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**The Indo-US Strategic Cooperation and How  
China's Influence Challenges to  
India-US Alliance in the Indo-Pacific**

**Mukesh Shankar Bharti\***

**Abstract**

*The purpose of this research is to find out the principal approaches and justification of the Indo-US bilateral cooperation. India relies on the U.S. for security reasons in the Indo-Pacific and its neighborhood. Further, India has severe security threats from its neighborhood in the northern and Himalayan frontier borders. In this prospect, this research investigates the bilateral cooperation of both countries. Why is the U.S. more important to India for the purpose of security and defense sectors in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region? The investigation of this study uses the comparative method with an analytical approach. As a result, the Indo-US strategic partnership is on the right track, and there is no conflict of interest in the Indo-Pacific at the global level. Furthermore, this research recommends that India needs to win*

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*the hearts of its South Asian neighborhood to restrict Chinese involvement in these countries.*

**Keywords:** India, USA, China, Indo-Pacific, South Asia, Geo-Politics, defense

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### Introduction

India has been encountering major security issues since 1990 on the northeastern border with China and Pakistan. China and Pakistan attacked India without provocation. There is a rivalry between India and China in various dimensions and perceptions of threats. China and India have common interests in the Indo-Pacific, but China unanimously creates problems in the Himalayan border areas. The recent Doklam standoff and clash at the Pangong lake between Indian and Chinese armies create severe security problems in South Asia. The U.S. has been facing a tough challenge in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific Region from the Chinese aggression policy. Thus, China's expansionism policy in the Indo-pacific region brought India and the U.S. closer strategic partners.<sup>1</sup>

The growing Chinese influence in Pakistan and Sri Lanka is an indicator for India in South Asia. Pakistan is a de facto ally of China and the principal strategic partner in the region. Since the 1960-70s, Pakistan has been a major importer of arms from China,

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<sup>1</sup>Amardeep Athwal, *China-India Relations: Contemporary Dynamics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Mukesh Shankar Bharti, "The Evolution of China's Economic Engagement in Central and Eastern Europe," *Economic and Regional Studies* 15, no. 1 (2022): 90–106; John W. Garver, "The Security Dilemma in Sino-Indian Relations," *India Review* 1 no. 4 (2007): 1–38; Jonathan Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 6 (2009): 811–840; C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Brookings Institution Press, 2012).

the Chinese authorities are providing strategic support. Pakistan uses this military equipment against India. The relationship between China and Pakistan is called an “all-weather friendship.” India’s strategic role in Pakistan is limited in the context of China’s deeper connection. Both countries are indulged in facilitating the proliferation of nuclear weapons mutually in this region. China and Pakistan are jointly developing fighter jets and missiles. The CPEC is directly connecting China to Gwadar port which is strategically important in this area. While the U.S. is successful in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz through the lens of free navigation and can mitigate the Chinese presence. Thus, China strongly encircles India from Gwadar to Hambantota on the western front of the country.<sup>2</sup>

India and U.S. signed the defense Framework Agreement on June 28, 2005. The agreement for a ten-year period is a landmark decision by both countries. This will help to change the geostrategic scenarios and will set the agenda for India and the U.S. in the region. India understands that the presence of the U.S. in the region will provide a good environment in an area of peace and stability. The Pacific and the Indian Ocean need a balance of power, and the US-India alliance has an agenda for this region to

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<sup>2</sup> David Brewster, “An Indian Ocean Dilemma: Sino-Indian Rivalry and China’s Strategic Vulnerability in the Indian Ocean,” *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 11, no. 1 (2015): 48–59.

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work together with other European countries as well.<sup>3</sup> There is a principal challenge to India, in the Asian continent no single power is able to dominate across the region. In spite of this notion, China is becoming a major challenger to India, and it is also dangerous for other continental states to cooperate in Asia and maritime as well. There is a need to restrict Chinese aggression against India, which is why India is willing to join hands with other western partners. The maritime challenge for India is energy supplies that remain friendly, and international maritime routes should be secure and free. India is trying to modernize the military and needs to work on military doctrine to respond to the opponent in the future course of grave challenges. This research answers the following questions 1) How do India and the U.S. nurture defense cooperation, and 2) To what extent India are the U.S. able to restrict Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region? The research uses primary and secondary data to find the research outcomes.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Background**

India is an important country from a strategic point of view in the South Asian region. The bilateral relationship between India and U.S. has been growing since the end of the Cold War. India and U.S. redefined their bilateral partnership after 1990.

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<sup>3</sup> Cherian Samuel, "Indo-US defense Cooperation and the Emerging Strategic Relationship," *Strategic Analysis* 31, no. 2 (2007): 209–36.

Meanwhile, India strategically emerged as an economic and defense power in this region. Before reaching out to India, the US was a key supporter and partner of India's rival, Pakistan. China's growing power in the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions caused the U.S. policy to shift toward India. Indian policy also aligns with the U.S. to meet defense supply to services. The growing defense trade shapes the bilateral economic and strategic partnership between India and the U.S.

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton initiated cooperation with India. Later, George W. Bush and the Obama administration gradually strengthened the bilateral relationship. Thus, the former U.S. Presidents made visits to India, which took the relationship to a higher level. The Trump administration had a good connection with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Trump's visit to India ushered in a new era of strategic cooperation and coined the concept of the Indo-Pacific.<sup>4</sup> India and the USA agreed to shape the strategic partnership and strengthen and deepen the relationship between both countries. Since 2004, both countries have accelerated the deepened association and have achieved several successful defense agreements. Apart from the defense deal, both countries successfully incorporated numerous cyber securities and

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<sup>4</sup> Vivek Mishra, "India-US defense Cooperation: Assessing Strategic Imperatives," *Strategic Analysis* 42, no.1 (2018): 1-14.

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economic and global initiatives after 2004.<sup>5</sup> China's growing footprint in the subcontinent has eclipsed India's aspiration in South Asia. The Chinese policies are trying to encircle India in this region through its extensive geo-economics connectivity. China's flagship project, the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), is connecting South Asian Countries. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through Pakistan's control Jammu & Kashmir region. The China-Pakistan nexus creates security problems for India's northeastern border. China's growing economy supports the cultivation of new geo-economics connectivity in the region. China's military modernization has pulled ahead among the Asian countries.<sup>6</sup>

India is very much aware of China's aspiration to become a security power in Asia. China's BRI is a geopolitical tool to acquire more areas to make an extensive presence. India understands that bilateral cooperation with the U.S. can curb

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<sup>5</sup> K.P. Vijayalakshmi, "India-US Strategic Partnership: Shifting American Perspectives on Engaging India," *International Studies* 54, no. 1-4 (2017): 42-61.

