

US-India Security Partnership: An Analysis of Grand Strategy of Trump and Biden

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Abstract

Grand strategy is a basic strategic view and a detailed plan for a shared set of ideas among policymakers. Policy makers formulate a set of guiding principles to achieve a specific goal. In a comparative manner, this study examines the contours of US grand strategy, with particular emphasis on the security policy towards India during the governments of President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden. Both governments have consistently prioritized great power competition as a strategic objective within their respective grand strategies. China is a superpower with which the United States is competing; therefore, the grand strategy of the United States in terms of the national interest of countering China during the aforementioned eras steps up the security engagement with India despite having some fault lines in it. This study provides an explanation of how the US grand strategy, specifically its offshore balancing approach, heightened security engagement with India under both neoconservative and liberal imperialist regimes. The study's findings indicate that neoconservatives have generally supported a strong India to counter China. Because they prioritize promoting democracy and American values globally, they see India as a potential strategic partner. While liberal imperialist regimes in the United States may be wary of India's human rights records, they also see India as a large democracy and a potential economic partner.

Keywords: US Security Policy, Grand Strategy, India, Major Defence Partner, President Donald Trump, President Joe Biden, Indo-Pacific.

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Introduction

There are several definitions of grand strategy. Henry Kissinger provides the most reasonable definition, stating that grand strategy serves as a guiding principle that directs foreign policy.”¹ According to Colin Dueck, the presidents of the United States assume the responsibility of formulating foreign policy decisions and selecting viable options, guided by their perceptions of domestic and international elements. Consequently, their foreign and national security policies rely on their pre-existing assumptions.² Rather than explaining detailed plans, grand strategy is an overarching plan, a framework, a basic understanding of the strategic perspective, and sets of ideas shared by policy practitioners. In other words, grand strategy is actually based on grand principles.

The US grand strategy to achieve national security interests lacks a formal official document, but it has been a part of US foreign policy since 1789, taking on various forms and evolving its modus operandi in response to shifting strategic environments.³ The grand strategy to achieve national interest consists of specific strategies aimed at securing specific goals, along with various instruments of national power. Analysing long-term state behaviour allows us to discern the US grand strategy to secure national security concerns. With the start of the 20th century, once the United States had achieved the status of a great power, the general contours of grand strategy became well established and persistently applied while the interests kept changing. Initially, the US desire to expand the continent and promote democratic values at home compelled it to adopt an isolationist approach.⁴ After becoming a great power, this isolationist approach transformed into more engaging strategies

¹ “Foreign Relations of the United States: 1969-1976, Organization and Management of Foreign Policy, Public Diplomacy, 1973-1976,” Government Publications Office 10865, (Government Printing Office, 2015), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v38p2/comp1>.

² Colin Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 150-200.

³ Richard D. Hooker Jr. *The Grand Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: National Defence University Press, 2014), 14-21.

⁴ Ibid, 30.

like offshore balancing, selective engagement, and global dominance.⁵ Offshore balancing is the strategic approach. The US adopted the offshore balancing strategy for Asian balance of power and to compete with the rise of China in the Indo-Pacific region while also maintaining the western liberal order. India has specific dynamics that necessitate a customized US grand strategy.

The US formed a security partnership with India to counter the perceived threat of rising China, which is actually in India's backyard, not the US'. Threats are common, but the geopolitical dynamics and related interests of both states are incongruent. This paper identifies the contours of a grand strategy to step up security engagement with India during the governments of President Donald Trump and Joe Biden. In this regard, US preferences and behaviour are important to examine in the US-India security partnership. They argue that the balance of power concept prevents any state from being dominant. This concept goes further; it recognises the role of domestic factors like political institutions and leaders' perceptions that reflect in the state's overall behaviour.⁶

Balancing Act: US-India Security Alliance in the Neoclassical Realist Perspective

Neoclassical realism sees US preferences to make a security alliance with India in light of China's growing economic capability, which corresponds to uncertainty for the US as well as India. By forming this partnership, the US reacted to changes in China's power, assumed intentions, and actual behaviour. In such cases, states react by hedging, balancing, or bandwagoning in order to maintain equilibrium, as does the US. When power dynamics change, states may hedge their bets, build alliances to counter a rising power, or join the stronger side to maintain the balance in terms of power distribution. In fact, neorealism often serves as the lens through which we analyse alliance formation. There is a list of leading

⁵ John Mearsheimer, "Four Grand Strategies: Isolationism, Offshore Balance, Selective Engagement, Global Domination," accessed April 1, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EH-kY0Z-wLk>.

