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OVERCOMING THE HESITATIONS OF HISTORY: AN ANALYSIS OF U.S.-INDIA TIES

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ABSTRACT

U.S.-India relations have not progressed as far or as fast as advocates have hoped. There is little doubt as to India’s strategic importance to the United States, as well as the critical role it will undoubtedly play on the global stage in this century. The history of U.S. ties since India’s independence are complex, and involve decades of divergence and estrangement, but with a decidedly upward trajectory over the past two decades. Historical tensions, however, still loom large in today’s relationship. It was in the summer of 2016 that India’s Prime Minister told a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress that India had “overcome its hesitations of history” with regard to the United States. It was a breakthrough declaration, but did it reflect the reality between Washington and New Delhi?

This study tests the Prime Minister’s proposition that history has been overcome. It first provides a detailed overview of the some of the shifting geopolitical dynamics in Asia, and in particular, India’s rise. It examines the U.S. approach to India since its independence in 1947, and then in a systematic way considers five years in particular (1962, 1971, 1998, 2005 and 2015) as case studies to examine in detail the gains that were made, the setbacks, and draws forward the important lessons for academicians and policymakers alike.

There have been other studies of U.S. and India relations over the years, but few that identified the key lessons, the deficiencies, the areas of promise, what has worked and what has failed. It is in this study that those historical lessons are carefully identified and analyzed, with a set of recommendations to chart a new way
forward – one that takes into account the foreign policy architecture of the 21st Century, in which there is a diminishing interest in formal alliance structures. Where and how do the U.S. and India advance their relations in this environment? This study provides a diagnosis of the problems, utilizes the case study methodology, evaluates the prospects for progress, and identifies the components that would offer the best chance to create a durable and lasting partnership.
This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my committee, led by Professor Nooruddin, along with Ambassador Bill Burns and Professor Victor Cha. I appreciate their strong support and guidance at every turn. I am also exceptionally grateful to my family for allowing me to pursue such a complex, time-consuming, yet fulfilling project, and especially to my father, Dr. Kamal Verma, who is a true South Asian scholar and inspiration.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2016, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi told a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress that the United States and India had “overcome the hesitations of history” and that both nations were destined for a stronger relationship.¹ The history between the United States and India is a complicated one, with periods of alignment, disinterest, frustration, and convergence. But Modi’s pronouncement was that this history was now behind both nations, and each country had broken free from the gravitational pull that had prevented achieving lasting diplomatic, economic or military advancements for far too long. It was a significant declaration. But was it true?

Modi would go on to call the United States and India “natural allies,” a phrase first uttered in 1998 by another BJP Leader and Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee.² Given the only partial thaw in bilateral relations at the time, Vajpayee’s declaration was bold and perhaps overly confident, as a large reservoir of distrust continued to keep both nations at a careful distance. But Modi’s insistence some eighteen years later was that the past was now a distant memory, and little could keep the “natural allies” from achieving big and consequential aims together, such as

¹ The Prime Minister made this address to a Joint Session of Congress on June 8, 2016. He was the sixth Indian Prime Minister to address the Congress, and the first since Prime Minister Singh in 2005. The full address can be found at: https://www.house.gov/feature-stories/2016-6-9-narendra-modi-speaks-to-joint-session

² Prime Minister Vajpayee would make this declaration in a speech to The Asia Society in New York on September 28, 1998 at the height of tensions with the United States following India being sanctioned for nuclear testing. His full remarks can be found here: https://asiasociety.org/india-usa-and-world-let-us-work-together-solve-political-economic-y2k-problem
exploring deep space, building nuclear power plants, and ensuring tens of millions of Americans embraced the virtues of yoga.

The reality of U.S.-India ties, however, presents a far more complex picture. One can go back hundreds of years to explore the various connections between the U.S. and India, with the vast network of people to people ties and increasingly, their shared values too. Many are surprised to learn that one of America’s first overseas consulates was established in Calcutta in 1792, then the base of the East India Trading Company. There was the visit of Swami Vivekananda to the Conference of World Religions in Chicago in 1893 where he captivated audiences and brought back his own impressions of America to a curious Indian population. There is a rich and diverse body of literature from scholars such as Emerson, Thoreau, Melville and Whitman that derive inspiration from Indian philosophy and would in-turn result in a broad fabric of Indo-American thinking on humanity, individual rights and democracy. A first-wave of Indian immigrants, mainly Punjabis, landed in Northern California in the early 1900s to work in the vast and growing agricultural and railway sectors. And during India’s independence movement and in the drafting of its first constitution, legal scholars like B.R. Ambedkar studied at Columbia University under Professor John Dewey, returning to India with those aspects of the American constitution that could be adapted for India’s needs.

But while these early connections were important and lasting, the most meaningful progress in bilateral ties occurred following India’s independence in 1947, with the most significant gains occurring in the past two decades. In fact, there were only modest gains in the first fifty years following 1947, and most of
these occurred during President Eisenhower’s second term through President Kennedy’s presidency. This fifty-year period also included long periods of cold and bitter relations, such as during President Nixon’s term when the United States took a decidedly favored position with Pakistan over India. The few gains that were achieved were difficult to sustain and the relationship lacked the durability necessary to progress through difficult diplomatic and security crises.

It was not until late in the Clinton Administration when the relationship began to take a different, more positive turn. President Clinton began the de-hyphenation process, de-linking India and Pakistan policies for the first time, and he became the first U.S. President since President Carter to visit India. He gave a transformative and forward-looking address to the Indian Parliament, outlining a new vision for future cooperation. Millions of well-wishers came out to greet him as he toured the nation. The gains continued through the Bush and Obama Administrations, until the current day, where the transactionalism of the Trump Administration has left many wondering if the two-decade upward trajectory in positive relations has come to an end.

Even without President Trump’s more transactional approach, relations with India have not progressed as far or as fast as supporters have wanted. In fact, the underlying assertion of this dissertation is that the relationship has under-performed over many decades. Relations have mostly been cordial, with a slight upward trajectory, but the United States does not count India as one of its closest friends and partners, and few would assert that we have become allies, natural or otherwise. Why have relations with India not grown into something more
meaningful, deeper and lasting? Why do deep pockets of distrust remain on both sides, and in both bureaucracies? And why have gains not materialized faster and in more measurable ways? This dissertation directly addresses these questions and more.

One of the central theories explored here is the role played by history, and whether and how much of that history still holds the partnership back. The research explores more fully PM Modi’s assertion of the so-called “hesitations of history” -- what are they, do they still remain, and what can be done to finally break free of history’s grasp? The study also explores in some detail the U.S. approach to a country like India that is neither an ally nor an adversary, and whether the U.S. government is adequately organized to embrace the opportunities and challenges offered in a dynamic relationship with India.

Relatedly, with no governing security institution between the two nations, but with interests growing increasingly aligned, this has been one of the gaps in moving the partnership forward to something akin to an alliance. While the Indian side may be weary of being drawn too far into the US orbit and, and therefore, not supportive of a formal alliance, there still is lacking any durable agreement, secretariat, or institutions to bind the two nations together. This deficiency and how to build a more fulsome fabric of ties is explored more fully in Chapter Three. Should the U.S. and India be successful in this pursuit, this may, in fact, provide a template that could be used in relationships with other nations; countries that do not aspire to be treaty allies, but still want a close, aligned and agile relationship built for this century.
I. The Literature

There have been other studies of U.S. and India relations over the years, but few that identified the key lessons, the deficiencies, the areas of promise, what has worked and what has failed. It is in this study that those lessons are carefully explored, with a set of recommendations to chart a new way forward. There are, however, surprisingly few books written on the subject of the bilateral partnership. Yes, there are libraries filled with literature on U.S. foreign policy, some which touch upon episodic periods of engagement with India. And, there is a rich and growing body of literature about India's role in the world, and the increasing influence it is demonstrating in the international arena. But again, there are few that actually address the bilateral partnership in great detail over a period of years.

Despite this gap in the literature, there are several books that are important to the topic at hand and have richly contributed to understanding the bilateral dynamics. The first, written by Dennis Kux, is entitled *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies*, and was first published in 1993. Kux lays out in great detail the policy developments and personal interactions of U.S. and Indian leaders over several decades. It puts in sharp perspective how distant American and Indian approaches were during the Cold War, and the great frustration that mounted in each capital, leading to this sense of ambivalence at best, and perhaps more accurately, as Kux calls it, estrangement. The Kux account ends in 1991, however, and therefore, it fails to capture the modern period of gains.

Professor Srinath Raghavan similarly details the ups and downs of U.S. engagement in South Asia in his more recent work: *The Most Dangerous Place – A
History of the United States in South Asia. The book is detailed in its accounting, follows many of the Kux trails chartered earlier, but gives a broader look at America in South Asia, which is critical to understanding U.S. and India bilateral ties.

That broader understanding of U.S. policy in South Asia is captured in Gary Bass’ stunning account of the American role in the war in then-East Pakistan in the early 70s. In The Blood Telegram, one is struck by the harshness of the Nixon/Kissinger approach to South Asia, their preference for the more Western-leaning leaders in Islamabad, and the impact that American policy had on civilians in what is today Bangladesh. This account is essential to understanding why New Delhi still maintains some degree of mistrust over American assurances some fifty years later.

The Kennedy era with India is short, but intense and exceptionally positive. Perhaps there is no more detailed account of bilateral ties at the time and what it means to be an American diplomat serving overseas than the letters and diary accounts of then Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith in his legendary Ambassador’s Journal. Galbraith takes the reader on a compelling journey, providing keen insights into Kennedy’s desire to support India, his growing concerns about China, and the delicate nature of building ties with a sprawling and complex country still grappling with its new-found independence.

Bruce Riedel’s JFK’s Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and the Sino-Indian War, a more recent publication, bolsters Galbraith’s account about Kennedy’s strong interest in backing India. He provides a fascinating perspective of the 1962 Sino-Indian war, and the now declassified letters from Nehru to Kennedy requesting
urgent military assistance. Riedel also provides an important foundation for
President Eisenhower's decision to support India through the course of his
presidency.

There may be no greater source for material about the Eisenhower, Kennedy
and Nixon periods than the actual official documents from that era housed in U.S.
archives and the presidential libraries. The NSC directives from this era are
particularly important, as are the cables between Washington and New Delhi. There
is a fascinating set of correspondence between then Secretary of State Rusk and
Ambassador Galbraith following Nehru's request to Kennedy for military assistance;
it is a request and a response that captures many of the complexities of U.S.-India
ties today. The request is for direct military support in India's 1962 war with China,
yet Washington raises significant concerns that it could get drawn into a raging hot
war between India and China. Moreover, McBundy argues that the U.S. and India
are not allies, and there is no larger agreement or set of shared principles to bind
the two democracies together or that would govern this complex new chapter, to
include war. Much of those deficiencies remain in place today.

Similarly, the Nixon audio tapes, cables and memos give the listener and
reader a sense of being in the room with Nixon and his Secretary of State and
National Security Advisor as America begins its pronounced tilt toward Pakistan.
The disdain for Indian leaders can be heard clearly in Nixon's voice. His decisions
would set in motion a historic low point in bilateral ties, a point that would take
nearly four decades from which to recover.
The approach of the Clinton Administration toward India, particularly in the intense period of developments during Clinton’s second term, is captured brilliantly in former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot’s account in Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and The Bomb. The book tells of the painstaking negotiations to forge peace between India and Pakistan, a task that goes unfulfilled, but more importantly, it explains the pivot Washington makes in de-linking India and Pakistan policies, as President Clinton makes a calculated bet on India. It also explains the difficult and largely unresolved matters governing nuclear non-proliferation in South Asia.

The understanding of the Bush years from 2000 to 2008 come from a variety of excellent journal articles, including from scholar Ashley Tellis and former Ambassador Bob Blackwill, as well as from The Back Channel, former Deputy Secretary of State William Burns’ account of the painstaking, but critical civil-nuclear negotiations with India that led to a breakthrough agreement. Former Indian Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, also provides a detailed account of the civil nuclear negotiations in How India Sees the World. Ray Vickery’s The Eagle and the Elephant covers the strategic aspects of U.S. India economic engagement during this period.