<sup>6</sup> Abhijit Singh, Aparna Pande, Jeff M Smith, Samir Saran, Sunjoy Joshi, and Walter Lohman, "The New India-US Partnership in the Indo-Pacific: Peace, Prosperity and Security," Observer Research Foundation, accessed June 12, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ORF-Heritage-Hudson.pdf>.

China's strategic aspiration in South Asia.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. diplomacy toward South Asia is observed with high hope with India on the international stage. Blackwill and Tellis (2019) describe that India is rich in resources and it is the second most populous country in the world after China. There are a future and a lot of possibilities in this country. Therefore, a superpower is waiting for its own strategy. India is a champion of promoting the democratic ethos and representing the world as the largest democracy, which is a key positive element for India, and Washington has high hope for India to cooperate in Asia as well as in the Indo-Pacific. India could be a crucial global partner in the region to restrict the rising authoritarian challengers in the region.<sup>8</sup>

Today's global world order focuses on grabbing power in order to explore its business in various locations at the international level. The concept of geostrategy became a central part of geopolitics for the rising country in the economic field. In international theory and practice, the balance of power is a key approach and central policy to run the economic policy in modern-day international relations. In the context of Indo-US cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, there is a struggle among

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<sup>7</sup> Jane Holl Lute, "Charting a Future for India-US Relations in the New World Order," Observer Research Foundation, January 26, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/charting-a-future-for-india-us-relations-in-the-new-world-order/>.

<sup>8</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J Tellis, "Why New Delhi Remains Washington's Best Hope in Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, October 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india/2019-08-12/india-dividend>.



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economic powers to expand its presence and strengthen the Naval base for security purposes. The U.S. policy is balancing the power in this region for a secure and safe maritime to counter the Chinese Maritime Silk Route Initiatives (MSRI). That is why the U.S. initiated a deep relationship with India to maintain the balance of power. The U.S. wants to establish common cooperation, which should be based on the equilibrium between the two states. According to Hans J. Morgenthau, states always do not focus on a balance of power, but the mechanism of the superiority of power is a key approach of any state. Equality is one of the key approaches for the use of power by any state to cooperate with the other power. But there are nations that seek to obtain the maximum power under any type of circumstance.<sup>9</sup>

Power transition theory is adapted to understand that the United States shifted its policy towards the Indo-Pacific, it could be analyzed according to the theory of power transition, which took a structural and dynamic approach to international politics. Power transition theory and the balance of power theory are close to each other in the global powers-centric perspective on international coalitions on the various issues of economic, political, military, and peace cooperation during the different

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<sup>9</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1960).

periods.<sup>10</sup> Power Transition theory is classified as part of a school of the realist. “Power Transition deals with the pattern of changing power relationships in world politics.” The U.S. has shifted its policy toward a “Pivot to Asia” because of its strategic importance in international politics. India has emerged as a stronger economic power in the region and has a huge competitive consumer market to accelerate economic cooperation. Washington’s policy is strengthening its market in the Indo-Pacific region, and China is creating another angle in this region. Peace is a key variable of the Power Transition theory; the U.S. and India try to establish peace and prosperity, which would be rule-based order to explore the region.<sup>11</sup>

### **Data and Methodology**

This study is based on the qualitative approach of the discussion to empirically explore the results and the main findings. Further, this research uses data from published and online journals, books, websites, and the government’s archival database. The Kargil war was a new milestone in Indo-US relations as President Bill Clinton meditated to stop the war between India and Pakistan. Bill Clinton criticized Pakistan’s aggression in Indian territory in

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<sup>10</sup> Abramo FK Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1968); Jacek Kugler, Ronald L. Tammen, and Siddharth Swaminathan, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House, 2000); Abramo FK Organski and Jacek Kugler, “The Costs of Major Wars: The Phoenix Factor,” *American Political Science Review* 71, no. 4 (1977): 1347–66.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler, and Douglas Lemke, *Foundations of Power Transition Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

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1999. For the first time, the U.S. openly came close to India at the international level to support the Indian stance. It is the crucial juncture between the Indo-US relations formed for deeper cooperation.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. interest in Asia is intersected with the Indian national interest. China's rising is noticeable to the U.S., but it does not only matter to its involvement in Asia. India is very keen on the issue of security and stability of regions' states. The U.S. policy supports the Indian concerns in this region because of the sovereignty of independent states. China's expansionist policy and dominance in South Asian states make India support Washington. In 2008, the civil nuclear deal was the trademark of Indo-US cooperation. This deal was successfully attempted by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The U.S. finally decided to establish a friendly relationship with India and tried to forget the uncomfortable experience of the past. India became a nuclear power, and the U.S. accepted it as a de facto nuclear weapons country.<sup>13</sup> After a successful nuclear deal, India showed that it is a responsible country in the use of nuclear energy, and India further fostered extensive cooperation in defense, economy, and strategy.

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce Riedel, "How the 1999 Kargil Conflict Redefined US-India Ties," Brookings, July 24, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/07/24/how-the-1999-kargil-conflict-redefined-us-india-ties/>.

<sup>13</sup> Harsh V. Pant, and Yogesh Joshi, "Indo-US Relations under Modi: The Strategic Logic Underlying the Embrace," *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (2017): 133–46.

There are perceived threats from rising China that caused the U.S. to promote bilateral strategic cooperation. It is the principal reason that the U.S. has switched its policy towards India.<sup>14</sup> The Indian government also wants the modernization of the Indian Army, including all services. Thus, the U.S. is able to fill the military equipment gaps in the Indian Army. India needs modern technology and arms from the U.S. to counter China's aggression on the Indian northeastern border. Russia is a natural and trusted strategic partner, but it cannot supply, or Russia doesn't have modern technology to meet the needs of the Indian Army. Post-Cold War period, China emerged as a powerful country because of the rise in its economy. George W. Bush's administration nurtured the Indo-US convergence, and the perceptions of threat are increasing in the South Asia region. India is also very serious about shaping its cooperation with the U.S. to get modern military equipment.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the Bush administration tied up strategic cooperation between India and the U.S. Before 2000, the Indian perception spread across the country was that the U.S. was a strategic partner of Pakistan, which is India's arch-rival. This scenario changed under the George W. Bush Presidency of the U.S. The "pivot to Asia" strategy led by U.S. President Barack

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<sup>14</sup> Condoleezza Rice, "Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 1 (February 2000): 54–57.

<sup>15</sup> Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "Indo-US Relations in the Bush White House," *Strategic Analysis* 25, no. 4 (2008): 545–56.