⁶ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144-172.

scholars who have produced remarkable treatises on US alliance formation and alliance politics. These are Stephen M. Walt, Kenneth Waltz, John J. Mearsheimer, Robert O. Keohane, and Glenn Snyder. Despite systemic pressures, states are also constrained by decision-makers' perceptions and state structure for their foreign policy choices.⁷ This study argues that we should analyse US security policy towards India during the aforementioned governments through the lens of neoclassical realism.

Indeed, neoclassical realism, a strand of realism, integrates the tenets of realism and structural realism, while also introducing novel elements not explored by its predecessors. Anarchy forces states, the primary actors in international politics, to maximize their power for their own security and survival. However, the distribution of power among states plays a crucial role in shaping international politics. When a central authority or law-enforcing agent is absent, there will be lawlessness and anarchy. According to all the realist variants, anarchy is the inevitable element of international politics. This anarchy-oriented international political system compels all primary actors to strive for power. The prevailing anarchic system forces states to constantly maximize their power to ensure their survival and security.

The distribution of power among these primary actors on the international political stage defines the dynamics of the power game, not the accumulation of power alone. Neoclassical realists are a group that emphasizes the distribution of power elements and treats them with equal seriousness. While classical realism focuses on objective capabilities, neoclassical realism emphasizes how leaders' perceptions of those capabilities shape foreign policy. This theory argues that domestic politics influences (or shapes) foreign policy decisions.

It recognises the impact of internal political pressures and influence, as well as the coordination of political institutions, on a nation's foreign policy choices. According to this theory's assumptions, domestic policy matters for foreign policy. Therefore, neoclassical realism offers a valuable supporting foundation for understanding the US-India security

⁷ Rose, 'Neo-Classical Realism,'.

partnership. It highlights the importance of shared threat perceptions, the desire to balance against a rising power, and the constraints imposed by domestic politics and historical relationships.

Political institutions such as Congress, the Department of State, the Department of Defence, and the White House play a key role in the formulation of security policy. This study closely observes the content analysis of documents published by these institutions. The State Department spearheads diplomatic engagement with India on security issues.⁸ This includes high-level dialogue, official visits, and back-channel communications. They work to build trust, establish common goals, and navigate any disagreements. The State Department negotiates and finalises security related agreements with India. These agreements might cover areas like defence technology transfers, joint military exercises, or maritime security cooperation.

The State Department, in collaboration with the Department of Defence and other agencies, develops policies for US-India security cooperation. This involves setting priorities, allocating resources, and ensuring alignment with broader US foreign policy goals. The State Department works to build public and congressional support for the US-India security partnership. They engage with media outlets, think tanks, and advocacy groups to highlight the benefits of the partnership. They also work closely with Congress to ensure legislation and appropriations support the partnership's goals. This may include briefings for lawmakers and committees, as well as advocating for specific funding or authorities.

US Grand Strategy and Security Engagement with India

Offshore balancing counters the rise of regional hegemony, and it also maintains the interplay of power between countries on a regional level by supporting the relatively weaker states. The United States needs to empower regional actors as a first line of defence. The

⁸ John Weaver, "The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States," *Journal of Strategic Security* 11, no. 1 (April 2018): 62–71, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.11.1.1655>.

strategy of offshore balancing is realist in nature; it has a limited scope for its goals. First and foremost, the interest is to counter the potential threat. Due to the involvement and contribution of regional balancers, the US shares the responsibility and burden. In the past, India has always been a non-aligned country for the US that can be considered a counterweight to China. Today, the US views India as a critical defence partner in the Indo-Pacific, ensuring a level playing field and preserving equilibrium.⁹