For a look at Indian foreign policy in the modern era, Indian strategic thinker and author C. Raja Mohan, provides important views of India’s approach to the United States in the Modi-era in Modi’s World. Similarly, Dr. Alyssa Ayers and Dr. Aparna Panda write about Indian society, history and modern foreign policy in Our Time Has Come and From Chanakya to Modi respectively. Professor Sumit Ganguly
and other South Asian scholars provide critical insights into Indian decision-making in *India’s Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*.

Significant recent works on Asia’s rise and India’s role in it, including from Dr. Kurt Campbell in *The Pivot* and Dr. Parag Khanna in *The Future is Asian*, help set the scene for the fast-moving nature of events in Asia. Of course, a range of recent literature on the disassembling of the current world order was reviewed as well, including *A World in Disarray* by Richard Haass, *The Jungle Grows Back* by Robert Kagan, and *The Return of Marco Polo’s World* by Robert Kaplan. In addition to the more contemporary works, the important political science texts were also covered in detail, including works from Graham Allison, Kenneth Waltz, Robert Gilpin and John Mearsheimer. This is on top of a rich body of literature on Indian development and history that was also explored deeply, including works by Ram Guha, as well as the writings of Nehru and Gandhi.

In sum, for this dissertation, over 50 books and dozens of think tank reports and scholarly articles, in addition to hundreds of pages of official documents, were reviewed in great detail. But again, I return to part of the impetus for this project, and that is to contribute to a deeper understanding of bilateral ties, its lessons, what has worked, and what has failed. On this score, there are only a few compositions, and hopefully, this account fills in some of the gaps, but also delivers a way forward for the modern era.
II. The Organization

The dissertation is organized in three chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1: Setting the Scene – This chapter provides important context about the fast moving dynamics of Asia, and how India fits into the story, both as a counter-weight to China, and also in its own right, as an increasingly important power regionally and globally. The chapter goes on to examine the shifting geopolitics of the region, including the evolving role played by Russia, as it endeavors to stay relevant, testing the limits of its friendships with Delhi as it secures new defense deals with Pakistan and China. The analysis then turns to a deeper examination of India’s rise, to include the underlying factors propelling India forward, as well as the variables causing the biggest risk to its ascendance. The chapter concludes with an examination of the U.S.-India relationship in particular and the different phases the partnership has experienced since 1947, with a particular focus on whether the relationship is truly underperforming, and if so, why.

- Chapter 2: Five Years in Focus – This Chapter examines five specific years in the U.S.-India partnership: 1962, 1971, 1998, 2005 and 2015. These years give perhaps the best indication of the different approaches American policymakers have taken towards India since its independence. These snapshots also give the reader a clear sense of the highs and lows the partnership has experienced, and serve as a reminder as to why history still remains such a important factor in evaluating today’s developments. The
chapter includes the lessons learned in each of these periods, and how they can shape future bilateral cooperation.

• Chapter 3: Allies Absent the Alliance – This is in many ways the most critical chapter, as it sets out a framework for future cooperation, one that draws upon the lessons of the past, while taking into account the evolving dynamics in Asia, including China’s rise, Russia’s attempt at resurgence, and India’s inherent limitations, both actual and perceived. The chapter looks specifically at how to become “natural allies” with India, without the alliance structure and binding treaty obligations. After all, if the US and India can successfully work towards this worthy goal, then their work together could serve as a model for other partnerships in this century. If the 20th century was about upholding the post-World War II order through a vast network of alliances and international institutions, the 21st century appears certain to take a different course, one with new alignments, more flexible commitments that take into account the growth and stature of new powers and their interests, which may often be at odds with a western-dominated order. If constructed properly, the U.S.-India relationship could provide the blueprint for other relationships with rising and middle powers, each with their own historical complexities with the United States.

In each of the chapters, there are sub-themes that could benefit from a stand-alone publication as a scholarly article or think tank piece. These include:

• The Importance of Shared Values in U.S.-India ties.

• Can the U.S. and India be natural allies without an alliance?
• What does it mean to be a Major Defense Partner of the United States?
• How trade can impact the U.S.-India strategic partnership.
• The Impact from the Growth of Indian and American Nationalism.
• Is the United States properly organized to maximize its partnership with India?
• What is the role of Congress and Diaspora Communities in building U.S.-India ties?

The overarching goal of this research project is to provide readers a rich contextual history of U.S.-India ties and its importance; to explain how that history has been a chief obstacle in making more progress in building bilateral ties; and to set forth a roadmap for modern cooperation, taking into account this history, the potential of the relationship, as well as some of the structural and organizational realities that could, if not addressed directly, continue to impede greater progress. In addition to the academic and intellectual aspects of the paper, there are also significant elements that could aid policymakers as well.
Chapter One

Setting the Scene – U.S.-India Ties in Context

Much of this dissertation describes the rise of India and the importance to the United States, with a particular focus on how America can build a sustainable, agile and modern relationship with India. The criticality of the relationship becomes even more central to America’s security and economic future if one considers the dramatic rise of Asia, its vast economic gains, including the urbanization, democratization and education of hundreds of millions, all occurring at a dramatic pace.

Asia’s future, however, is not without risk or internal challenges. There are significant counter-veiling pressures from powerful individuals and nations that seek a consolidation of power, and object to the Western led political and economic frameworks of the post-war period. Moreover, the shifting geo-politics of Asia present new and challenging alignments, such as Russia’s growing partnership with China, and where new threats, many of them transnational, continue to present real challenges to individual security, economic well-being and governance.

Amid this churn sits India, a nation poised to lead the world in a range of key categories by 2030, but which also continues to be consumed with massive developmental and regional security concerns. At the same time, the United States finds itself constrained by resources and political currents, resulting in a reassessment and at least a perceived retrenchment over its force posture, and commercial and diplomatic efforts across the Indo-Pacific, which predictably has bolstered China’s efforts to claim additional influence. There may be no more
important time, therefore, for the U.S. and India to craft a policy that can simultaneously fend off the very real threats to the democratic order, while building a partnership of the modern era, taking into account each nation’s aspirations in a more multi-polar world.

The chapter’s first section provides the context for Asia’s rise, setting the scene, explaining the key players and tensions across the Indo-Pacific, but then quickly turns to the importance of India, as well as its challenges, followed by an explanation of the American approach over seven decades and a recounting of why the partnership is of such importance to the future security and economic prosperity of each nation. The chapter concludes with a candid look at the deficiencies in bilateral ties. The framework for this chapter is as follows:

I. The Asian Century

II. India Rising

III. The U.S. Approach to India Since 1947

IV. Assessing the Performance

V. Summary

I. The Asian Century

The 20th Century was largely a western-dominated period, with the United States and allied European powers prevailing in two world wars and one cold war. Following World War II, America soon boasted the world’s largest economy, military and most educated population (Meacham 179). And while America still holds the dominant position in these and other categories, the economic and geo-
political momentum is shifting to the Asia-Pacific theater (Khanna 3). Sixty percent of the world’s population and two-thirds of the world’s global economic growth now come from Asia alone (4).

**China**

One of the principal bases for this economic shift is because of China’s steady and deliberate rise. In purchasing power parity terms, China has surpassed the United States in economic power (9). Its military and diplomatic corps are now the world’s second largest (Campbell 157; Lowy Institute). China has more mega cities, more Internet users, and more college graduates than any other nation (Campbell 53, 55 and 42). China leads the world in infrastructure investment and renewable energy use (53, 58). The nation has flexed its muscles more aggressively across Asia, but also on the global stage, prompting the Trump administration in its first National Security Strategy of 2017 to conclude that the United States had returned to an era of great power competition.4

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3 The dissertation uses “Asia-Pacific” and “Indo-Pacific” somewhat interchangeably throughout the study, but in both cases it refers to the same region of the Indian subcontinent across East and Southeast Asia to Australia and New Zealand.

4 While Russia was also a factor in making this assessment, the clear focus was on China’s rise and its implications for the post war order. The full National Security Strategy of 2017 can be found here: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf; see also Professor Aaron Friedberg’s compelling account of China’s rise in January 2019 in The American Interest, which can be found here: https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/01/10/getting-the-china-challenge-right/. Professor Friedberg paints a disturbing picture of a China more capable of confronting the United States in multiple domains, and where communist party leaders have consolidated even greater power, making the prospect for any economic or political liberalization even less likely. This argument mirrors the views of Professor John Mearsheimer, the architect of offensive realism, and who believes that China will aim to achieve regional hegemony in Asia, which could very well lead to conflict with the United States in the years ahead. See his forceful argument here: https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204?page=0%2C3.
China has no peer competitor in Asia, though India often suggests it is preparing for such a role (Ayres 103; Malik 59). Chinese influence in Asia results from a skillful deployment of economic, political and military tools. Its economic weight is particularly important. No country in the Indo-Pacific has escaped the economic entanglements that result from trade with China. China remains the largest investor in the developing economies of Asia, the leading supplier of critical goods and services, and a gigantic consumer of food, energy and consumer goods produced in nations across the Asia Pacific (Khanna 157; Observatory Report). The economic activity has created a kind of dependency that smaller nations, and even more economically powerful nations like Australia, cannot easily escape.5

The Chinese entanglements are particularly difficult to reconcile for the developing nations in South and Southeast Asia. The Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh, for example, all have to balance the need for Chinese investments, with the strategic risks posed by China’s growing influence in the region (Allison 20-21).6 The United States, India, Japan and Korea are trying

5 Australia is a member of the G-20, and boasts one of the most diverse and advanced global economies. Its GDP is nearly $2 trillion and accounts for almost two percent of the global economy. Yet, Australia’s largest trading partner is China at some $200 billion in annual two-way trade, which is nearly 2.5 times the amount of Australia’s next closest trading relationship (Australia Trade and Investment Report). Australia, for example, exports some 300,000 tons of beef and nine billion tons of coal to China each year (Global Meat News; The Guardian). A downturn in economic relations with China would send Australia’s economy reeling, and therefore has prompted considerable hesitation in Australia’s strategic calculus with regard to China, including withdrawing in 2009 from the short-lived “quad” which left India, the U.S. and Japan without a fourth member.

6 China’s use of economic power to achieve political aims has been labeled “geo-economics”. See also Robert Blackwill’s and Jennifer Harris’ 2016 book on this subject called “War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft.”
to counter China’s influence, but the effort is often under-resourced and badly coordinated, not to mention constrained by each nation’s own ties with Beijing.7

In the course of its rise, China has smartly not tried to completely upend the post-World War II order. Rather, it has sought to use those aspects that advance China’s interests, namely through the international financial institutions, and it has participated in key international agreements, such as the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran nuclear agreement, and it is driving negotiations forward on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (Khanna 322-325). It has also used the constraints of the system to limit the reach of its competitors, for example, by blocking many of India’s and the United States’ interests within the UN Security Council and in other international organizations (Malik 46). But it has also sought to undercut other norms, particularly those related to human rights, the freedom of navigation, and the territorial integrity of island chains in the South China Sea, which has inflamed tensions across the Asia-Pacific region (Campbell 241, 174-188). These and other actions associated with China’s rise have also had the effect of drawing the U.S. and India closer.

China’s dramatic rise is India’s number one strategic concern, even more so than the threat posed by Pakistan (Malik chaps. 3 and 6). India and China share a 2100-mile border, with virtually all of it disputed. The rivalry between these two great civilizations is, of course, not a development of recent times, but the product of

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7 Reports suggest the Chinese Government spends more than $40 billion annually on its Belt and Road Initiative and related projects. The U.S. has no alternative or competing institution. The new International Development Finance Corporation was funded with an annual appropriation, yet to be obligated, of some $325 million. For more budget details on the U.S. effort, see: https://www.opic.gov/sites/default/files/files/fy2020-executive-budget-summary.pdf.
intense competition of the post-colonial period in virtually every domain. As Mohan Malik writes in *China and India: Great Power Rivals*, “relations between the two Asian giants has been marked by conflict, containment, mutual suspicion, distrust, and rivalry” (9).