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Obama focused on strengthening bilateral cooperation with New Delhi. Barack Obama visited India twice while in office to expedite the relationship deeper with UPA and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) governments.<sup>16</sup> Later, when Donald Trump came into power, he extended the policy of former Presidents and started deeper maritime cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific. India also needs a partner in the region for extensive security cooperation to restrict the Chinese footprint in Pacific politics. The Trump administration is highly interested in the sea economic routes and makes strategic cooperation among regional powers. Because in maritime politics, there is a huge amount of rivalry between the U.S. and China across the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>17</sup>

India launched the “Look East Policy” in 1992 in order to boost the Indian economy. The ASEAN countries show enormous interest in economic cooperation with India. India’s liberalization policy helps foreign investment in the country. The importance of maritime business routes is growing. India has a strong presence in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The geostrategic policy is contradicted between India and China in the region of

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<sup>16</sup> Muhsin Puthan Purayil, “The Rise of China and the Question of an Indo-US Alliance: A Perspective from India,” *Asian Affairs* 52, no. 1 (2021): 62–78.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Ashbee and Kashish Parpiani, “US-India defense Ties ‘Socializing’ India into the India Indo-Pacific Calculus,” Observer Research Foundation, August 29, 2019, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/us-india-defence-ties-socialising-india-indo-pacific-calculus-54884/>.

Indo-Pacific. The Chinese scholar understands that the two Asian rising powers have a deep connection in the region. China's think tank understands and recognizes the Indian potentiality in the Indian Ocean.<sup>18</sup> Zhu Fenggang articulates that the Indian strategy is aggressively involved in expanding its naval approach at various choke points in the Ocean.<sup>19</sup> India is supporting its Navy to secure the maritime routes from the Malacca Straits to the Gulf of Aden. Thus, India's willingness to strengthen its stances in the region in the context of the India Naval presence. China's policy to restrict the Indian advantages in the Indian Ocean region. Because of India's stronghold in this region, China is aware of the Indian advantages. India's geostrategic location is the most important because of guarding the huge areas by the Indian Ocean, which is also called the "neversinking aircraft carrier."<sup>20</sup>

Since 2010, when India began to strengthen relations with regional organizations, such as ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, this culminated in a free trade area between the ASEAN member states and India in 2010-11. India has interests in the South China Sea region because of its growing trade partnership with

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<sup>18</sup> David Walgreen, "China in the Indian Ocean Region: Lessons in PRC Grand Strategy," *Comparative Strategy* 25, no. 1 (2006): 55–73.

<sup>19</sup> Zhu Fenggang, "The Impact of the Maritime Strategies of Asia-Pacific Nations," *Dangdai Yatai* 5, (2006): 34.

<sup>20</sup> Avinandan Choudhury and P. Moorthy, "Strategic-Maritime Triangle in the Indian Ocean: An Emerging Indo-US Naval Entente?" *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 74, no. 3 (2018): 305–25.

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Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Apart from this, India wants to provide access to the regular uses of the Indian Navy. This kind of Indian initiative is a thorn in the Chinese eye. It is reciprocal that China needs access to water around India in the Indian Ocean region as India has an interest in China's water.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, unlike China, India has no problems with energy imports in the context of the "Malacca Dilemma," instead, its representatives imagine an analog "Hormuz dilemma." India's maritime doctrines and policy widely focus on the Red Sea, the South China Sea, as a legitimate area of interest from the Persian Gulf to the Strait of Malacca, and the southern Indian Ocean is a secondary area of interest in the Ocean.<sup>22</sup>

The sea line of communication (SLOCs) is widely protected by China in the Indo-Pacific region. There is an overwhelming strategic policy adopted by China in this particular area to support the transport of energy. The Indian Ocean is a key chokepoint in this region, where 40 percent of China's imports surpass the Strait of Hormuz as it enters the Persian Gulf. Around 82 percent of China's oil imports through the transit of the Malacca Strait to

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<sup>21</sup> Jan Hornat, "The Power Triangle in the Indian Ocean: China, India and the United States," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2015): 425–43.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew S. Erickson, Ladwig C. Walter, and Justin D. Mikolay, "Diego Garcia and the United States' Emerging Indian Ocean Strategy," *Asian Security* 6, no. 3 (2010): 214–37.

Southeast Asia.<sup>23</sup> Although, the debacle for India in the 1962 Sino-India War forced New Delhi to do something rational at the international level. India seeks U.S. support to strengthen the Himalayan border (Line of Actual Control) with China. That's why India has signed with the U.S. to get modern technology and arms for the Indian Army. India has shifted its defense policy to the continental-level security agenda.<sup>24</sup> However, the Indian strategy moved towards the western powers in 1962. But Russia remains a reliable strategic partner of India and supplies 70 percent of India's military equipment. During China's aggression in 1962 against India, that time Indian Prime Minister Nehru requested U.S. President Kennedy for air assistance to India. The U.S. aircraft carrier had rushed toward India at full of speed for the Bay of Bengal. The U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> fleet was in action mode in the Indian Ocean to support the Indian Navy. It was an effective deterrence against China's naval activity in South Asia and the Pacific region as well.<sup>25</sup>

India realizes and acknowledges the differences between strategic alignment and the natural alliance because time is a need

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<sup>23</sup> David Brewster, "Beyond the 'String of Pearls': Is There Really a Sino-Indian Security Dilemma in the Indian Ocean?" *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 10, no. 2 (2014): 133–149.

<sup>24</sup> Darshana M. Baruah and Yogesh Joshi, "India's Policy on Diego Garcia and Its Quest for Security in the Indian Ocean," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 75, no. 1 (2020): 36–59.

<sup>25</sup> National Archives of India, "New Delhi "Mr. Chester Bowles Interview with Foreign Minister on Tuesday the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1965," Ministry of External Affairs, WII-104(17)/65.



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to focus on a multi-alignment strategy. India understands that western countries have modern defense powers, which is beneficial for Indian arms forces to counter the opponent countries' military doctrine in this region.<sup>26</sup> In recent years, the U.S. and India have been accelerating defense cooperation together to achieve a balance of power and India's emergence in South Asia as a regional power. India has a potential market with growing purchasing power because of the rising economy. India is keeping in mind to maintain power in Asia with the relationship between the U.S. and other western powers. This relationship helps India to combat international terrorism, cross-border illegal intruders, and the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The US-India defense cooperation has grown and is not limited to the purchase of only military arms. This defense cooperation is added to professional education for arms forces, exercises, encompasses dialogue, defense sales, and practical cooperation.<sup>27</sup>

### **Defense Deal and Trade**

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<sup>26</sup> "External Affairs Minister's Speech at the 4th Ramnath Goenka Lecture, 2019," Ministry of External Affairs, India, October 14, 2019, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/32038>.