Both of the countries accelerated this joint venture in 2015 by agreeing on a Joint Strategic Vision (JSV) for the Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific.¹⁰ JSV is based on shared interests in regional connectivity, optimising energy transmission, promoting free trade, interpersonal relationships, and social connections. The successful achievement of all these goals depends on security. The US placed emphasis on implementing the trilateral dialogue strategy by involving other states in the region. Overall, the US adopted a bilateral approach rather than relying on a multilateral alliance. Other multilateral forums in the region are considered in the background of this partnership. A bilateral alliance can serve US interests more effectively. Recognizing this, the US has emphasized a strategic approach that combines bilateral and multilateral dialogue.

This strategy fosters cooperation with individual countries while also facilitating discussions between the key players. By including other regional states in these dialogues, the United States aims to build trust, address common challenges more comprehensively, and leverage the strengths of each nation. While multilateral forums offer a broader platform for cooperation, the US recognises the potential for bureaucratic hurdles and slow decision-making. However, we do not entirely disregard exiting multilateral forums in the region. They can still serve as valuable venues for broader discussions and maintaining relationships

⁹ David Vergan, "U.S., India Rapidly Expand their Military Cooperation." U.S. Department of Defense, June 20, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3433245/us-india-rapidly-expand-their-military-cooperation/>.

¹⁰ "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region," The White House, (January 25, 2015), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region>.

with a wide range of countries. Ultimately, the US believes that the combination of bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral forums can more effectively advance its interests and achieve regional security objectives. Policy initiatives, designations, and agreements form the foundation of the US-India security partnership, fostering collaboration. The US Congress plays a key role in facilitating the initiatives through legislation. Congress facilitates a number of key agreements, including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) of 2016, the Communications Capability and Security Agreement (COMCASA) of 2018, and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) of 2020.¹¹

The U.S. and India both have a growing and deepening military partnership. The US Department of Defence significantly contributes to the establishment of a military partnership with India, which is a noteworthy development in the Indo-Pacific region. It is likely to continue to grow in importance over the years. Both regularly conduct joint military exercises on land and at sea. These exercises help to improve interoperability between the two militaries and develop common tactics and procedures. The US is India's largest military equipment supplier. India has purchased billions of dollars' worth of American weaponry in recent years, including fighter jets, helicopters, and aircraft carriers.

The US and India are increasingly cooperating in defence technology development. This includes joint research and development projects on a variety of weapons systems. The White House also emphasises a strong and growing security partnership with India. The White House launched the Initiative on Critical Emerging Technologies (ICET) in January 2023 and highlighted it during a meeting in June 2024.¹² Congress legislation on the US side facilitates a combination of policy initiatives, designations, and agreements that form the foundation of the US-India security partnership. Hence, in 2016, the US designated India as

¹¹ "U.S. Security Cooperation with India," U.S. Department of State, accessed May 6, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/>.

¹² "Fact Sheet: United States and India Elevate Strategic Partnership with the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)," The White House, January 31, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/01/31/fact-sheet-united-states-and-india-elevate-strategic-partnership-with-the-initiative-on-critical-and-emerging-technology-icet/>.

a major defence partner, a key development.¹³ This designation, established through policy initiatives, elevates India's status to receive advanced defence technology and equipment on par with close allies. Another notable Act of Congress is the Nuclear Defence Authorization Act (NDAA), which is an annual legislation that authorizes defence spending and sets policy guidelines for the US Department of Defence.¹⁴ Although the NDAA is not exclusive to India, it can include provisions that support defence cooperation with India, such as funding for joint exercises or technology transfer programmes.¹⁵

US Preferences and Behaviour During President Trump Era

According to archival data from recent history, the US has often assumed the responsibility of leading military interventions to counter regional dominance. This pattern is evident in past conflicts such as World War II (against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan), the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and the Iraq War in 2003. The political party in power can influence US grand strategy, but it is not the sole factor. National security threats and the ability to achieve bipartisan consensus also play significant roles in shaping these interventions. National security threats are paramount, driving the need for decisive action to protect American interests and allies.