Today, India-China relations resemble in many ways the paradoxes of the U.S.-China relationship. As the U.S. depends on China for billions in foreign investment and as the source for low cost manufacturing, India does the same. The economic entanglements with China have limited American – and so too Indian – options to walk away from China. There is a dependency recognized in Washington and Delhi that limit the options of policymakers, and also simultaneously serve as a disincentive for military conflict, despite Chinese provocations in the region.

In the summer of 2017, Indian and Chinese forces faced one of their most dangerous and longest stand-offs in recent times. In the complex tri-border region of Bhutan, China and India known as the Doklam Plateau, Chinese and Indian military forces came face to face, with troops close enough to engage in hand to hand combat. The confrontation resulted from Chinese Army efforts to build a road through what both the Bhutanese and Indian governments claimed was the sovereign territory of Bhutan (Panda). The dispute brought to light many of the key simmering underlying tensions of the region: disputed borders; large garrisons of military forces with little command and control from either Beijing or Delhi; the risk of misinterpreting signaling from the respective capitals; and a battle for regional primacy and influence in South Asia, particularly in smaller states like Bhutan.
But the dispute also displayed the somewhat positive trend lines as well, many of which are linked to the deep commercial entanglements between China and India. Both nations were looking for off-ramps to the dispute, and neither side wished to risk a broader conflict. Of course, traditional military deterrence and diplomacy played a key role, but so did the risk to both nations’ economies (and even more so to India) if the stand-off had escalated into a more dangerous conflict. In fact, at the end of the dispute, both Prime Minister Modi and Chinese President Xi spoke numerous times, including face-to-face at the Wuhan Summit, pledging to work hard to “prevent incidents in border regions.” (Wuhan Summit Declaration, Para. 4). Much more on China is covered in Chapters Two and Three, as there is no more a consequential relationship to the U.S.-India partnership than the role played by China in the years ahead.

**East and Southeast Asia**

While China’s rise and continued climb will dominate Asia’s growth story, East Asian powers of Japan and Korea, and even Taiwan, also account for a crucial part of the story. East Asia’s growth is nothing new, with intense periods of economic acceleration leading to the so-called “East Asian Miracle,” lifting millions out of poverty, helping to stabilize large swaths of Asia, and power economic growth regionally and globally as well (Khanna 60-63). Japan’s economic and political power can be felt across the region. A democracy and home to the world’s leading
technology companies, as well as new financial powers like Softbank, continue to give Japan an outsized influence in Asia and on the global stage.\(^8\)

Korea too, despite the significant geo-political risks posed by its North Korean neighbor, continues to play the role of economic powerhouse and technology and innovation leader. Korea’s Samsung has outpaced Apple to become the world’s leading supplier of smart phones, and the nation now ranks as the fourth largest economy in Asia.\(^9\) Korea, like Japan, is a democracy and an alliance partner with the United States. It also boasts a newly updated Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. Like Japan, Korea exercises global political and strategic power as well. The Koreans (and Japanese) are active and important voices in international institutions, and have played key roles in the leading debates on non-proliferation, climate and security.

And while Taiwan sits in the shadows of China’s stare, it too plays an oversized role in driving Asia’s economic and security future. With a per capita GDP nearly three times that of China, Taiwan boasts one of the most highly educated populations and claims one of Asia’s most capable militaries.\(^10\) It also continues to purchase advanced military equipment from the U.S. at a steady rate, walking a tightrope between self-defense and triggering Chinese provocation. The deliberately vague U.S. defense obligations to Taiwan are still a powerful deterrent,

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\(^8\) Japan is a $5 trillion economy representing about 8% of the global GDP. One data point illustrating the speed of its economic resurgence is the per capita income, which went from around $300 in 1957 to nearly $40,000 in 2018. See additional economic data available at: [https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/japan/gdp-per-capita](https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/japan/gdp-per-capita).

\(^9\) More detailed economic data on Korea can be found here: [https://tradingeconomics.com/south-korea/](https://tradingeconomics.com/south-korea/)

\(^10\) Taiwanese economic data can be found at: [https://tradingeconomics.com/taiwan/](https://tradingeconomics.com/taiwan/)
serving to keep the Chinese at bay, while giving Taiwan the space to freely trade and exercise its political muscle well beyond its shores.

The ASEAN countries of Southeast Asia are undergoing a similarly significant economic revolution, though political liberalization has been uneven and tenuous. With a population of over 600 million and a GDP of nearly $3 trillion, the U.S. and China continue to compete for economic and political influence in the region.\(^\text{11}\) India does too. But ASEAN nations are rapidly developing and increasingly dictating their own trajectories, with or without American or Chinese alignment. Indonesia is ASEAN’s largest economy, a member of the G-20 and the world’s 16\(^{th}\) largest economy yet, like India, confronts significant development and religious and ethnic integration issues. Singapore has emerged into an economic powerhouse and headquarters for most multinational’s operations in Asia. It has the regions highest GDP per capita, boasts amazingly efficient infrastructure and has become a massive port and transshipment point. It is a democracy, yet has maintained a careful balancing act between China and the United States, which it counts both as close partners.

Vietnam and Malaysia have moved aggressively in recent years to open their economies and serve as an alternative to Chinese-sourced manufacturing. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam have also been upgrading military assets, particularly their navies, to better defend their positions against Chinese territorial intrusions and claims made against their fisheries and energy reserves (Campbell 67). Across ASEAN, the economic growth rates still

come in over 5% despite a global slow-down, and each of the markets is making deeper inroads into global markets.\textsuperscript{12} The region, like other parts of Asia, continues to hold significant demographic advantages, and its massive urbanization efforts mirror those taking place in India and China. Certainly, there are connectivity, security, humanitarian and governance issues as several of the nations continue to struggle with democratization. But despite the challenges, there can be no doubt that ASEAN is growing in importance to China, to the U.S., and to India as well, which makes future alignments and trading and security partnerships even more consequential.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{South Asia}

In many respects, South Asia has been the laggard in economic growth in the Indo-Pacific, but yet it also holds some of the greatest prospects for future growth. The reasons for its lagging performance are complex, but stem from a mix of inward looking economic policies, war, and colonialism. India’s independence from Britain was secured just over seven decades ago, and since that time it has labored with how much and how fast to open its traditionally closed economy. Conflict has plagued all of the nations in the region, with India and Pakistan fighting numerous battles since 1947, and with a continued proxy war carried out by cross border extremists based in Pakistani-controlled territories.

\textsuperscript{12} https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/AEIB_5th_Issue_Released.pdf.

\textsuperscript{13} For a comprehensive account of the U.S. grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific from the early 1780s to the modern era, see Professor Mike Green’s By More Than Providence (Columbia University Press 2017).
Likewise, Afghanistan has yet to break from its cycle of war, division and domination from outside powers. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have fought wars of liberation, followed by years of intense civil strife and instability. Nepal and the Maldives have also faced innumerable political crises and instability, with weak governing institutions and supporting infrastructure. There has been no Asian “tiger” emerging in this often-troubled region, as leaders have struggled to keep nations afloat and as they attempt to lift millions out of absolute poverty. There are, however, reasons to be hopeful.

The demographic trends of South Asia point to a younger, more educated and more connected population than ever before, not just in India, but across the region. The Indian subcontinent and surrounding countries have an average age of just 26 years. India has the world’s youngest population with some 600 million people under the age of 25 (Jack). Education at all levels – secondary, higher ed, and skills training – have all seen a dramatic uptick in enrollment and graduation rates. According to the World Bank, enrollment in primary schools in South Asia rose to nearly 90% percent over the past decade, while the number of girls not attending school dropped by 59% (World Bank). The region had been one of the least connected and with intra-regional trade accounting for only 5% of all trade in South Asia (by contrast, 50% of all trade in East Asia is intra-regional trade) (Kathuria 7). Much of this standstill results from the virtual trade embargo and no transit zones between India and Pakistan. But even with this significant obstacle, South Asia has

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14 More details on South Asia’s demographics can be found here: [https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/southern-asia-population/](https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/southern-asia-population/)
made some progress on inter-regional connectivity in recent years. Increased air travel, shared cross-border energy resources, and better sea, port and road access have gradually given way to a more connected region, despite the contested border areas, the ever-present security risks, and the often impassable Himalayan landscapes.

Human development indicators also indicate real progress, with tens of millions being lifted out of poverty in the past two decades alone. In Bangladesh, for example, average life expectancy has increased 25% since 1990, while child mortality rates have fallen 73%. Average per-capita incomes in Bangladesh have climbed 50% in the past five years, while women in the workforce rose some 35% to nearly 20 million over the past decade. One can find the same progress in Sri Lanka, even with its significant internal political cleavages and risks posed by extremist groups. Over the past thirty years, extreme poverty in Sri Lanka has been virtually eliminated; GDP numbers have increased over ten times; inflation has been slashed; and literacy and secondary school enrollment is near 100%.

India no doubt will drive much of the positive – and negative – developments emanating from South Asia given its size. Its economy and population dwarf all the

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15 Life expectancy data for Bangladesh can be found at: https://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/bangladesh-life-expectancy; and child mortality data can be found here: https://data.unicef.org/country/bgd/.

16 Women in the workforce data for Bangladesh can be found here: https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2018/03/08/women-workforce-employment-without-empowerment; and per capita income data for Bangladesh can be found here: http://data.gov.bd/story/capita-income-bangladesh-rises-usd-1466; 

17 More data on Sri Lanka can be found here: https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=LKA.
other nations of South Asia combined. As described further below, Indian economic growth, military power and strategic influence have accelerated considerably in the past three decades, with significant future growth on the horizon, notwithstanding its own set of internal challenges.

If one examines these Asian-Pacific trend lines: (1) India and South Asia on the rise; (2) China consolidating its power; (3) East Asian powers providing a key foundation and dose of stability; and (4) ASEAN moving at a heightened pace to meet the demands of a young and mobile population – the case some have made for this being the Asian century becomes clearer and stronger (Khanna; Campbell). And if one were also to include the Oceana region, to include Australia and New Zealand, the argument becomes even stronger.

Some have argued that Asia’s rise was predictable and is simply a return to the global order pre-dating the 19th century, when the Indian and Chinese economies were the world’s most dominant (Mahabubani 3). With the end of colonialism, it was only a matter of time before India and China would reemerge as global powers, argues Singaporean scholar Kishore Mahabubani. Others, however, are not so sanguine. Some are predicting the demise of the Asian century, well before it even gets fully underway. They point to an economic slowdown in China, and growing conflict on the Korean peninsula, increased tensions between Japan and Korea, rising flashpoints in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and growing authoritarian trends in South and Southeast Asia (Rachman). This debate will no doubt continue,

\[\text{18 See, in particular, “The Asian Century is Over” by Michael Auslin, July 31, 2019 in Foreign Policy and available here: https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/31/the-asian-century-is-over/}.\]
but as it does, the evidence still points convincingly to growing Indo-Pacific power across the political and economic and strategic domains.

**Americans in Asia**

The American approach to Asia since World War II has been undergirded militarily through alliances with Korea, Japan, the Philippines, a mutual defense pact with Taiwan, with American bases and 60% of the U.S. Navy maintaining a delicate peace. As former Secretary of Defense Carter would remind allies and adversaries alike, “The United States is a Pacific Power and it will remain one” (PACOM).

Economically as well, the U.S. has invested heavily in the region, running up large trade deficits, but maintaining a wide range of trading relationships and committing to help build the regional architecture such as with ASEAN, APEC and the East Asia Summit. As has been covered here and will be addressed in greater detail in later chapters, the U.S. economic approach has in many ways fallen far short of Chinese efforts, particularly with aggressive Chinese infrastructure investments alongside the more comprehensive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).19

The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) was meant to be the Obama Administration’s centerpiece of the U.S. trading strategy in Asia, with 40% of the world’s economic output and trading activity encompassed in one agreement, serving both as a stick to China and a carrot to countries like India, which could seek admission to TPP if it continued with the reform process (Ayres 146-148). But President Trump upended that approach shortly after he took office by withdrawing

19 Parag Khanna in *The Future is Asian* calls the BRI the “largest coordinated infrastructure investment plan in human history” and “the most significant diplomatic project of the twenty first century.” (2:3)
from the negotiations and exiting the formal talks. Driven by a concern over the perceived unfairness of the Alliance framework, coupled with the charge that the U.S. has been exploited in past trade deals, the recent American approach takes on key allies like Japan and Korea for insufficient burden sharing, discounts the importance of democratic values, but is driven by a confrontational approach on trade, and mainly focused on China. It remains to be seen whether the strategy produces the desired outcomes, or whether China’s long-term ambitions become emboldened.