<sup>27</sup> "The US-India Partnership: The Fact Sheets, Office of the Press Secretary, for Immediate Release," The White House, November 8, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/08/us-india-partnershipfact-sheets>.

India is rapidly achieved higher economic growth in recent years, and a liberal economic market is providing an appropriate business environment for entrepreneurs in the U.S. and India as well. India's diasporic community has a strong lobby in the U.S., and Indian American lobbying has a stronger position at the U.S. political and policy level, globalization has paved the way for bilateral cooperation. Apart from this, since 2000, India's impressive growth in the area of information technology, its military capability in the South Asian region, growing threats of terrorism, and acquisition of nuclear weapons are caused positive changes in relations between the U.S. and India as well. Since the last decade, both countries' relationship has been visible in economic, political, socio-cultural, and defense sectors under the "Strategic Partnership" is understood as counter-terrorism cooperation, defense Framework Agreement, joint military exercises, missile defense cooperation, the US-India Civilian Nuclear Deal, defense commerce, pharmaceutical, and technology group cooperation.<sup>28</sup>

On July 18, 2005, The US-Indo nuclear deal was signed, which has been known as the "Henry J. Hyde US-India Peaceful Atomic Cooperation Act 2006." This civil nuclear cooperation between the U.S. and India had passed by the House of Representatives on September 27, 2008, and Senate passed the

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<sup>28</sup> Ashok Sharma, "US-India defense Industry Collaboration: Trends, Challenges and Prospects," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 9, no. 1 (2013): 129-147.

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bill on October 1, 2008. It had become legislation after the signed nuclear deal by U.S. President George W. Bush on October 2008.<sup>29</sup> This nuclear agreement is the trademark of the pioneer of bilateral relations between the United States and India. It aims to work in the energy sector, nuclear safety cooperation, safeguard nuclear fuel and advance nuclear reactors, which is India's desire to cooperate with the U.S. It has also been seen through the prism of the growing importance of geo-economics and geostrategic realities in today's global order. India is a big nuclear power market for U.S. companies, and India's global status helps to make it Asia's counterbalance to China in the region. After this nuclear deal, the U.S. lifted the ban on technology transfer, and U.S. defense companies can transfer sensitive and high-tech technologies to India.

In Kargil War, the Indian Airforce and Army felt to need for modern military equipment and shared it with the Government of India. India decided to purchase modern weather-friendly aircraft and choppers under the security deal between the two countries. India successfully purchased lots of military arms from the U.S., for example, INS Jalashwa, multi-mission maritime aircraft (8 Boeing P8-I), three Boeing 737 business jets, 10 Boeing C-17

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Congress, "H.R.5682 - Henry J. Hyde United States and India Nuclear Cooperation Promotion Act of 2006," 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005-2006), December 18, 2006, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/5682>; "Milestones in Indo-US N-Deal," *India Today*, October 2, 2008, <https://www.indiatoday.in/latest-headlines/story/milestones-in-indo-us-n-deal-30847-2008-10-02>.

Globemaster, and six Super Hercules aircraft. Between 1999-2010, India purchased USD 25 billion worth of military equipment from the U.S.<sup>30</sup> In November 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama visited New Delhi to meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to expand and strengthen the bilateral strategic partnership. Both leaders signed an agreement worth approximately USD 10 billion and 20 commercial agreements.<sup>31</sup> India's defense deals are projected in 2022 to be around USD 50 billion.<sup>32</sup>

India is suffering from huge problems because of terrorist activity, such as the recurring cross-border terrorism at the northern border of the country. Since the 1990s, thousands of innocent people have been killed by this bad activity, and there have been explosions in many metro cities. During the U.S. President's visit to India in July 2010, the agreement was signed for the settlement of Counter-Terrorism Initiatives by the two governments. The two leaders criticized all forms of terrorist activities, and both sides also agreed to share information on terrorist activities and deepen operational cooperation, capacity

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<sup>30</sup> Saroj Bishoyi, "Defense Diplomacy in US-India Strategic Relationship," *Journal of defense Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011): 64–86.

<sup>31</sup> Sunita Narain, "ABCDE of Obama's Sales Pitch," *DownToEarth*, November 30, 2010, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/environment/abcde-of-obamas-sales-pitch-2227>.

<sup>32</sup> Rahul Bedi and Richard Spencer, "US-India defense Deal 'To Counter China,'" *The Telegraph*, February 26, 2008, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1579938/US-India-defence-deal-to-counter-China.html>.

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building, and technology transfer counter-terrorism.<sup>33</sup> During 2013-16, Indian deals in 13 arms contracts worth USD 37 billion, this deal surpasses Russia. However, Russia has been a traditional defense partner of India since the 1960s. India successfully included U.S. defense in services, i.e., Harpoon missiles, Apache and Chinook helicopters, and M777 ultra-light howitzers. India is decided to purchase more defense systems from the U.S.'s General Atomics, and the Indian defense Acquisition Council (DAC) is the highest decision body for defense deals, which is clearing the purchase of 127 mm caliber guns. Apart from these deals, India is willing to purchase 5<sup>th</sup>-generation aircraft for the U.S. Navy and Air Force.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The White House, "Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Singh of India," Office of the Press Secretary, November 8, 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/08/joint-statement-president-obama-and-prime-minister-singh-india>.

<sup>34</sup> Laxman Kumar Behera and G. Balachandran, "Indo-US defense Industry Cooperation: A Prognosis," *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 74, no. 3 (2018): 337–42.

**Table 1:** The various defense trade between the U.S. and India

Years	Defence Equipment	Quantity in Number	Services	USD in billion
2008	Super Hercules C-130J	6	Indian Air Force	1
2009	P8I Poseidon Long Range Maritime Patrol	8	Indian Navy	2.1
2010	AGM-84I Harpoon Block II missiles	24	Indian Air Force	0.170
2011	C-17 Globemaster-III transport aircraft	10	Indian Air Force	4.1
2011	MK-54 all-up-round lightweight torpedoes	32	Indian Navy	0.086
2012	Super Hercules C-130J military planes	6	India Air Force	1
2012	AGM-84L Harpoon Block II missiles	21	Indian Air Force	0.200
2015	AH-64E Apache helicopters	22	Indian Air Force	2.1
2015	CH-47F (I) Chinook helicopters	15	Indian Air Force	0.900
2016	M777 Howitzer guns	145	Indian Army	0.732
2016	Super Hercules C-130J military transport planes	1	Indian Air Force	0.134
2016	P8I Anti-Submarine aircraft	4	Indian Navy	1.1
2019	Sig Sauer Assault Rifles	72,400	Indian Army	0.090
2020	Ah-64E Apache helicopters	6	Indian Army	0.930
2020	MH-60 Romeo Seahawk helicopters	24	Indian Navy	2.1

**Source:** Author’s own compilation, U.S. Embassy in India (December 2016), defense World (August 2016), Deccan Herald (February 2020).