Additionally, the ability to achieve bipartisan consensus strengthens the resolve and legitimacy of such interventions. Broad public and congressional support allows for a more sustained commitment of resources and reduces the risk of mission creep. However, this approach is not without its critics. Some argue that the US has overly become interventionist and that diplomacy and economic factors could be more effective tools in certain situations,

¹³ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with India." January 20, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/#:~:text=India%20plays%20a%20vital%20role,the%20United%20States%20and%20India.>

¹⁴ Mike D. [R-AL-3 Rep. Rogers, "H.R.2670 - 118th Congress (2023-2024): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024," legislation, December 22, 2023, 2023-04-18, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/2670>.

¹⁵ Rep. Rogers, "H.R.2670 - 118th Congress (2023-2024): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024,"

like dealing with China. Though political parties in power can influence the US's grand strategy, other factors, such as national security threats and bipartisan consensus, also play a role. The Republican Party, which President Donald Trump belongs to, emerged as a rival to the renowned Democratic Party in the second half of the 19th century. The Republican Party not only played an integral role in ending the American Civil War and abolishing slavery in order to preserve US sovereignty as a union, but also introduced a new leadership with new ideas based on isolationism, noninterventionism, and economic nationalism.

The conditions in the US during that period significantly shaped the foreign policy contours of the first Republican government, led by President Abraham Lincoln. President Donald Trump, during his stint from 2017 to 2021, had a mix of approaches from neo-conservatives and pale-conservatives in terms of grand strategy.¹⁶ President Donald Trump acknowledged that traditional threats such as terrorism are still relevant, but the rise of China has become a relevant threat in recent years. The US should not ignore China's rapid military and economic rise, as it poses a clear threat to US hegemony. Therefore, he emphasizes the importance of economic growth and homeland security as new priorities. Border control and strengthening resilience became the key factors. On the one hand, he criticized the role of traditional allies and stressed unilateralism by promoting "America First" and restricting immigration policy.¹⁷

On the other hand, he aimed to enhance India's strength and position it as a primary defence against China, thereby promoting a balance of power in the region and sustaining peace. As a matter of fact, India was not a US ally like Japan or the Republic of Korea, but President Trump stressed increasing partnership with India by declaring her a "Major Defence Partner" in capital letters in the 2017 National Security Strategy report.¹⁸ US western

¹⁶ Allensworth, Wayne, David Azerrad, Mark G. Brennan, C. Jay Engel, Pedro Gonzalez, Grant Havers, Carl F. Horowitz et al. "A Paleoconservative Anthology: New Voices for an Old Tradition," (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023): 110-200.

¹⁷ Sarah Pierce and Andrew Selee, "Immigration Under Trump: A Review of Policy Shifts in the Year since the Election," *Migration Policy Institute* (2017): 1-16.

¹⁸ John M. Weaver, "The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States." *Journal of Strategic Security* 11, no. 1 (2018): 62-71.

allies constantly criticise President Donald Trump for their role in burden sharing, but they have stepped up a security partnership with India in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, during the Trump administration, offshore balancing became a prominent feature of US grand strategy. According to this strategy, India will act as the first line of defence, with the US providing assistance in the form of advice and strategy development rather than deploying its own military in the region. The US will only intervene physically if India fails to perform its role. The State Department promoted broader security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, which include India. The US, India, Japan, and Australia participated in the revised Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in 2017. They also work with India to address regional security challenges like counterterrorism, maritime security, and non-proliferation.

Despite the fact that the Trump administration appears uninterested in developing a combined strategy for South Asia and the Indo-Pacific, despite considering India a “major defence partner.” Moreover, the US associates India with the new geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific which, according to President Trump's national security strategy, defines its borders starting from the west coast of the United States and ending on the west coast of India, leading to a definitional clash within the Indo-Pacific region. It appears that the United States wants India to become its key ally in the Indo-Pacific region, which, according to the NSS report's definition, starts on the west coast of the US and ends on the west coast of India. This clearly indicates that the US-defined Indo-Pacific region does not include South Asia, of which India is the major country. There is a high possibility of an incongruence of interests between the two states. A combined Indo-Pacific and South Asia strategy may suit India because of its security concerns about the western border. For the time being, the US does not prioritise India's interests in its national security strategy.