**Russia in Asia**

One other country deserves mention in relation to the rise of Asia, and that is Russia. Putin’s Russia has jettisoned many of its 20th century loyalties and relationships in order to expand its influence in Asia, counter Western gains, and seek the hard currency it desperately needs through defense and energy deals (McFaul, ch. 4).

No relationship better illustrates Russia’s new maneuvering in Asia than its growing ties with Beijing. Historically, Russia and China have maintained a relationship of mutual distrust, with intense competition commercially and militarily, including dangerous border and naval disputes (The Economist). During the Cold War, China carefully avoided being drawn into Moscow’s orbit. In fact, much of the American diplomatic gambit of the early 1970s with the Nixon Administration’s attempt to establish relations with China was driven in large part to form a U.S.-China partnership that could counter Soviet influence.
Russia-China ties have evolved quickly over the past two decades, with increased convergence on commercial and security matters.\textsuperscript{20} For example, Russia has become China’s largest military supplier over the past three decades, selling nearly $40 billion in advanced armaments (nearly 80% of Chinese military imports are from Russia), to include ground platforms, naval assets, the S-400 missile defense system and the Sukhoi SU-35 fighter jets. In the past five years, China’s President has made more trips to Moscow than any other nation. In the energy field as well, Russia is China’s largest supplier of crude oil, and in 2014 it diversified the energy relationship to include a $400 billion deal for natural gas (The Economist).

In a recent joint statement following their June 2019 Summit, the governments asserted that Russia and China have obligations to together uphold global and regional stability and that the two countries are united “based on the relations of a comprehensive equal trust partnership and strategic interaction between the two states.”\textsuperscript{21}

As much as Russia welcomes the financial benefits stemming from the numerous deals with Beijing, it also welcomes the counter-balancing of Western influence in Asia that results through a Russia-China partnership. The fight to advance a liberal democratic order in Asia, and to develop western-oriented democratic and free-market systems is an ongoing battle taking place across the

\textsuperscript{20} For other more detailed accounting and analyses of growing Russia/China ties, see also: (1) China, Russia and Twenty First Century Global Geopolitics by Paul Bolt and Sharyl Cross (Oxford University Press, 2018); and (2) Sino Russian Relations in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, Editors Jo Inge Bekkevold and Bobo Lo (Palgrave McMillan, 2019).

\textsuperscript{21} The full statement from June 5, 2019 can be found at: https://fortunascorner.com/2019/06/06/russia-china-joint-statement-on-strengthening-global-strategic-stability/
Indo-Pacific. Such an emerging order not only presents real challenges to China’s influence in the region, but also could reverberate within its own borders as well, creating pressures and risks for the Chinese Communist Party. Both Russia and China have raised objections about Western influence and interference in the region, expressing particular concern over advanced defense sales to U.S. allies in Japan and Korea. (Yuhas)

Perhaps the relationship that Russia and China are watching most closely is the partnership between Washington and Delhi. The acceleration of the partnership in recent years has caught both nations somewhat by surprise. Moscow was flummoxed in 2016, for instance, when the U.S. overtook Russia as the leading supplier of military equipment to India – a milestone that was reached in just over a decade. As the US and India have deepened cooperation at all levels, Russia has not been shy to voice its concerns, asserting last year that the growing U.S.-Indo partnership “does not look constructive” (Economic Times). While Russia has attempted to accelerate its efforts with India, offering a dizzying array of advanced military equipment, including the S-400 ballistic missile defense system, President Putin has also crossed some prior red lines as well, including offering a first of its kind defense deal with Pakistan, reminding India that it too was not bound by Cold War frameworks.

The Russia-Pakistan military relationship is in its early stages, but the fact that it has gained ground in recent years has raised alarm bells in Delhi. In the past five years, Pakistan has imported six percent of its total arms purchases from Moscow, and this year there have been rumors of a major defense sale of nearly $9
billion. The reaction in India has divided the Government into two basic schools of thought. The first emerges from the largely older generation of strategic and foreign policy bureaucracy that worked alongside Russian military and government colleagues during the Cold War. Russia has been a dependable partner when India needed it most, the sentiment goes, and therefore, India should not now alienate a trusted partner in Moscow by striking new deals with the West, especially with the United States (Ganguly 236-238). This is a predictable and self-inflicted wound, they believe, and India should move quickly to restore Russia as its principal strategic relationship.

The second school of thought believes Russia is an aging and declining power, and while it may have been a steadfast partner during the Cold War, India’s future rests with the West and with a more diversified set of partnerships, including with the United States (Mohan 115-116). Moreover, proponents of this view posit that New Delhi need not be bullied or intimidated by Moscow’s provocations with Islamabad or China. As a leading power that favors strategic autonomy as an underlying foreign policy priority, it need not be subject to or controlled by Russia’s dictates.

An additional Russian provocation, according to India (and which remains ongoing) is its reemergence in Afghanistan. Reports suggest that Moscow has been weighing in on the side of the Taliban, and has even provided some arms and training to Taliban fighters (Rowlatt). The move is not only a direct provocation to

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U.S. and Western forces seeking to contain the Taliban’s political and military influence, but it also directly confronts India’s longstanding interest in not ceding any territory or political control to Taliban interests.

In Indian intelligence and foreign policy circles, the Afghan Taliban presents a direct threat to Indian security and territorial integrity. With its ties to Al Qaeda and its support for extremist groups in Pakistan as well, the Afghan Taliban is viewed in Delhi as a terror group and a destructive force for peace in South Asia. In fact, one of Delhi’s greatest concerns about U.S. peace talks in recent years has not only been centered on India’s exclusion from such talks, but also on fears that the U.S., China and others would concede to Taliban demands, allowing it to have seats in the Afghan parliament and territory in which to govern. India has long objected to such an outcome, but it did not foresee that its longstanding partner in Moscow would be aiding the Taliban's efforts.

The preceding discussion on Russia demonstrates the nature of the shifting geopolitical sands in Asia, with 20th century alignments set aside as Russia and China attempt to block a Western-led order, and with Moscow willing to risk its partnership with Delhi in the process. The events are moving quickly. While there are risks to the United States in the emerging geopolitical alignment, the direction and strength of U.S.-India ties could not only lessen those risks, but these could help shape the balance of power in Asia for decades to come.

II. India Rising

Amid the uncertainty and struggle for power across the Indo-Pacific, India’s rise is real and present. Since India’s independence in 1947 through the 70s and
early 80s, economic growth in India remained stagnant at the so-called Nehruvian rate of growth of just 1.7% (M. Chakravorty). Its economy had remained closed. But in 1991, then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh oversaw the first slate of economic reforms designed to open the nation’s economy and attempt to catch up to China and the East Asian Tigers. While India would never fully catch up, the reforms set in motion a real and sustained period of growth that continues to this present day.

Concurrent with India’s internal reforms, India sought to become more integrated into the global economy. Unlike China, which became the home to low-cost manufacturing for electronics, components of all kinds, garments, and toys, India took a different path, focusing instead on information technology services (Ayres 84-85). IT services were mastered by India and its millions of engineers and data scientists, many graduating from the top science and engineering schools in the world, including the Indian Institutes of Technology. Soon, a growing list of world-class tech companies like Wipro, Infosys and TCS paved the way for delivering back office technical and accounting support, as well as complex data analytics. This “outsourcing” was so cost effective and of such a high quality that multinational companies began laying off their own software engineers in favor of Indian talent, which in itself created political challenges in the United States and Europe.

Since that time, India’s economy and its reach abroad has diversified considerably. India is now the world’s sixth largest economy, and the third largest when measured by purchasing power parity. It became a G-20 member in 1999. Average per capita income, while still low compared to other BRICS nations, has
nearly doubled in the past ten years.\textsuperscript{23} Human development indicators are also on a steady climb. Life expectancy has increased some 75\% over the past four decades, while child mortality is down over 80\% over this same period.\textsuperscript{24} In education too, more and more Indians are graduating from high schools, and receiving either higher education or skills training after graduation. Some 270 million people have been lifted out of poverty in India in just the past 10 years, cutting the Indian poverty rate in half.\textsuperscript{25}

As prosperity and education spread, India itself is changing in real time. There is ongoing today a massive demographic shift from rural areas to urban centers, as more Indians seek opportunity in cities and in the formal economy. Today, around two-thirds of India’s 1.3 billion people reside in rural areas, and over 50\% of the country relies on agriculture for their livelihoods. But by 2050, more people will live in cities than in rural areas, and those relying on farming will drop to 25\%.\textsuperscript{26} All of this is taking place in a nation that is, in relative terms, exceptionally young. Nearly two-thirds of India is under the age of 35. It has the youngest workforce in Asia, and it will hold this youth advantage in Asia, and globally, at least

\textsuperscript{23}\url{https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/india/gdp-per-capita}

\textsuperscript{24} Life expectancy data can be found here: \url{https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sp.dyn.le00.in}. Child mortality rates can be found here: \url{https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/india/mortality-rate}.


\textsuperscript{26} Farming data can be found here: \url{https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/more-than-55-of-indians-make-a-living-from-farming-heres-how-we-can-double-their-income/} and the population data pertaining to rural versus city populations can be found here: \url{https://tradingeconomics.com/india/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html}. 
until 2050 (UNFPA). With aging populations in Japan, China, Russia, and across Europe, India will retain a key advantage in this category for nearly three decades.

From an infrastructure perspective, there is a race to keep up with the massive demand for new schools, hospitals, airports, and highways. India will spend some $4.5 trillion on infrastructure over the next two decades; and 70% to 80% of the infrastructure that India needs for 2030 is yet to be built. Some 100 new airports are being planned or constructed over the next 15 years. India may also soon overtake China as the nation with the most mega-cities (those with over 10 million residents). Already, India has a number of the most populated cities in the world, including New Delhi and Mumbai, which are in the top ten.

The flow of information and Internet connectivity is also taking place at breakneck speeds. One of Prime Minister Modi’s signature initiatives was to connect every Indian village to the Internet, an effort that is rapidly reaching its goals. Already, India boasts around a half billion smart-phone and Internet users, second only to China. In addition, the deployment of high-speed 5G networks at low cost is sweeping the nation. In 2015, the Government of India rolled out the world’s largest electronic benefits program, through its signature Aadhaar card,

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issued to nearly one billion Indians. The card allows for the transfer of government benefits, digital payments and other services with one biometric card. The result of these and other innovations has resulted in a more connected India with more access to information. Of course, the developments also give rise to privacy and security concerns that are all too present in the digital economy. But, in short, there is no turning back for India on its move to digitize its economy.

While these rapid advancements, not to mention the scale and pace of economic development, would be impressive for any nation, the fact that this progress is occurring in a democracy is even more impressive and potentially impactful regionally and globally. India’s democracy is a young and somewhat fragile 72 years old, but it has held up well, despite considerable internal and external pressures.

India is a federal constitutional democracy, with power shared between the states and central government. It is a mixed parliamentary and presidential system, but with most powers consolidated with the Prime Minister, who is selected by the party or coalition of parties that secures the greatest number of seats in India’s lower house, the Lok Sabha. India’s upper house, the Raj Sabha, functions much like the U.S. Senate, with the body designed to be more deliberative and a check on unfettered power exercised by the Prime Minister or by the masses through the lower house.

India’s constitution also mandates strict civilian control over the nation’s large and powerful military. The limitations on military influence are particularly salient within India, as citizens have watched the contrasting experiment in
Pakistan, where the military’s influence over the government has only grown stronger in the decades since Pakistan’s founding. Upholding the constitutional rights has fallen to India’s judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, which has developed an important record of independence in providing the necessary checks and balances on the other branches of government. Lower courts are often inundated with too many cases, and long delays in administering justice continue to plague much of the system, but overall, India’s legal system and the quality of its jurists continue to receive high marks (Guha 678).

