the Triple 7 guns and support platforms have proven successful. The country has also purchased two frontline fighters, LCA Mark 2, Mark 1A, and Mark 2, all powered by GE engines.

Policymakers often ask about India's military modernization, with preference for either Russian or U.S. models. However, the reality is that India is building its platform for technology transfer, such as in the case of helicopters, and whether Russia is the best model for India's defense industry is not always clear, as it depends on the country's geography and terrain conditions. India is also

negotiating the striker infantry competitor, which is not suitable for India due to its terrain conditions.

The crucial role of small island states in the Indo-Pacific

Small island states play a critical role in the Indian Ocean region due to their strategic location along key maritime routes, which provide vital sea lanes for trade and commerce. They also play a role in maintaining stability and addressing security challenges such as piracy and illegal fishing.

Small island nations possess valuable maritime resources, including fisheries and potential hydrocarbon deposits, making them important players in the economic dynamics of the region. Climate change and environmental issues pose broader implications for these states and regional stability, leading to increased international cooperation on climate-related issues. Economic partnerships between small island states can influence economic dynamics and development, and their involvement in regional organizations and alliances can shape collective responses to shared challenges.

ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific

ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific is advocated through regional leadership, non-interference, peaceful coexistence, and consensus building. This centrality promotes a rule-based order, economic integration, engagement with external powers, challenges, and diversities. India and the US can collaborate in Southeast Asia through the Quad partnership, which aims to enhance dialogues, economic cooperation, security cooperation, diplomatic outreach, infrastructure development, and softer aspects of diplomacy. The ASEAN Economic Community plays a key role in the region, engaging with various regional economic partnerships and external partners.

However, there are challenges in managing issues like the South China Sea disputes, as there are varying levels of economic development and political systems among member states. ASEAN centrality can help manage issues like the South China Sea disputes and bring more cooperation and potential collaboration. Coordination between Japan and India in infrastructure development projects can diversify interests and contribute to Indo-Pacific strategies.

Security partnership between India and the EU in the Indo-Pacific

Maritime security cooperation between India and the European Union assumes great importance in the larger context of the US-China rivalry and strategic competition. They focus on two dimensions: ongoing cooperation and adding tangible security architecture to the region. One driver is the deepening of ongoing cooperation, as demonstrated by the Coordinated Maritime

Presence (CMP) concept of the European Union. This comprehensive framework encompasses vital elements such as the National Defence Academy (NDA), joint exercises, and port calls, and builds on existing cooperative frameworks with partners in the production sector. However, there is a problem of perception between New Delhi and Brussels, as France is the only European power that can provide security services.

There is a need to deepen the CMP, improve defense industry cooperation, and develop a more tangible security architecture. Also, need for collaborative efforts to contribute to substantiating the security architecture and the IP region that does not deepen great power rivalry, pushes for multipolarity, and engages smaller players in the region under a more autonomous leadership than the US can alone provide.

There is a possibility of establishing a hybrid threat center in the Indo-Pacific under the leadership of the EU. This idea is based on the existing Centre for Excellence on Hybrid Threats in Helsinki, Finland, which was established in 2016 to identify and operationalize responses to hybrid threats.

The Indo-Pacific region is not homogeneous, but is riddled with different threat perceptions, both traditional and non-traditional, stated **Arnab Ganguly**, Associate Director, CUTS International in his closing remarks. The security architecture is evolving and it should be flexible, robust, inclusive, and promote multipolarity. He added, collaboration in the Red Sea is critical for securing trade routes in the Pacific region. Asian centrality is still unclear, but economic interests bind countries together. The Indo-US defense relationship impacts India's economic and socioeconomic parameters, Hyderabad being an apt example in this regard. State governments in India can and do contribute to the achievement of national goals, and this should be an important takeaway.