One of the grand strategies of US “regime change” seems to have become irrelevant during President Donald Trump's first tenure. The failure to achieve goals in Iraq and Afghanistan led to a shift away from this strategy. Although this policy seemed reasonably plausible to meet US interests in the first phase of removing the existing governments, later

on it fell short of their goals for several reasons. The process of installing new democratic governments posed numerous challenges. The US underestimated the socioeconomic and political obstacles present in these countries. These countries are characterised by sectarian divisions stemming from their complex and entangled violent histories.

The strategy failed in the second phase because the focus remained on military rather than socio-economic development, post-war reconstruction, and tackling governance issues in the countries. This poorly planned strategy created a power vacuum at the local level. The US forces overthrew the existing government and took control of the entire area until they installed a new one. As a result, not only did the local armed forces become unemployed, but the political leadership also lost interest. Furthermore, instead of training the local armies, particularly in Iraq, the US disbanded the Iraqi army, resulting in unemployment and fuelling the insurgency. Later, new local governments in these countries regained control, leaving them in a precarious socio-political situation. The ineffectiveness of the US's regime change strategy undermined its positive image as a saviour. Hence, the US did not continue regime change as a grand strategy for tackling security issues abroad.

If the United States stays offshore, it will portray her as a protector rather than an attacker, as she is believed to have been in the Iraq-Kuwait War in 1991, in Afghanistan in 2001, and in Iraq in 2003. President Trump is a Republican Party member aligned with neoconservatives, who traditionally believe in the unilateral use of force to counter any threat to US national security as well as global dominance. However, his "Trump Doctrine" national security strategy embodies principled realism, prioritizing national interests and sovereignty over ideology.

In the 2017 NSS report, the US discusses India and Pakistan in two separate regions, Indo-Pacific and South Asia, respectively, which is quite incongruent with India's national security interests.¹⁹ Without considering Pakistan, India's security policy cannot be comprehensive. The US welcomed India as an aspiring global power and emerging security

¹⁹ Weaver, "The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States," 66.

partner in the Indo-Pacific region. Although terrorist threats originate from Pakistan, their operations within the country could potentially challenge power competition in the Indo-Pacific region. The context of cross-border counterterrorism and the potential transfer of nuclear technology to terrorist's highlights US interest in Pakistan. Even after over two decades since 9/11, US foreign policy remains unchanged. In September 2018, the first-ever 2+2 ministerial dialogue between India and the US took place to sign the "Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement."²⁰ Afghanistan and North Korea are considered global and regional concerns, but Afghanistan is actually separate from the Indo-Pacific for obvious reasons. The Department of State published an exclusive report, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision," in early November 2019. Apart from multilateral frameworks, the report assertively focuses on bilateral partnerships as well, claiming strategic interoperability with India's Act East Policy. For the first time in history, "Tiger Triumph," a nine-day tri-service Indo-US military exercise, took place by the end of November.²¹

U.S. Preferences and Behaviour during President Biden Era

President Joe Biden, the successor of President Donald Trump, assumed office for the first time in 2021. He had also served as vice president under President Barack Obama from 2009 to 2017.²² As a member of the Democratic Party, President Biden aligns with liberal imperialists who have a traditional belief in international institutions and multilateralism, also known as alliances. They strongly advocate the non-use of force to counter any threat to US national security, as well as her global dominance. In fact, President

²⁰ "U.S.-India Defence Cooperation a 'Key Driver' of Overall Relationship," U.S. Department of Defence, March 26, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1622396/us-india-defense-cooperation-a-key-driver-of-overall-relationship/>.

²¹ "U.S., India Launch First Tiger TRIUMPH Exercise," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command," March 26, 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2018116/us-india-launch-first-tiger-triumph-exercise/>.