In June 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the U.S., and the U.S. recognized India as a “Major Defense Partner.” The U.S. commits to facilitating technology sharing with India to boost defense cooperation. The two countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish the defense industry in India. In the space sector, both countries mutually agreed on space research and innovation “NASA and Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) are collaborating for India’s

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Mars Orbiter Mission and for a dual-band Synthetic Aperture Radar” (NISAR).<sup>35</sup>

India and the U.S. are keen to strengthen the advanced level of defense and strategic partnership. India was granted Tier I status of the U.S. Strategic Trade Authorization (STA) license exception in 2018. This status will help India in cooperation with advanced technology like U.S.’ other key strategic allies, and partners have the status of Tier I. In the Industrial Security Annex (ISA), both countries signed for the purpose of protecting classified information and technology, which enhances defense transfer of co-production involving private companies from both sides. Science and Technology cooperation is a key area in the Statement of Intent (SoI). In 2016, the “Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement” (LEMOA) was signed between the U.S. and India. Thus, in 2018, both sides agreed on the “Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement” (COMCASA). Moreover, in 2020, another agreement was signed, the “Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement” (BECA) for Geo-Spatial Cooperation, which is associated with cooperation in defense and strategic technology partnerships.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Brief on India-U.S. Relations,” Ministry of External Affairs, India, June 2017, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India\\_US\\_brief.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_US_brief.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Saroj Bishoyi, “India-US Forging Tech Alliance since Long. Now Use 2+2 Dialogue to Push It Further,” *The Print*, April 11, 2022, <https://theprint.in/opinion/india-us-forging-tech-alliance-since-long-now-use-2-2-dialogue-to-push-it-further/910983/>.

The defense minister of India addressed the 18<sup>th</sup> India-US Economic Summit on the topic of ‘Bouncing Back Resilient Recovery Path Post Covid-19’, which was organized by the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce. He said that defense is an integral area, and apart from security, it is helpful for the overall development of the country. He also focuses on Research and Development (R&D) to give a platform for the young mind. Later, he discussed the “Robust domestic demand and availability of a talented young workforce and innovation make India a major investment destination.” He added: “I am sure that the economic and strategic partnership between India and the U.S. will act as a springboard, and the forum will act as a bridge to achieve this,”<sup>37</sup>

The U.S. and India are both countries taking significant steps to strengthen their defense technology cooperation. On July 30, 2021, the Indian ministry of defense and the U.S. department of defense signed the Project Agreement (P.A.) for an Air-Launched Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (ALUAV). This agreement between the two sides would work together in the defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI).<sup>38</sup> India is decided to replace old military

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<sup>37</sup> Abhishek Bhalla, “Rajnath Singh Urges US defense Companies to Transfer Technology through Joint Ventures, invest in India,” *India Today*, September 16, 2021, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/rajnath-singh-us-defence-companies-technology-joint-ventures-investment-india-1853282-2021-09-16>.

<sup>38</sup> NewsOnAir, “India & US Take Significant Step towards Deepening defense Technology Cooperation,” September 4, 2021, <https://newsonair.com/2021/09/04/india-us-takes-significant-step-towards-deepening-defence-technology-cooperation/>.



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equipment of Soviet and Russian origin with the new deal from the US, France, and Israel. India has purchased several military weapons from the U.S. over the past decade worth around USD 15 billion. In 2016, both countries signed an agreement to allow access to each other's military bases, and since then, the Indian and the U.S. military have participated in joint exercises. Furthermore, in 2018, on the issue of mutual communication, both sides established secure military communication.<sup>39</sup>

The Industrial Security Agreement (ISA) was signed by both countries in December 2019. On October 1, 2021, in New Delhi, India and the U.S. agreed to develop a common protocol on the exchange of classified information in the defense industries.<sup>40</sup> During the 4<sup>th</sup> US-India '2+2' virtual summit on April 12, 2022, the U.S. and India signed an agreement on the issue of deepening collaboration in science and technology in the U.S. and India Joint Technical Group (JTG), and both countries entered into the new defense domain such as artificial intelligence (A.I.) and cyber. Both countries understand the importance of mutual information sharing, which is a principal norm of the U.S. and India defense partnership. The establishment of the Basic Exchange and

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<sup>39</sup> Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, "India: Pact in Works for U.S. Defense Technology Transfers," March 23, 2020, <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2020/03/india-pact-in-works-for-u-s-defense-technology-transfers/>.

<sup>40</sup> "India and US to Set-up Joint Working Group in defense Industrial Security," Ministry of Defense, India, October 1, 2021, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1759911>.

Cooperation Agreement (BECA) is welcomed by both countries to support the exchange of geospatial information. Apart from these initiatives, the U.S. and India had entered into enhanced defense industrial cooperation in the naval sector to explore the Pacific and the Indian Oceans.<sup>41</sup>

India wants the U.S. to steer deeper investments in India to help the growth of India's economy and defense and transfer of technology ties up with the U.S. India has been curious to strengthen its defense sectors since the Covid-19 outbreaks, and China has been aggressive towards the Line of Actual Control (LAC).<sup>42</sup>

India is an active member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) with the U.S., Japan, and Australia. On September 24, 2021, the QUAD countries leader participated in a meeting at the White House in Washington, DC. U.S. President Joe Biden hosts a Quad Leaders' Summit along with Indian Prime

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<sup>41</sup> "Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," U.S. Department of State, April 11, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/fourth-annual-u-s-india-22-ministerial-dialogue/>; "Joint Statement on the Fourth India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," Ministry of External Affairs, India, April 12, 2022, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/35184/Joint+Statement+on+the+Fourth+IndiaUS+22+Ministerial+Dialogue>.

<sup>42</sup> Sameer Lalwani, Elizabeth Threlkeld, Christopher Clary, and Zoe Jordan, "Toward a Mature Defense Partnership: Insights from a U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue," Stimson, November 16, 2021, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/toward-a-mature-defense-partnership-insights-from-a-u-s-india-strategic-dialogue/>.