India’s military and its ability to project power and deter threats in the region and beyond has grown considerably stronger in recent years. India has become the world’s leading importer of defense equipment and technology, much of it from the United States and from Russia. One of Prime Minister Modi’s signature campaigns has been to make India a defense manufacturing hub for the region. The success of that campaign remains in doubt, but that should not cause one to underestimate the capability of the Indian military, which has grown to become one of Asia’s most effective fighting force (Chadda 179-190).

India will soon have the world’s third largest military, only behind the U.S. and China. Its Navy has grown particularly adept at complex missions, from coastal defense, to keeping sea lanes open, to playing cat and mouse with Chinese nuclear powered submarines that appear without notice in Indian waters (183-184). Indian ground forces also have years of battle-hardened experience in numerous cross-border conflicts with Pakistan, as well as a continuous presence along the 2200-mile border with China, much of which lies in the mountains of the Himalayas. And the
Indian Air Force, while facing depleted squadrons of modern fighters, is one of Asia's largest and the proficiency of Indian pilots remains very strong.\textsuperscript{30} Taken together, this range of sophisticated military capabilities coupled with India's acquisition of advanced defense systems, not to mention its quest to develop a home-grown defense industry, puts India near the top of Asian military powers (Woody).

India itself recognizes many of these positive trend lines on the economy, on demographics, urbanization, innovation, and military power. In fact, much of Prime Minister Modi's popular appeal both in 2014 and in the recent 2019 election stemmed from his message of renewal and strength, borne from the perception and reality that India was indeed a country on the move. He promised the Indian people a transition from the passive role the country had played in world affairs in the past to becoming an active, leading power on the world stage – a break from India's past of inward looking regionalism (Mohan 201-202).

The signs of India's change in attitude and activity are evident on the world stage. Take, for instance, India's role in international institutions. Long seen as the leader of the non-aligned nations during the Cold War, and thereafter, as one of the dominant voices of the so-called Global South and developing nations, India saw its role as blocker, protector, and defender of lesser developed nations (Guha 187-188). It would routinely reject western drafted measures aimed at imposing global standards, even aspirational targets, such as in the climate change or global health

\textsuperscript{30}India now participates in more military exercises with the United States than with any other nation, including the Air Force's Red Flag, where U.S. officials regularly praise Indian pilots effectiveness and proficiency.
arenas. While not totally abandoning its protectionist practices, especially at the World Trade Organization, where India has espoused a firm, uncompromising position on agriculture, there are clear signs that India wants to play a more thoughtful leadership role on the multilateral stage, and not just as a blocker.

The successful conclusion of the Paris Climate Agreement is a good case study, and it provides a useful contrast between the role India played on climate matters only five years earlier at the Copenhagen Summit, where India and China scuttled a long-negotiated Western-crafted limit on carbon emissions. But Paris was different. India still proved to be the exceptionally tough negotiator it had been in prior multilateral negotiations, but it also knew the fate of the deal rested in the hands of a few developing nations, with India’s voice likely carrying the most weight. India eventually signed on to the treaty’s terms and brought with it a number of key developing nations.

Following Paris, India played a similarly constructive role in limiting Hydrofluorocarbons (HFC’s) at the Kigali Climate Conference; it took a more active role in training UN peacekeeping forces; and it even began to play a more constructive role in addressing global health concerns. And at the UN, India, in a break with past practice, even worked constructively with Israel to allow a Resolution to move forward condemning Hamas. Within the region, India has

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31 India was key to sealing an agreement to limit HFCs at the Kigali climate conference; India has also been one of the main contributors to UN peacekeeping and in the training of those forces; and India, long reluctant to agree to global health mandates outside of the UN construct, signaled its intention to support the Global Health Security Agenda. See: [https://www.ghsagenda.org/](https://www.ghsagenda.org/).

32 India had normally voted against U.S. or Israeli Resolutions condemning Hamas, but in the summer of 2018, it abstained, which was a major change in policy. And recently, India voted with Israel to
worked collaboratively with China in the Asia Bank for Reconstruction and Development and it has negotiated in good faith in the Pan Asian Trade Agreement known as RCEP. In 2021, India will chair the G-20 for the first time since its entry, and it has already been telegraphing some of the issues in which it wants to lead, including on the cross border flow of data. On climate, too, India built on its constructive work at Paris, and has led global efforts to establish an International Solar Alliance, based in India, but comprised of 121 nations.

Beyond international institutions, India has been flexing its military muscle as well. The stand-off with Chinese forces at the Doklam Plateau was discussed earlier, but there have also been Indian efforts to take on greater responsibilities at sea, committing to counter-piracy patrols off the coast of Northern Africa, as well as playing a more active role in humanitarian and disaster response (Peri). It was Indian efforts that first reached a battered Nepal after the devastating 2015 earthquake, and it was Indian planes that helped evacuate civilians from Yemen after the re-start of its brutal civil war. India has been involved in the rebuilding of

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33 Although last November (2019), India announced it was suspending its formal role in RCEP negotiations due to concerns over growing trade deficits with key RCEP countries. Japan and others have been lobbying for India to return to the negotiations. See: https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/the-implications-of-indias-rcep-withdrawal/.

34 See: http://isolaralliance.org/Index.aspx

war-torn Syria and has transferred billions in aid and now military assistance to Afghanistan.³⁶

India has also demonstrated its considerable soft power in recent years. The Indian film industry is the world’s largest, with Bollywood films and music reaching hundreds of millions of fans globally.³⁷ Indian yoga, spirituality and mindfulness are aggressively promoted by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Prime Minister, leading to the annual yoga day now celebrated in over 150 countries (Mohan 194-197). Indian clothes, cuisine, and sports like cricket and kabaddi have become widely popular across the world. India has also deftly promoted itself as a top tourist destination with its “Incredible India” campaign. Over ten million tourists visit India each year, double the amount from just ten years ago.³⁸ The totality of the soft power effort has bolstered Indian pride, nationalism, and confidence.

The confidence is well placed. India is a young nation, with its economy the fastest growing in the world, and with demographic factors playing to its favor. Its democracy has held up during tough times, and its military is prepared to defend Indian interests across the Indo-Pacific. Its population is healthier, better educated, and more connected than ever before. It seeks a more global role for itself – a seat at the so-called high table – and it has begun to break away from its traditional inward looking and non-interventionist foreign and trade policies. Yes, India is on

³⁶ Information about the Syrian rebuilding can be found here: https://www.livemint.com/news/world/new-delhi-steps-up-bid-to-help-war-torn-syria-rebuild-its-infra-1559673494431.html; and a good summary of India’s efforts in Afghanistan can be found here: https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/36-things-india-has-done-for-afghanistan/.


the rise, but the question remains: can it overcome the very significant obstacles the nation confronts today?

**The Challenges**

India faces a myriad of very real challenges. It is perhaps easiest to understand these by separating them into four broad categories as follows: (1) economic growth, development and poverty alleviation; (2) caste and communalism; (3) governance; and (4) strategic and security risks. Each of these examined in more detail below.

**Economic**

The scale of the economic challenges confronting India are unlike those facing any other rising nation. India claims the second largest number of people living in absolute poverty at 73 million.\(^{39}\) While those numbers are coming down, the magnitude and complexity of the problem remains. Nearly a quarter of India’s rural population do not yet have indoor plumbing or a flush toilet, while 10% of the population still does not have access to a regular supply of power, limiting work and school for tens of millions to daylight hours only.\(^ {40}\) The average annual income in India remains a breathtaking $1700, with the GDP per capita coming in just over $2000. A majority of Indian girls still do not progress beyond the 8\(^{th}\) grade, and

\(^{39}\) See the Brookings Institute study: [https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/06/19/the-start-of-a-new-poverty-narrative/](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/06/19/the-start-of-a-new-poverty-narrative/).

more than 80% of Indian workers remain outside of the formal economy, in the shadows, outside of any wage or workplace protections.  

The government’s strategy, launched under successive Prime Ministers, including Narendra Modi, has been to rollout an assortment of programs to educate, train, equip, and connect villagers to the modern economy, consistent with Gandhi’s underlying ethos of supporting the rural poor. The programs have been only modestly successful. Most economists and Indian policy-makers find that India needs at least 7% economic growth to keep pace with the demand of the one million new job seekers each month, let alone to make a dent in its enormous development concerns (Ayres 45, 58; Das ch. 5).

There is little doubt that the economic development challenges within India impact Indian ambitions abroad. So long as the country remains inwardly focused on the economic plight of millions, the ability of Indian leaders to focus on taking on greater roles and responsibilities abroad is naturally limited. Again, the traditional Indian economic model is grounded upon a form of Nehruvian socialism that places farmer and village well-being ahead of advancing India’s role in a globalized economy or taking a lead role in the international trading system. The continued plight of farmers and lower castes only reinforces the traditionalists and skeptics of the international system.

There are also practical budget implications stemming from India’s economic situation. An increasing amount of India’s annual budget goes to addressing the needs of the poverty-stricken and to keep up with the subsidy commitments made

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41 See: https://www.newsclick.in/nearly-81-indias-employed-population-informal-economy.
over a period of decades to farmers, military retirees and union workers. The world’s largest public health care scheme, rolled out last year, will put even more strain on the already depleted budget. (Kwatra)

Moreover, with so many hundreds of millions of workers still in the informal economy, there are scant tax revenues collected each year. Less than 10% of Indian workers actually pay tax on the income they earn.\(^{42}\) As a result, the Indian government is typically cash starved, and constantly reprogramming and delaying major government expenditures for later years. This includes much-needed weapons systems, and large infrastructure and power projects.

\textit{Caste and Communalism}

Caste and communal cleavages continue to divide India, though many would argue the worst times are a relic of historical record, with most of India living in a more modern, pluralistic society. Any kind of official recognition of caste was long since outlawed in India, but the vestiges live on (Jones). One of the most damming features of India’s caste system was its immovability and weight that rested upon one for life, and for the lives of one’s children too (Verma). Unlike other societies where the lower economic classes at least had a theoretical chance of graduating into the lower middle class, Indian castes were permanent features, and the so-called untouchables of the lower caste were meant to stay there, indefinitely, regardless of social progress or economic attainment (Verma). The feature created a permanent underclass, working and living in dire poverty, largely in the shadows,

while forming a foundation of largely unskilled and badly paid workers at the base of India’s economy (Guha 378-386).

Despite Gandhi’s protestations and the work of civil society and political leaders over generations, it was not until 1950 that caste-based societal structures were permanently outlawed through India’s constitutional protections. But such a system, deeply embedded into Indian culture, society and economics for generations, does not vanish overnight. In fact, much of the remnants of the system continue to exist today, leaving millions stuck in a perpetual lower class where the glass ceiling has been cemented over with decades of de jure and de facto discrimination (598-609).

The communal thread is perhaps the more dangerous one to India’s future, and one that could quickly escalate. Despite India’s professed secularism, religious tensions, principally between Hindus and Muslims, lay just below the surface. India’s history is replete with examples of communal violence, rioting, mass killings and uprisings, lynchings and religious and ethnic discrimination. India’s recent national elections only served to exacerbate the divisions, with heated political rhetoric, much of it designed to inflame voters along religious lines (Gettleman). Social media, too, has played a divisive role with misinformation campaigns and hate-fueled group chats careening swiftly through cyber space, with few mechanisms to reign in the instigators and provocateurs who feed off of disunity and heightened tensions (Teitelman).

In the face of these challenges, Indian institutions have remained relatively strong and served as bulwark against majoritarianism, giving both lower castes and
disenfranchised Muslim populations a voice. The Supreme Court, in particular, has issued several key judgments in recent years to help stamp out the legacy of caste-based economic and political frameworks.\(^{43}\) So, too, has the Court been cognizant of its duties to protect religious and ethnic minorities.

The Parliament has also grown more diverse over the years, bringing into play the views of an increasingly large number of minority groups, and especially those of the lower castes.\(^{44}\) India’s Parliament also now claims 27 Muslim members, though none from the majority ruling BJP, and down sharply from the 50 members it once had.\(^{45}\) Despite the drop, the Parliament is an institution that does still hear from a myriad of voices, fostering a somewhat more balanced debate during floor proceedings.