²² "Interim national security strategic guidance." The White House 8 (2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

Thomas Jefferson founded the Jeffersonian Republican Party, which gave rise to the Democratic Party in the first half of the 19th century, specifically in 1828, and elected Andrew Jackson as President on its ticket.²³ Their grand strategies, known as Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism, gained fame due to their similarities and established the foundations of party policy. Therefore, the first twenty-eight years of the 19th century saw the formation of a new political party with its own set of ideals.

Hence President Biden has a clear contrast between the school of thought he belongs to and that of his predecessor. As a result, he discontinued a few previous government security policies, notably the reengagement of diplomatic ties with Iran, but in some cases, he continued his predecessor's legacy in other regions of the world, such as Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific region.²⁴ The rationale for pursuing these strategies primarily stems from the liberal imperialism school of thought that he and his party adhere to, emphasizing the use of diplomatic measures and a multilateral framework. In the case of Afghanistan, President Biden and his government have advanced the idea of troop withdrawal, a clear indication of a reversal from the previous strategy of regime change, which the US adopted in the first decade of the 21st century under the Republican Party government under President George W. Bush.

In the region of the Indo-Pacific President Biden established AUKUS (Australia, the UK, and the US) in September 2021. Another multilateral security framework in the region was an effort to continue President Trump's policy of reviving a similar Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States in 2017.²⁵ The US President reaffirmed his close ties with India. The US Department of State published a fact sheet in 2021, emphasizing India's crucial role in realizing our shared goal of a free and open Indo-Pacific. It states that the Political-Military Affairs (PMA) Bureau advances

²³ Walter Russell Mead, "*Special Providence: American foreign policy and how it changed the world*" (Routledge, 2013): 222-350.

²⁴ Daniel W. Drezner, "Perspective: The Policy Gap in the Indo-Pacific." *The Washington Post*, January 12, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/01/12/policy-gap-indo-pacific/>.

²⁵ Weaver, "The 2017 National Security Strategy," 65.

the defence trade relationship and strengthens security relations between the two states, namely the US and India.²⁶ In a major move, the US granted India access to top-tier military technology in 2018. India achieved a major coup by securing Tier 1 STA status from the US.²⁷

This opened the door for streamlined access to military and dual-use technologies. The PM Bureau backed the increase in defence trade with India and streamlined the defence sales, which fall under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) processes. A potential enhancement in India's military capabilities will possibly increase US-India military interoperability and protect congruent security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region. All of these details were reported to Congress. The PMA Bureau also led the global peacekeeping operation on behalf of the US government under the United Nations umbrella and considers India one of the major contributors to these efforts. In its 2022 NSS report, President Biden's government expressed key concern for the Indo-Pacific region in general and described China as out-competing.

This report specifically prioritizes India as a security partner for the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" region.²⁸ On the one hand, the report claims that the US-India security partnership was established to counter China's influence, but on the other hand, this report does not mention Pakistan directly, a major security concern for India. The same year, Biden's government published an Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) for India for public consumption.²⁹ The US, rather than relying on her traditional allies in Europe in the form of NATO to counter China, is considering regional partners, particularly India from the Indian Ocean, an immediate neighbour of China. It is because of two reasons: one is that Europe does not necessarily consider China a primary threat; it has economic ties instead, whereas,

²⁶ United States Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with India."

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Michaela Dodge and Matthew R. Costlow, "Expert Commentary on the 2022 National Security Strategy," *National Institute for Public Policy* 3, no 1 (February 2023): 1-133, <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/OP-Vol-3-No.-2.pdf>.

²⁹ "Integrated Country Strategy India," United States Department of State, May 27, 2022, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ICS_SCA_India_Public.pdf.

Russia will always remain the direct threat for the Europeans due to geographical compulsions. Secondly, India shares common interests with the US; this time, she not only considers China a major threat to India's national security but also to India's hegemonic designs.³⁰

The administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Director of the National Science Foundation, the Executive Secretary of the National Space Council, and senior officials from the Department of State, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Defence, and the National Security Council attended a meeting at the White House during the Biden administration on the initiative of critical and emerging technologies.³¹ All the departments showed their strong will to collaborate in all the areas proposed by the initiative, such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and space exploration. Furthermore, they supported collaboration between the US Defence Innovation Unit and India's Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDex) to jointly develop cutting-edge military technologies.³² Secure technological environments and strong democratic institutions are considered shared values between the two states.