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Minister Narendra Modi, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, and Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide. In the joint statements, “we recommit to promoting the free, open, rules-based order, rooted in international law and undaunted by coercion, to bolster security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.” Moreover, the QUAD leaders agreed, “We stand for the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity of states.” The Quad leaders don’t even mention China and its rising influences in the region, including the South China Sea and the East China Sea.<sup>43</sup>

India is anxious over its border problems with China and Pakistan, and by joining the Quad, India would be in a position to counterbalance China’s growing presence in the region of Indo-Pacific. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China is building port facilities for its navy in the Hambantota and Gwadar ports. China’s policy ‘encirclement’ and ‘string of pearls’ is pushing India to strategic cooperation with the U.S. and partnership with other Quad members. India established the “Security and Growth for All in the Region” (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI) in the field of maritime

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<sup>43</sup> Saheli Roy Choudhury, “The Quad Countries Pledge to Promote an Indo-Pacific Region That Is ‘Undaunted by Coercion,’” *CNBC*, September 27, 2021, <https://www.cnb.com/2021/09/27/quad-leaders-summit-us-india-japan-australia-statement-on-indo-pacific.html>.

security. In 2018, the Indian government tried to align the purpose of the IPOI and SAGAR with the Quad framework.<sup>44</sup>

## Results and Discussion

China and Pakistan have a joint defense program to build aircraft and missiles. India has security issues from the frontier side of China and Pakistan. China's policy is to restrict every Indian stance in the South Asian region through its encircling approach, which is also called the "String of Pearls." In contrast, China has a disadvantageous position in the comparison of the US-Indo alliance's power in the Indo-pacific region. The Indian Ocean Region is far from China's connectivity, and there is a larger distance from the South China Sea to Malacca Dilemma (IOR). The Malacca choke point could be blocked by the U.S., causing fear in China about a future crisis between the two sides. China has a strategy to expand its naval capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, there are activities about China's policy and strategy to expand its geographical presence from South Asia to Southeast Asia and Pacific countries. China's geographical nexus

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<sup>44</sup> Harsh V. Pant, "India and the Quad: Chinese Belligerence and Indian Resilience," *Observer Research Foundation*, March 20, 2022, accessed July 10, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-and-the-quad/>.

<sup>45</sup> J. Susanna Lobo, "Balancing China: Indo-US Relations and Convergence of Their Interests in the Indo-Pacific," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 17, no. 1 (2021): 73–91.

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is growing in South Asia in the context of the Silk Road expansion for the purposes of political, economic, and strategic interests. China is constructing CPEC and its presence at Gwadar Port in Pakistan, the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, the Chittagong Port in Bangladesh, naval base in Myanmar. The Chinese are actively involved in the Bay of Bengal and laid the foundation of a canal across the Kra Isthmus in Thailand. Thus, China has a heavy military presence in Cambodia with mutual agreement and strategic build-up and military presence in the South China Sea.<sup>46</sup> They are using the hard and soft power of diplomacy to strengthen their position around the world. This is useful for making strategic cooperation with global partners to expedite trade, economic, arms sales, and humanitarian aid. In recent years, China has been attracting Oceanic countries, for example, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Djibouti. Apart from this, China is extensively working in the area of the Horn of Africa. Djibouti is the focal point for Chinese connectivity in East African countries.<sup>47</sup>

China's strategy to dominate across the world, Chinese President Xi Jinping launched its flagship project (BRI). That is

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<sup>46</sup> Mohan, Samudra Manthan, Surinder Mohan, and Josukutty C. Abraham, "Shaping the Regional and Maritime Battlefield? The Sino-Indian Strategic Competition in South Asia and Adjoining Waters," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 16, no. 1 (2020): 82–97.

<sup>47</sup> Ben Blanchard, "China Sends Troops to Open First Overseas Military Base in Djibouti," *Reuters*, July 12, 2017, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-djibouti-idUSKBN19X049>.

spreading across the world rapidly in South Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Europe. China's goods train reaches out from Beijing to Warsaw via Belgrade in the Balkan region. China started the '17+1' framework for deeper economic engagement with 17 Central and Eastern European Countries. China's maritime initiative is called Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). Under this project, China has deep involvement surrounding India in South Asia with Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. China is strengthening the encirclement policy against India. And China's various initiatives cement the cooperation and its extensive strategy in the South Asia region.<sup>48</sup> India's "Neighborhood First Policy" is specially made for better connectivity in South Asia countries. But recently, last year, China recognized the 'Taliban' rule in Afghanistan, while India favored democratic rule, peace, and stability. Thus, China diplomatically worked against India and Pakistan and seconded the Chinese doctrine in South Asia because Pakistan gets support from China in the United Nations (U.N.) for the protection of terrorists (China is openly supporting Pakistan-sponsored terrorist organizations).

China's growing foothold in the Indo-Pacific region is a major challenging concern for India. In recent years, India has tied up with the French in this region, and the U.S. is a big stakeholder. These countries unitedly work in the Pacific region to

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<sup>48</sup> Bharti, "The Evolution of China's Economic Engagement," 90–106; Christian Ploberger, "One Belt, One Road – China's New Grand Strategy," *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies* 15, no. 3 (2017): 289–305.

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counter other opponent powers. India is successfully participating in a naval exercise with the U.S. and French in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, India is involved in building a strong naval presence and modernizing the Navy. India seems to have procurement of weapons and modern technological arms from the USA. India has taken a challenge to strengthen its naval capabilities. India's Far East Naval Command in Andaman Nicobar Island is being upgraded through the Naval Modernization Program to enhance its capabilities. The Indian Navy has larger western coast at Karwar, and the construction work is in progress under the Seabird Project. It would be beneficial for the Indian Navy to use it on a larger scale and can accommodate stealth frigates, aircraft carriers, submarines, and destroyers.

India is helping Iran with the modernization of Chabahar Port to counter the Chinese presence in Gwadar Port. India is working with Iran to reach out to landlocked countries from Central Asia and Afghanistan. Now Afghanistan is under Taliban rule, and still, India doesn't have good relations with the Taliban. Somehow India wants the upper hand in Afghanistan on the China-Pakistan nexus in this area. India is providing aid to

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<sup>49</sup> Sankalp Gurjar, "Understanding the Geopolitical Significance of India's Aid to Madagascar," *Deccan Herald*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/understanding-the-geopolitical-significance-of-india-s-aid-to-madagascar-801396.html>.