**Governance**

India's governance issues have multiple and complex roots. There are the vestiges of colonialism, with a system of government and set of practices that were initially designed by outsiders – the British, not Indian nationals. Certainly, India put its own stamp on its constitutional framework following independence in 1947,

\(^{43}\) The Court, for example, has limited sectarian and hate-filled speech during election campaigns. See https://www.dw.com/en/indias-caste-system-weakened-but-still-influential/a-39718124.

\(^{44}\) India’s Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), for example, was formed to principally represent the lower castes and religious minorities. It has become a large and consequential political party. Its leader, the former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, known simply as “Mayawati” is a popular Indian politician and member of the upper house who has focused on social justice issues on behalf of India’s left behind classes.

\(^{45}\) The trend lines for Muslim political participation under the BJP are moving in a decidedly downward trajectory. See reports from Christophe Jaffrelott in The Wire here: https://thewire.in/rights/christophe-jaffrelot-majoritarian-state-muslims-parliament; and in The Quartz: https://qz.com/india/1617067/indian-election-2019-why-few-muslims-make-it-to-the-lok-sabha/ where they highlight the 50 year low in Muslim participation in the legislative branch.
but the colonial experience, habits and practices have not simply vanished (Guha 745-746).

Moreover, India’s federal system, like that of the United States, does present novel and difficult questions on the sharing of power, questions that even America’s top courts and jurists still wrestle with today. While providing the balance and natural tensions India’s constitutional drafters had sought to constrain unbridled power, it has also created sharp conflicts and significant gaps in citizen’s access to basic services (Sahoo).

But perhaps top among India’s governance challenges is the sheer lack of capacity in government to adequately address the deep and serious public policy issues impacting India’s population (Sahoo 17-20; 25-28). This is often the case at the state and local levels, where there is less oversight of government workers, less training, fewer resources, and less access to technology. Long delays and corruption also are still hallmarks of the government in India, but again, not at all levels, and not in all states. There has been some measurable progress.

Prime Minister Modi campaigned in 2014 on stamping out corruption in government. From a federal perspective his government has been sparred the high-profile scandals of past governments. Yet corruption still confronts too many citizens at other entry points to government. The Prime Minister has also made improving the “ease of doing business” a top priority of the government, not just for large corporations, but also for the small shopkeeper and for ordinary citizens. The goal was to improve the constituent/government interface, wherever it occurs. That means reduced wait times in local courts, streamlined licensing requirements
for building permits, and a single entry and license for more complex approvals by states and localities.\textsuperscript{46} In addition, NITI Aayog, the former planning commission of the Government, has begun ranking states on how they perform in the ease of doing business, bringing long-desired transparency and competition among and between the states.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, while there has been good progress, the issue is not whether the Government of India can address the needs of its people today, but can it address the needs of the world’s largest population and a nation on the rise.

\textit{Security}

India faces a wide range of difficult security challenges. It sits sandwiched between two nuclear-armed neighbors in China and Pakistan; it faces well-funded and trained extremist groups crossing into Indian territory from the mountainous regions on the Western border with Pakistan; it faces its own domestic insurgent groups, particularly in the difficult to govern Northeastern states; and it often has to tend to regional disturbances and civil unrest in neighboring countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Maldives.

There is little doubt that India’s top long-term strategic concern pertains to China and its effort to encircle India, constraining India’s ability to exert influence in other parts of South and Southeast Asia (Mohan 106-108). Beyond the 2100 mile disputed shared border with India, China has also developed a close relationship with India’s other neighbor and adversary, Pakistan. China has invested heavily in

\textsuperscript{46} Information on India’s ease of doing business rankings can be found here: \url{https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=184513}.

\textsuperscript{47} The NITI Aayoog ranking on states can be found here: \url{https://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/document_publication/EoDB_Single.pdf}.
Pakistani energy and infrastructure projects, and facilitated the export sensitive defense technologies, including nuclear weapons know-how. This has delivered China enormous influence over Pakistani foreign and domestic policies, creating additional risk for India (Saran 40-41). Not only does India have to guard its Northeast and Northern borders from Chinese incursions, it must defend its Western borders as well, where Pakistani forces, bolstered by China’s support, create the strategic encirclement that India fears.

The Chinese also have a commanding presence at sea. The Chinese Navy is becoming a “blue water” Navy that can simultaneously be present in the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea (Mohan 159-161; 166-168). But it is not just the Navy where China’s forces outgun the Indian capabilities. In fact, every branch of China’s military is larger than India’s Air Force, Navy and Army. China has aggressively modernized its force, and where necessary, has supplemented its needs with Russian-made equipment.

When not planning for military conflict with China, India has for 72 years been concerned about Pakistan, and the extremist groups that often receive safe harbor and training there. Since Pakistan’s independence in 1947, the military and intelligence agencies within Pakistan have gained considerable strength. As Pakistan has gravitated between military and civilian leaders over the decades, the civilians have yet to fully regain full control over the nation. (Ganguly 21). The military is the most powerful institution in Pakistan. Reconciliation with India has

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proven elusive, as the military has consolidated its power and discouraged a normalization of ties with India, as a steady state of tension and potential for conflict with India allows the intelligence and military forces to maintain their centrality and grip on power (Mohan 74-77). Regrettably, there are few incentives for peace.

Pakistan has also upgraded its military capabilities in recent years, including through the development of a substantial nuclear weapons program, which now includes tactical nuclear weapons, many of which are reportedly scattered near or along the border with India (Ahmed). It has acquired F-16 fighters from the United States, but also supplemented its U.S. arms purchases with Chinese and Russian platforms. Pakistan spends nearly four percent of its annual GDP on military armaments.49 While India outnumbers Pakistan’s military in terms of sheer size, Pakistan remains a formidable challenger to India across all domains.50

The disputed territory of Kashmir also continues to generate difficult tensions between India and Pakistan, as it has for seven straight decades. There is a long and complex history to how Kashmir became a disputed territory and flashpoint for a larger Pakistan-India war, a history that is too lengthy to cover in this dissertation.51 But two points are important to note in this regard. First, little

49 See: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS.

50 Pakistan’s capabilities and its ability to go head-to-head with India were on full display after India crossed into Pakistani territory in Balakot to launch air strikes after a terrorist incident in Kashmir in February 2019. Pakistan not only responded to India’s attack, prevailing in an aerial dogfight, it then shot down an Indian fighter, taking the pilot hostage. India and most observers were surprised at the strength of the Pakistani response. For more information on the Balakot Indian air strikes and Pakistan’s response, see: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47882354.

51 For a more comprehensive account of historical and current tensions in Kashmir and the India-Pakistan partition more broadly, see the following: (1) Nisid Hajari’s Midnight’s Furies – The Deadly Legacy of India’s Partition (Penguin Books, 2015); (2) Kashmir: Behind the Valve by M.J. Akbar (Roli Books 2002); (3) Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris by Christopher Snedden (C. Hurst & Co,
progress has been made in resolving Kashmir’s disputed status; and second, the conditions have served as a radicalizing and motivating factor for extremist groups and acts of terrorism. Pakistani-based terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) derive some of their support and their recruits over a number of grievances directed at India, top among them the unresolved status of Kashmir (Ganguly 19). Many of the groups are well-funded and equipped, functioning as a kind of special operations force of the Pakistani Army (Khan).

Within India as well, domestic-based insurgencies, especially in the Northeast, have plagued the nation for years. The insurgents represent a mix of native tribes people, Naxalites, Maoists and other disaffected and disenfranchised ethnic groups. Some have been displaced by modernization and urbanization, while others have faced more deliberate and coordinated state and societal discrimination (Guha 423-427). The Indian Government has made progress in reaching a difficult peace with many of the groups, including in 2015 when India signed a historic truce with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, putting an end to nearly 60 years of insurgency that had plagued this particular Northeastern state.52 Despite the progress, the remaining insurgent groups and their potential to create political disruption and carry out acts of violence remain a risk to India’s national identity, security and cohesion.

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Herein lies the paradox of modern India: a country on the rise, brimming with excitement and advancements at nearly every socio-economic grouping, eagerly looking forward to the time that it breaks out of its longstanding inward and regional approaches, yet still plagued by severe internal challenges of a size and scale that would normally stifle or even reverse the chance for real growth in most other nations. India continues to defy expectations and its critics. But this may not always be the case.

While one should not presume India can grow and innovate its way out of its deepest economic, societal, and security problems, so far it has demonstrated that it can. That is why India’s trajectory remains so positive. The India of 2030, for example, is the nation that will lead the world in so many key categories and will undoubtedly play an ever increasingly consequential role in world affairs in this century. The United States is right to think of India as one of its most critical partners, if not today, then in the future. The policies and the approach taken by the United States, however, have not always matched these intended aspirations.

III. The US Approach to India Since 1947

India has yet to emerge as a foreign policy priority of the United States. It has been important at times, and U.S. officials have sought better ties and been enthused at different periods, but it would be difficult to argue that Indo-U.S. relations over the past seven decades have risen to a top tier concern of U.S. policymakers and diplomats. Rather, the bilateral relationship has undergone periods of peaks with high performance and convergence, followed by valleys and long periods of rather disengaged and often disinterested partners. Since the year 2000, however, the
trend lines have been decidedly positive, though the partnership may again be entering a period of non-convergence and transactionalism. It is perhaps most helpful to understand the approaches and the policies by dividing up the period into five distinct phases as follows.

a. Exploring the promise (1947 to 1957)
b. Convergence (1957 to 1964)
c. Estranged (1965 to 1975)
d. Disinterested (1975 to 1999)
e. A new beginning (2000 to the present)

Each of these is examined in more detail here.

**Exploring the Promise (1947 to 1957)**

The United States in 1947 was a tired and over-stretched nation that had emerged victorious from Europe to the Pacific, defeating two brutal regimes in Berlin and Tokyo. Americans were rightly confident and proud of the role they played in stemming the tide of fascism and authoritarianism, but the country was also war-weary and still grappling with the massive human toll that had been taken on its population. It was not actively seeking new partners, only looking to ensure the countries it helped liberate remained free and open. Treaty alliances were formed to bind the trans-Atlantic nations, and mutual defense treaties were entered into with Japan and the Philippines. India remained on the outside of this activity. It was, at the time, reaching the heights of its own independence struggle with the United Kingdom, and experiencing the world’s largest forced migration of ethnic and religious groups, with Muslims moving East to Pakistan and Hindus relocating...
out of Punjab and consolidating positions in India. At this point, the Soviet Union was neither a Cold War adversary of the United States nor a close partner of India. Things would change relatively quickly.

By President Eisenhower’s first term beginning in 1952, U.S.-India ties were already experiencing difficulties. Both sides saw the other’s policies as undermining each other’s interests. Moscow had moved quickly to consolidate its power over the satellite nations in Eastern Europe, contrary to assurances made years earlier to President Roosevelt. Concurrently, in Asia, the spread of communism from China to the Korean peninsula and beyond raised significant concerns in Western capitals.

India’s “neutralism” in the fight against communism, and its perceived closeness to the Soviet Bloc, alarmed many in Congress and in the Administration including Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (Raghavan 166-171). This posture, coupled with America’s early outreach to Pakistan, set ties on a difficult early footing (Kux 114). But Eisenhower himself remained more personally measured. He not only wanted to engage India more fully, but he also did not want to lose India to the communist wave sweeping across Asia, nor did he want to create issues with what he believed was a potentially promising relationship in South Asia (Raghavan 171).