Fault lines and Challenges to US Grand Strategy

One of the important strategic interests of the US is to prevent any other country from becoming a competitor in any part of the world. Currently, China is considered a threat. Therefore, the US grand strategy goal is to maintain a balance of power in Asia and oppose the rise of China. A bilateral security arrangement with India is one of the key components of achieving this strategic objective. Other foreign policy goals are the promotion of democracy, human rights, and a free and open Indo-Pacific, which means the US does not

³⁰ Araudra Singh, "Revisiting India's China Challenge," *The Diplomat*, October 3, 2023, accessed March 24, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/10/revisiting-indias-china-challenge/>

³¹ White House, "Fact Sheet," 3.

³² *Ibid*, 4.

ask any country to choose either of the blocks but to maintain the prevalent regional order.³³ Furthermore, the United States prioritizes a world order based on independent nations, peaceful conflict resolution, fair trade, open communication, and respect for international law.

The US claims from time to time to champion a global system where countries are free, disputes are settled peacefully, trade thrives, agreements are clear, and international law is upheld. The vision that guides US foreign policy is to create a world of sovereign nations, peaceful solutions, open markets, clear communication, and global connection. Thomas F. Lynch III, explaining the major national security interests of the US, says that one of the important and relatively new interests is enabling India to become a rising security partner in the Indo-Pacific region.³⁴ Factually, the goals of offshore balancing are very limited; basically, they are two. One is to secure the US position in the Western Hemisphere, and the second is to defend three key regions (Europe, the Persian Gulf, and North East Asia) from any rising regional power as a hegemon. It does not include several other key aspects, such as promoting peace all over the world and preventing genocide.³⁵ Because it does not cover these areas, talking about human rights is meaningless.

Conclusion

The US grand strategy in recent years has been based on great power competition, particularly with China. This competition defines the contours of US grand strategy, specifically in the Indo-Pacific region. The US has never placed such importance on relatively small states as their security partners. In the past, the United States heavily relied on traditional European partners, but in response to China's engagement with smaller states, the United States also broadened the realm of security partnerships outside Europe. On

³³ "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision," U.S. Department of State, March 20, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-advancing-a-shared-vision/>.

³⁴ Hooker, "The Grand Strategy of the United States."

³⁵ Stephen Walt, "What Grand Strategy for America?: Why Offshore Balancing Is Best," YouTube, accessed on April 27, 2024, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Mpl8TjIJPG4>.

security issues, the US Department of State served as a vital bridge between the US government and India. Through diplomacy, policy development, and public engagement, the State Department played a central role in strengthening this critical partnership. The White House portrays the US-India security partnership as crucial for regional stability and technological advancement. Security agreements facilitated by the US Congress pave the way for military-to-military information sharing, logistics support, and communication interoperability during joint exercises and operations.

Indeed, the US's outcompeting efforts not only obscure their ultimate objectives but also limit the potential of partner states such as India. The absence of Pakistan in the official national security strategies of both regimes, despite being India's primary security concern, supports this argument. On one side, India is a member of Quad, a multilateral framework for the Indo-Pacific region. On the other side, the US established an exclusive bilateral security framework with India for the same region. The US needs to adopt a relentless strategy to step up security cooperation with India because any short term strategy will not be capable enough to gain maximum benefits from this partnership.

Neoclassical realism in this study recognizes that the US Congress's support for the partnership reflects the recognition of India's growing economic and military capabilities, making it a valuable partner. India's large population and strategic location in the Indo-Pacific are also important considerations. Neoclassical realism also highlights the limitations of this partnership. India's long-standing relationship with Russia and its commitment to strategic autonomy might constrain its willingness to fully align with US interests. Disagreements on trade could also create friction.

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