Myanmar to build a Sittwe Port, which would benefit India's northeastern states. India is assisting Myanmar in opening a trade route between the two countries and an alternative route to transport goods to its northeastern states as well.<sup>50</sup>

China has a deep connection to the continental level, and the BRI projects have strong ties up with East African countries. Similarly, India has also strengthened its stances in economic and trade cooperation, mainly in South Africa, Madagascar and Mozambique. India has a naval presence in Mozambique and a radar surveillance station in Madagascar. These initiatives support India in strengthening its position in the IOR.<sup>51</sup>

However, New Delhi has great involvement with the Seychelles and Mauritius. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, has visited these Island countries for deep cooperation in IOR. India is getting support from Mauritius at several levels because of the Indian diasporic community. India is assisting in building up an airstrip and jetty for strategic purposes. Thus, both the island countries support India in Ocean politics.<sup>52</sup> India has

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<sup>50</sup> Harsh V. Pant, "Sino-Indian Maritime Ambitions Collide in the Indian Ocean," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2014): 187–201.

<sup>51</sup> Gurjar, "Understanding the Geopolitical Significance of India's Aid to Madagascar."

<sup>52</sup> Geeta Mohan, "India, Seychelles Continue to Cooperate on Assumption Island Joint Facility," *India Today*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-seychellescontinue-to-cooperate-on-assumption-island-joint-facility-1269762-2018-06-26>.



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expanded its maritime expansion from the South China Sea to Southeast Asian countries. The Chinese contested waters in the South China Sea, where India has stretched its geographical presence. Thus, India is connecting its trade route in the deep Pacific and the Indian Ocean.<sup>53</sup> The sea lanes became much more important to support the global economy because the maritime trade routes have 70 percent of total business capabilities. If there is any kind of disturbance occurs in sea lanes, it will drastically affect the international economy. This will also impact Asian stability, and the U.S. position in this region also be affected. Thus, there is a need to focus on establishing proper security systems. Moreover, any form of disturbance in the Indo-Pacific region can brutally impact the global economy, and it can also vitally affect international power projection.<sup>54</sup>

The U.S. is supporting its allies in the IOR and providing security assistance. Being the largest economy in the world, the U.S. is using the sea lanes in the Pacific region and imports oil from the Persian Gulf to East Asia. India has huge support from the U.S. in the context of the exploitation of the Pacific trade routes.<sup>55</sup> There is a challenging sign for the U.S. alliance by the

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<sup>53</sup> David Scott, "India's Role in the South China Sea: Geopolitics and Geoeconomics in Play," *India Review* 12, no. 2 (2013): 51–69.

<sup>54</sup> Michael J. Green and Andrew Shearer, "Defining U.S. Indian Ocean Strategy" *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2012): 175–189; Chunhao Lou, "US–India–China Relations in the Indian Ocean: A Chinese Perspective," *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 4 (2012): 624–639.

<sup>55</sup> Erickson, Walter, and Mikolay, "Diego Garcia and the United States," 218.

Chinese dominance over the sea. It is creating restrictions for the U.S. and its allies' power in the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean regions. The U.S. needs to play the safe game to provide a tussle-free zone in waters from the Chinese aggression.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, China's challenge is a major task for India and the U.S. The Great Coco Islands are crucial points and important shipping lanes located in the Pacific water, which connects the Strait of Malacca and the Bay of Bengal. This is the principal challenge and a big factor in the way of the Indian strategic radius.<sup>57</sup>

However, the Chinese policy captured an anti-approach periphery strategy to restrict opponent powers. China's policy is fully restricted to third countries' armies in their control areas. Thus, the Chinese controlled water, and it was impossible for opponent countries' arms forces can enter and operate its control areas. Moreover, China's always threatening the forces of the US, India, and other countries to easy entry into the territories of their control. This applies in the South China Sea and around Taiwan, China's policy to demoralize and undermine the U.S. and its close

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<sup>56</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal and Jisi Wang, *Addressing US–China Strategic Distrust*, John L. Thornton China Centre, Monograph Series No. 4 (Washington, DC: Brookings 2012), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0330\\_china\\_lieberthal.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0330_china_lieberthal.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Jae-Hyung Lee, "China's Expanding Maritime Ambitions in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24, no. 3 (2002): 554; Gurpreet S. Khurana, "China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications," *Strategic Analysis* 32, no. 1 (2008): 3.

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partners in Pacific diplomacy.<sup>58</sup> This study highlights that there is growing strategic cooperation between India and the U.S. India, as a liberal democratic nation, attracted like-minded nations to extensive partnerships at the global level. India and the U.S. support and share a common political and democratic ethos to promote freedom of expression, justice, gender rights, human rights, and show a commitment to the rule of law. India is advocating the use of flights in the South China Sea and supports the freedom of navigation according to international laws. India is fully opposed to an inimical presence in the IOR, mainly opposing presence near the South Asian neighborhood because India feels that security is a big concern in the region, which is why India is against the presence of opponent powers who want to synchronize the Indian trade and business routes on the Ocean and land as well.<sup>59</sup>

Since the last decade, the South China Sea has been in a heated debate between the U.S. and China. China's assertiveness and military build-up are creating instability in the balance of

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<sup>58</sup> Evan Braden Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection," *International Security* 38, no. 4 (2014): 115–149.

<sup>59</sup> Smruti S. Pattanaik, "Indian Ocean in the Emerging Geo-Strategic Context: Examining India's Relations with Its Maritime South Asian Neighbors," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2016): 126–42.

power in the South China Sea.<sup>60</sup> There is the U.S.'s involvement in Asia strengthens its presence and domination. The growing power of the U.S. in this region is creating regional stability. Thus, The U.S. is capable of protecting the fear of security and stability of regional allies in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>61</sup> China's using the method of providing loans easily to South countries after some years if the country is unable to pay back to China, in return for trying to capture the port of that country. For example, Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port has been under Chinese control for 99 years. Hence, China's policy effectively restricts India's emergence in the South Asian region. Likewise, China is spreading its position heavily in the Pacific Ocean and has a military presence in the first chain of the island. It stretches Japan's archipelago to the South China Sea and its spreading to the Philippines and Malaysia. China's presence is there in the second island chain after the first island chain, and the U.S. naval presence in the region has challenges from the Chinese side. The U.S. position is there in the Northern Marianas, Carolinas, Guam, and Palau.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> "Asia," in *The Military Balance 2019*, edited by International Institute for Strategic Studies (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019); "Asia," in *The Military Balance 2021*, edited by International Institute for Strategic Studies (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021).

<sup>61</sup> "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," The White House, accessed July 15, 2022, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nssall.html>.

<sup>62</sup> David Scott, "The 'Indo-Pacific'-New Regional Formulations and New Maritime Frameworks for US-India Strategic Convergence," *Asia-Pacific Review* 19, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 85-109.