Eisenhower directed his National Security Council to explore what a more developed and enhanced relationship with India could mean for the United States and for regional security. The first two NSC directives on India were issued by President Eisenhower’s White House in 1954 and 1957. The first directive, NSC 5409, considered South Asia primarily through a Cold War lens, with little interest
in cultivating individual relationships in South Asia, but more as a battleground to ensure communism did not spread. It critiqued India’s non-alignment, and in fact, aimed to counter India’s rise as the leader of free Asian nations. It was also generally positive about the prospects for security cooperation with Pakistan.\(^53\)

**Convergence (1957 to 1964)**

Just three years later, with the issuance of NSC 5701, the White House, and President Eisenhower himself, took a more nuanced view of South Asia and a more positive role for India, beyond simply stemming the tide of communism. One year prior to the directive’s release, Eisenhower and Nehru met for an extended period during the Prime Minister’s first visit – a state visit – to the U.S. in 1956. The visit and interactions between the two leaders went better than expected, with Eisenhower even promising to become the first American President to visit India.\(^54\) NSC 5701, therefore, reflected this more optimistic and enhanced potential for South Asia, and India in particular.\(^55\) The Directive reflected the broader geopolitical importance of South Asia in its own right, and not simply as a hedge against communism. It did not make the U.S. role in South Asia or with India contingent upon military alliances, which it acknowledged would be difficult to secure, but the Directive did emphasize economic, technical and educational support to India to improve self-governance and to strengthen India’s independence. Significantly, the

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\(^{53}\) The full text of NSC 5409 can be found here: [https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v11p2/d622](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v11p2/d622).

\(^{54}\) Eisenhower would visit India for five days in December 1959. He outlined a positive and far-reaching vision for U.S.-India ties – a vision that would not be realized until the next century.

\(^{55}\) The full text of NSC Directive 5701 can be found here: [https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d5](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v08/d5).
Directive also argued that the success of the India model over the China model will have significant ramifications regionally and globally, especially as developing nations are closely watching the competition.

The approach would guide Eisenhower for the remainder of his term, including during his historic visit to India in 1959, and it would also set the stage for President Kennedy’s term. This period from 1959 through Kennedy’s term is one of increasing convergence with India. While Nehru and Kennedy did not share the same personal rapport that Nehru had with Eisenhower, they did share a mutual distrust of China and its expansionist plans (Kux 182, 205).

President Kennedy moved beyond Eisenhower’s South Asia strategy. He wanted to actively court the so-called “major neutrals” like India, and not simply wait for them to become more pro-American (Komer NSC Memo). Kennedy and Nehru would confer often, but Kennedy relied on his hand-picked Ambassador in Delhi, John Kenneth Galbraith, who had developed a strong personal connection with Nehru. This relationship would become critically important, especially in 1962 when Chinese troops came rushing across the border in what would become the Sino-Indian War of 1962. A more detailed accounting of this year and these events is covered in Chapter Two.

**Estranged (1965 to 1975)**

The significant gains made over the course of the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations came apart quickly over the next decade. Johnson was far more skeptical – and frustrated – by India’s non-alignment. President Johnson blocked advanced fighter sales to India, for fear of rupturing the U.S.-Pakistan security
partnership. With the Indo-Pakistan War in 1965, the U.S. suspended military assistance to both India and Pakistan, not wanting to be drawn into the middle of the South Asian hostilities. Over time, Johnson would move to disentangle America from South Asia, especially as it was being drawn further into a dangerous and intractable civil war in Vietnam.

The Nixon Administration greatly accelerated the devolution of ties between D.C. and Delhi. Several reasons gave rise to President Nixon’s ambivalence, and then hostility, toward India. First, Nixon was a Cold War warrior. Few things aggravated him more than a lack of support for the Western alliance and the efforts to defeat communism. Second, he developed a personal disdain and dislike of Indira Gandhi, whom he had met many times when he was a Senator, Vice President and now as President. Perhaps it was her status as a powerful woman or her unwillingness to blindly go along with American requests (Kux ch. 7). Regardless, the two had a strained and difficult relationship for many years. Third, Nixon preferred the regime in Islamabad. He admired Pakistani strength and decisiveness, and found them to be a far more reliable security partner. Fourth, when it came time to seize the historic opening with Beijing, which Nixon believed would also help contain the Soviet threat, he used interlocutors in Pakistan to facilitate the opening and support the outreach. The move not only left India in the dark, it left them incensed and even more distrustful of the Nixon White House. And finally, Nixon’s support of Pakistan was broad and sweeping, to include a vigorous defense of East Pakistan as well. That meant coming out against India and the liberation movement that would soon give way to Bangladesh.
Disinterested (1975 to 1999)

It was a steady devolution of bilateral ties from Kennedy to the end of the Nixon Administration. From the heights of cooperation and trust, to the depths of estrangement, competition and distrust, this period marked a sharp downward turn, and one that would lead to a period of relative inactivity, with both sides feeling that little progress could be made. As a result, bilateral relations during the Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush presidencies were cordial, but unremarkable for nearly two decades. From the American economic crisis of the 70's to the massive military build up of the 80s, the focus was not on South Asia. From a foreign policy perspective, the overriding objective was to deliver a fatal blow to the Soviet empire, an event that came rather unexpectedly and quickly by the end of 1989. India also was undergoing its own internal challenges, with the assassinations of both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi and growing economic distress. There was little appetite for creative diplomacy with the United States.

With the end of the Cold War, the election of President Clinton in 1992, and with the beginning of India's economic reforms in 1991, there were new reasons to be hopeful that both nations could overcome their historical differences. India's markets were becoming open to American companies again. President Clinton had a personal affinity for India and its culture. But he also knew the history between the two nations. He wanted a stronger, more resilient and diverse relationship. He directed his NSC to fashion a new approach to India, much as Eisenhower had done 40 years earlier. But these efforts really never got off the ground, and instead, by 1998, the US and India were back in another crisis. India had detonated a nuclear
device in response to Pakistani nuclear testing. The testing triggered comprehensive US sanctions against India, leading to yet another period of distrust and disengagement.

**A New Beginning (2000 to the Present)**

With the end of his second term fast approaching, President Clinton set out on a historic visit to India in March 2000, the first visit of a U.S. President to India in 22 years. His five city, six day trip marked the modern reset of bilateral ties. Millions came out to see the popular, young U.S. President, reaffirming the strength of the people to people connections and shared values. In his address to the Indian Parliament, President Clinton pressed for even stronger ties. He said: “After too long a period of estrangement, India and the United States have learned that being natural allies is a wonderful thing but it is not enough. Our task is to turn a common vision into common achievements so that partners in spirit can be partners in fact.” (Clinton)

President Clinton’s visit and message set the stage for the next eighteen years, and three different U.S. Presidents and two Indian Prime Ministers. Through successive Republican and Democratic administrations in the U.S., and Congress and BJP governments in India, the U.S.-India partnership steadily advanced in several key ways. First, defense cooperation surged forward, with a series of military exercises now conducted annually between the services of each nation. In addition, defense sales reached $18 billion, with American defense equipment at one point even displacing the Russians as the leading provider of military armaments.
Second, a historic civil nuclear deal was advanced that gave India access to much needed fuel and support for its civilian reactors, while also opening itself to international inspectors for the first time in its history. The Indian nuclear weapons program remained outside the scope of the agreement. The initiative was controversial at the time, as India was not a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, yet was also an unrecognized nuclear weapons power. Under U.S. and international law at the time, there was no way to grant India access to the civil nuclear support it needed – not without significant U.S. support and diplomatic pressure to create an exception for India at the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The United States succeeded in those efforts, and perhaps that effort itself meant more to India than the actual construction of nuclear power plants (which to this day have still not been built). The civil nuclear initiative demonstrated to many Indians that America could be a loyal and steadfast partner, despite some of our more difficult shared histories (Saran ch. 10).

In addition to defense and nuclear energy, the U.S. and India made considerable progress over this time on increasing the full range of commercial contacts, tripling the bilateral trade during this period. In other sectors – higher education, tourism, science, space, cyber and more – the two nations began to formalize and deepen their cooperation. To be sure, a mutual distrust of a rising China drove much of the convergence during this period, with both countries expressing formally their joint commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, committing to uphold the post-war democratic order, to resolve disputes peacefully

through dialogue, to preserve territorial integrity and to maintain the right to freedom of navigation as guaranteed under international law.\textsuperscript{57}

The progress during this period was built on a simple strategic proposition: a strong and prosperous India was not only good for India, but for the United States too. From an American perspective, having a democratic power in South Asia, with shared values, was essential to bolstering democratic systems across Asia and to counter-balancing China’s dramatic rise (Blackwill and Tellis).

This form of “strategic altruism” is what allowed the two nations to look past many of the underlying trade and market access irritants, focusing instead on the bigger gains to be made well into this century (Blackwill and Tellis). This became the view of foreign policy professionals and diplomats across the political spectrum.

The Trump Administration came into office with this more traditionalist view of U.S.-India policy. Several key proponents of the relationship included Secretary of Defense Mattis, National Security Advisor McMaster and Secretary of State Tillerson. But over the past eighteen months, as these key appointees departed and as trade tensions have escalated, the Administration has largely rejected the strategic benevolence approach toward India. In its place is now a more highly transactional and confrontational approach, where trade disputes have taken center stage. It is unlike any approach taken by any Administration since India’s independence, and it has left Indian policymakers flummoxed (Economic Times). It has also reinvigorated some American skeptics in India, who harken back

to the days of Nixon. As trade tensions escalate today with India, there are doubters who emerge in both nations who profess that neither country is ready for a closer or more advanced relationship, and that both have fundamentally different aspirations that are not in alignment. The hesitations of history may not be so historical after all.

**Looking Ahead**

Despite the headwinds, many of the underlying tenets that cemented strategic cooperation over the past two decades remain in place: (1) a concern over the rise of China; (2) a growing convergence in counter-terror cooperation; and (3) shared democratic traditions that help bolster the post war order; and (4) the potential to expand cooperation into other domains like cyber security, homeland defense, intelligence sharing, and space cooperation. Each thread helps weave together a strong tapestry of strategic cooperation.

Moreover, many of the commercial and personal connections remain strong. Both countries have built large and successful technology and innovation ecosystems, undergirded by an excellence in the hard sciences and engineering; both nations are meritocracies, and each rewards those who have excelled in business, entrepreneurship and higher education (Chakravorty ch. 5). India’s growing start-up and innovation ecosystem is finding common cause with America’s tech industry and Silicon Valley in particular. It should perhaps come as no surprise that there are more Indians in America than any other nation, with that number
now approaching four million. The Indian diaspora has had a far-reaching impact on American society, with its contributions seen across sectors, including in corporate America, the halls of Congress, Hollywood, academia, medicine, and law. During times of tension between the two governments, these people-to-people ties, and millions of immigrant connections, keep the U.S. and India aligned and never too distant or permanently estranged. (277-282)

The potential for deeper U.S.-India ties occurs at a critical time with the U.S. confronting renewed great power competition, but also with India moving up quickly from a middle to a leading power. India’s rise is happening now. It will soon be one of the world’s largest economies, with one of the largest militaries, the largest democracy, and with the world’s largest population. India will be a more powerful nation. How it chooses to wield that power, and who it partners with in exercising that power, is not an inconsequential matter. For the United States, India’s location, its democratic traditions, and yes, the speed and the scale of India’s rise, makes it more than an attractive partner. It makes India an essential partner.

In short, the advocates for stronger U.S.-Indian ties argue that a properly calibrated bilateral partnership can provide an alternative architecture for the non-alliance framework of this century, bolster democratic norms, serve as an engine for economic development, and inspire and encourage other nations that may otherwise fall prey to authoritarian impulses, particularly in South and Southeast Asia.

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IV. Assessing the Performance

But the vast promise of the relationship described above is still very much an aspirational target. Few would assert that strategic or economic goals have been achieved. And, certainly, while the past two decades have seen decidedly upward trends in key areas, the deep convergence sought by advocates remains a distant goal. But how one measures overall performance is not so easily determined.

The comparisons with China, for example, especially on trade data suggest India has been left badly behind in economic ties with the U.S. Two-way trade between the U.S. and China was only $7 billion in 1985, and with India it was $5 billion at that same point in time. Yet today, China’s two-way trade numbers are nearly seven times larger than U.S.-India trade. But conversely, when comparing U.S.-India trade data with other BRICS countries like Brazil and South Africa, the U.S. and India economic ties appear to be somewhat normalized.\(^59\)

The true assessment of the strength of U.S.-India ties cannot be fully understood just by examining trade data, however. A more complete picture results when examining a broader array of cooperation, including actual outputs and evidence of cooperation globally. What one finds is that despite the strategic convergence of recent years, there remains operational distance. And, the same holds true for cooperation in multilateral institutions. Trade remains a significant area of friction, and there are real limits to the connective tissue offered by the nations’ shared values. Finally, the historical hesitations, coupled with the relative

\(^{59}\) The U.S. two-way trading data with BRICS countries can be found here: [https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/](https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/).
newness of modern cooperation, reveals the existence of a lingering, yet persistent, trust deficit. Each of these is examined in more detail here.