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China is continuing to increase its military strength and spent lots of money to modernize. The U.S. is anxious that China is becoming more hegemonic in the Asian region, and it is visible in China's 2018 National Defense Strategy. The Chinese authority is continually increasing its military and economic stability with a vision to dominate the long term at a broad level in different parts of the world at every juncture. China heart-heartily wants to grab much power in the Indo-Pacific region because of its global value for trade and business.<sup>63</sup> The U.S. policymakers believe that China is trying to displacement of the U.S. position. In other words, China's assertive behavior creates chaos for its opponent groups in the entire region of the Pacific Ocean. Thus, China's expansion in the Indo-Pacific region is growing its MSRI framework from Asia to Europe to Africa, and these intercontinental initiatives are undermining the U.S.'s position across the world in the near future. The U.S. and India have a mutual understanding and common interest in cooperating in the area of security and trade in the Indo-Pacific region. The disputed region of the South China Sea indicates the principal challenges.

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<sup>63</sup> "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy," U.S. Department of Defense, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-StrategySummary.pdf>.

India and the U.S. have a common idea to use the sea line for mutual benefit.<sup>64</sup>

India is developing a strategic partnership with the U.S., but there is a need to be more trustworthy from both sides in order to strengthen the bilateral relationship across the Indo-Pacific and South Asia region as well. Both countries are involved in initiating multilateral cooperation and major initiatives in this region, for example, the Quad and Malabar exercise. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is a strategic mutual understanding of security in the Pacific region between Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. This is the policy of the quadrilateral countries against the opponent countries' aggression and threats in the Indo-Pacific region. It saves the Pacific trade routes and breaks the monopoly of China in the region. The Quad countries claim that this model supports the member countries' political and economic processes in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>65</sup>

This research indicates that India has signed on defense with various stakeholders from the U.S. Recently after the Doklam standoff in 2017 between the Indian Army and People's Liberation Army (PLA), India shifted its defense purchase with the U.S. to a high level to get as earlier as possible. The U.S. has modern equipment and defense systems, which have the upper

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Dutton, "A Maritime or Continental Order for Southeast Asia and the South China Sea," *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 3 (2016): 5–13.

<sup>65</sup> Bharti, "The Evolution of China's Economic Engagement," 104.

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hand over Russia. Russia is a trusted strategic partner of India but is unable to provide 5th fighter jets and other defense systems; that is why India has defense deals with the US, France, and Israel. Now the U.S. claim that India is a fast-growing defense partner, and the U.S. strategically supports the Indian presence in the Indo-Pacific region against Chinese domination. There is a major development in the defense sector, and growing defense cooperation between both countries was initiated in 2012, the defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). In later years, India signed the agreements of foundation documents to strengthen the defense ties between the two sides. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) is for the transfer of technology (cutting-edge technology) and mutual access to military sites and their bases for the arms forces. Another agreement was concluded between India and the U.S. on the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA); the purpose of this agreement is to provide confidential military intelligence output.<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The study empirically points out that the U.S. and India's defense cooperation is gradually shaped by both partners as a future bilateral strategic partnership. Since the Kargil War, India

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<sup>66</sup> *BBC*, "US-India 2+2: Crucial defense Deal Signed," October 27, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-54655947>.

has been reluctant to the U.S. to get modern defense systems. In later years, there were seven visits by the U.S. Presidents to India. On the occasion of India's Republic Day, U.S. President Barack Obama toured India for 2<sup>nd</sup> time as the chief guest. The Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is too much enthusiastic about embracing the U.S. as a strategic partner of India. Modi visited the U.S. for the sixth time as a reliable partner and successfully signed several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). During the tenure of President Donald Trump, the Indo-Pacific concept became a reality, and the US-supported India's engagement in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions. Now, the Indian Army has U.S. defense equipment and modern arms. The sea lane, economic, security, and defense are the key elements to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The growing foothold of the Chinese in the Indo-Pacific and its concept of "Strings of Pearls" are direct threats to India in South Asia. There is strong nexus between China and Pakistan, which creates enormous problems for India. These are causes for which India supports the U.S. and western countries in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. needs support from a strong Asian country, and India is able to fulfill the U.S.'s expectations in Asian politics. India is a big market with huge consumer power as the second largest population in the world.

Prime Minister Modi says that the U.S. is India's natural global partner. This partnership is emerging as more relevant in



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this digital world. There is a need even more in our relationship for a far-reaching transformation for full enthusiastic waves. PM Modi stated that our partnership was crucial and more important to the establishment of peace, prosperity, and stability at the global level.<sup>67</sup> In 2020, there was the Galwan Valley clash between India and China, opening Indian eyes to how China is threatening India. There have been security issues with India since its Independence of India. China attacked India in 1962, and Pakistan was involved in a war with India in 1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999. Thus, the Indian defense system has relied on Russia since the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) era. China has defense systems and fighter jets from Russia as well, which is why the Chinese are very much aware of the Indian defense systems, and India scuttles (reduces) the further big defense deal with Russia. Now, India relies on western technology and defense systems. Further research suggests that India is positive to set up defense ties with the U.S. and other European partners. This circumstance is problematic for India because 70 percent of Indian defense systems came from Russia. There is a scope for further empirical and comparative research on India-US cooperation and where China is in Asian politics as well as in the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions.

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<sup>67</sup> Tanya Somander, "The Highlights of President Obama's Visit to India," The White House, January 26, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/01/26/highlights-president-obamas-visit-india>.

India's military modernization is ongoing, and with a self-reliant India campaign (Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan) to start defense industries with the assistance of the U.S. and other Western countries. India is decided to cooperate with the U.S. to receive the technology transfer to build defense industries for the production of modern arms and military weapons. The U.S.'s defense major Lockheed Martin signed an agreement with India's public sector firm Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to cooperate in India's aerospace sector. Both countries' defense companies agreed to work on the defense ecosystem and global aerospace. India's defense dealing with the U.S. shows that India's defense interest has been growing in recent years. This study also highlights that India's cooperation with Quad is proven the Indian concern on the issue of security in the Indo-Pacific region as well. India seems to assimilate the U.S. and Western approaches in this region. India stands to support the rule-based order, multilateralism, democratic ethos, and navigation of freedom in the Indo-Pacific region. China has its own mechanism in this region, and its partner countries support China's BRI projects. Even India and the U.S. have pragmatic economic and trade partnerships, and China is growing persistently in the Indo-Pacific region. India and the U.S. are failing to restrain Chinese expansion in the region.

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