**Strategic Convergence but Operational Distance**

As has been discussed, there is strong evidence of strategic convergence over the past two decades. With the signing of the civil nuclear deal, the launching of the defense framework agreement (which also spawned defense trade and military exercises), and the deepening distrust of China’s rise, as spelled out in various joint statements and declarations about the free and open Indo-Pacific, there can be little doubt that America and India have developed a strategic coherence that heretofore would not have been possible. While there are certainly gaps related to U.S. policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the basic geo-political understanding between the U.S. and India has held firm. Successive national security strategy blueprints from both Democratic and Republican Administrations have, for example, identified India as a key U.S. partner in advancing and protecting the democratic order in Asia.

But this ideological bonding has not yet translated into actual operational results. Despite engaging in a number of military exercises, the U.S. and Indian military forces do not operate together anywhere in the world, and they never have. Military and political officials in India publicly downplay suggestions that the military exercises or the recent signing of defense foundational agreements have led or will lead to joint operational planning or interoperability with the U.S. military (Rosen). They have likewise resisted efforts to post officers in U.S. military
commands or take on joint humanitarian disaster response activities (Saran).  

Joint military patrols or operations have been ruled out-of-hand publicly and swiftly (Pasricha). Even the limited defense co-production that takes place within India is meant strictly to benefit the Indian military end-user, and not to enhance interoperability with U.S. or multinational forces (Lalwani).

As a result, little real burden-sharing between Western and Indian military forces takes place. India continues to resist most multilateral operations, even those conducted under a United Nations Security Council authorization. The Indians refused to participate in the Persian Gulf War following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and they similarly have rejected subsequent engagements in the Balkans, Sudan, Libya and the anti-ISIL coalition, all of which they viewed as designed to advance mainly Western interests. While they have played a lead role in the training of UN peacekeepers, and have participated in some counter-piracy efforts around the Horn of Africa, the participation has been sporadic and without significant domestic support.

Thus, if U.S. military planners or policymakers were looking for India to claim a greater share of Asian military responsibilities in projecting power and deterring aggression in any coordinated manner, that has not yet occurred. Yes, India has become a stronger and more capable military, but one that has been consumed with threats in its immediate periphery from Pakistan to China. For the foreseeable

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60 There has been some positive progress along these lines. In the recent 2+2 Security Bilateral Security Dialogue in December 2029, the Indian military did agree to formally explore placing Indian officers in both CENTCOM and Special Operations Command, and offered a similar exchange for U.S. officers to India’s national security fusion center in New Delhi. See: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-and-usa-conclude-several-landmark-agreements-in-22-ministerial-dialogue/articleshow/72892719.cms.
future, this is the domain that will dominate its attention. American policymakers and military planners that had greater ambitions and aspirations will have to be patient, and will have to put in place those confidence building measures that could lead to change this status quo. More detail on the kinds of measures that might lead to greater operational results are presented in Chapter Three.

But India’s hesitations are in many ways reciprocated by the United States. This is contrary to the thinking of most experts, who assert that it is India alone that is reluctant to support a deeper and more fulsome relationship. But America, too, has created its own strategic ambiguity when it comes to India. Would U.S. forces support India in the event of a Chinese or Pakistani incursion into Indian territory? Perhaps, but short of a military alliance and a commitment to mutual defense, Indian military planners are left to generate response plans without counting on American support and involvement.

The lack of active military planning and operations is replicated in multilateral institutions at the political and diplomatic level, where India and the United States operate in largely separate, and sometimes confrontational domains. India believes the post-war multilateral institutions were designed by the West, mainly the victors of the Second World War. Therefore, the institutions, in design and practice, are there to serve the interests of the architects of the key institutions, not the new group of leading nations (Saran ch. 13). Moreover, India’s non-aligned and non-interventionist traditions makes it far less willing to support the binding quality of multilateral demands on third countries. They are unlikely, for example,
to support international sanctions regimes or efforts to isolate or condemn human rights violations (Ayres 135-139).

At the U.N., the WTO, ASEAN and World Bank there are generally cordial relations, with increasing levels of consultations, but little joint development of initiatives to advance common efforts. At the UN, for example, to the extent the two nations share common purpose, the bulk of those efforts generally relate to counter-terrorism, and the designation of Pakistani-based terror groups (Nichols).

**Trade Frictions**

In the economic sphere, especially at the WTO, the concern is not simply a lack of coordination, but one of active confrontation. This should not come as a complete surprise, given the disparity in the respective stages of development between America and India, not to mention the level of state control over each nation’s economy. Recall, India’s GDP per capita stands at just under $2000, while America’s comes in at over $60,000, some 30 times higher. Indian bureaucrats and economists aim to protect sectors and industries from being consumed by stronger more developed nations and corporations, including and especially from the United States. The situation has resulted in a continuing set of confrontations bilaterally and multilaterally, with deepening suspicions and preconceived notions that are already well-entrenched in both nations.

The balance between commercialization, free markets, protecting Indian industries and workers, and obtaining the necessary support and technology from American firms is an ongoing battle. But both governments have been hamstrung by the lack of formal agreements or structures to govern modern commerce. There
is no basic bilateral investment treaty, for example, between India and the United States, which only serves to add to the complexities, as more routine investor/state disputes can drag on for years, take on an oversized weight, and create additional obstacles in relations.

Multilaterally the challenges are just as stark. In recent years, India and the U.S. have actively fought over agriculture and energy subsidies, market access restrictions, contract sanctity and claims of expropriation in a myriad of international claims and WTO-linked settings (Brown). The experience has caused U.S. officials to oppose India’s efforts to join APEC, which they believe will fall victim to India’s protectionism, contrary to APEC’s own economic integration goals (Ayres 218-219).

Obviously, even closely aligned nations can engage in difficult trade battles. But the U.S.-India trade relationship presents unique challenges in particular due to the relative fragility and immaturity of the overall relationship. Many of these economic issues that often seem resolvable are left to fester, where domestic constituencies on both sides often exacerbate the divides, deepening divisions, and even making cooperation in other unrelated areas difficult.

**The Limits of Shared Values**

As has been detailed here, shared values form a unique, foundational aspect to the bilateral partnership. But they also have their limits. For example, there has been little appetite for advancing those values globally, as India’s traditions of non-alignment and non-intervention remain strong. There has been no joint work anywhere to strengthen legislatures, train parliamentarians, bolster judicial
systems, reinforce civil societies, combat human rights violations, stop trafficking or child labor. Moreover, the joint declarations calling for a free and open Indo-Pacific have expressed important words, but have amounted to little real cooperative action to bolster democratic systems in Asia or elsewhere, leaving key aspects of the declarations to be more aspirational and rhetorical in nature, or they amount to obligations to be undertaken by the U.S. alone.

Moreover, the Government of India has shown little interest in making those shared values part of the bilateral conversation. When values-related matters are raised by U.S. officials, Indian authorities generally dismiss U.S. comments or questions out of hand. The State Department’s annual human rights report, for example, which routinely calls out India for weak enforcement of child labor laws or human trafficking, is usually ignored or rejected outright by Indian officials. Moreover, concerns raised about press freedoms, communal tensions, Kashmir or the health of civil society also draw harsh and swift denials from Indian authorities. The Indian objections have their roots in nationalism and a strong sense of sovereignty, and commentary in this domain from U.S. and other Western governments are particularly sensitive and evoke strong emotions within India, given India’s long and difficult experience with colonialism.

The work of American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in India is a timely and interesting case study that illustrates the divide. While India has a robust civil society, suspicions reign over NGOs that work too closely on policy or human rights matters that the government often feels is outside of the normal bounds for civil society activity, and that could result in disruption to law and order,
or even worse, could be politically damaging to governmental authorities. The concerns are significantly magnified for those NGOs funded by outside interests, including from the United States. NGOs working on environmental protection, religious freedom, women's rights, civic education or ethics, for instance, often get in the cross-hairs of government officials (Ayres 150-152).

Leading American NGOs like the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, and religious organizations like Compassion International have had to stop their work in India because of government crackdowns on the Indian entities they finance and support. The Indian Government characterizes the work of these entities as interfering in the domestic affairs of a sovereign nation. There has been a negative impact to bilateral ties.\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{Trust Deficit}

The trust deficit results from two main components. The first stems from the absence of a decades-long working relationship between the two governments. Recall, the modern relationship’s start being late in President Clinton’s second term. As a result, in practice there is less than a 20-year track record in trying to build the bureaucratic bridges, develop deeper elements of cooperation and overcome the Cold-War obstacles. This is still very much a work in progress. One of the important collateral benefits of the many government-to-government working groups that have been launched over the years is not simply the work product that results from

\textsuperscript{61} The former Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ed Royce, a long time India supporter, expressed his frustration with India’s blocking of American NGOs, noting: “We have spent nine months and hundreds of hours dealing with the Indian bureaucracy on this, and it looks like the bureaucracy is trying to run out the clock.” The full text of Royce’s statement can be found here: https://republicans-foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/remarks-chairman-royce-compassion-internationals-work-india/
those groups, but also the building of trust and habits of cooperation between bureaucracies that may not otherwise be preordained to work together. More on how to institutionalize and strengthen these habits of cooperation is covered in Chapter Three.

The second component contributing to the trust deficit are the legacy security partnerships that still give rise to suspicions and create actual operational limitations on the types and kinds of information that can be shared. Specifically, it is America’s continuing security partnership with Pakistan, and India’s significant defense relationship with Russia, that continues to limit what the U.S. and India can do together ideologically and practically. Especially in the defense arena, there are real limits to the operational sharing of advanced technologies, for example, with regard to fifth generation fighters and jet engine technologies, so long as India remains closely partnered with Russia and continues to acquire advanced defense platforms like the S-400 missile defense system.

One key impact of the trust deficit is the resulting fragility of the overall partnership. Shocks or major disagreements are hard for the relationship to absorb. Slight are taken personally. The relationship suffers from a lack of resilience. As a result, disagreements that should be contained and managed within a particular diplomatic channel often spill into other facets of the partnership. This is especially true with trade disputes.

The Trump Administration has discovered this in its now two-year battle with India on trade and market access issues. The fragility was also on display in 2013 when an Indian diplomat was arrested, strip searched and expelled from the
U.S. for alleged trafficking of her household domestic staff. The Indian response was swift and sweeping in scale. Security barricades in front of the U.S. Embassy were removed, authorities opened a tax investigation at the American school in Delhi, government dialogues were canceled and the American Ambassador’s expedited airport access rights were revoked (Weiser).

While the two countries may no longer be “estranged democracies,” as Dennis Kux suggests in his classic book on the bilateral relationship, they do remain distant in fundamental ways. As diplomats and political leaders like to focus on the achievements, it is equally important to acknowledge the gaps and, at times, the semi-estrangement that can reappear.

V. Summary

The point of the prior section is not to degrade the progress that has been made, particularly in the past two decades, but rather to highlight and accept that this remains a bilateral partnership in its infancy, with both sides still exploring what is possible. The bulk of each nation’s interactions take place in bilateral channels, with few coordinated or joint efforts in more global domains. It is a transactional relationship of relatively low ambition, at least at this current time.

This should not come as a surprise, given each nation’s respective histories, especially the separate paths taken during the second half of the 20th Century. Moreover, continuing areas of mutual distrust remain, such as on trade and due to legacy relationships with Pakistan and Russia. But the question for academics and policymakers alike is whether this status quo position is adequate or could there be a different formulation, one that takes into account the realities of this century.
These realities include the dramatic rise of China, American retrenchment in Asia, threats to the liberal order, and the need for multilateral solutions to global threats such as climate change, pandemics, cyber crimes and terrorism.

There are fundamental questions, however, about whether such a new relationship – even one that accounts for these new realities – is really possible. Does India actually want a deeper relationship with the United States, or will it choose a more diversified set of partners across Asia and Europe, to include Russia? Does India have the capacity to take on the kinds of roles and responsibilities envisioned by U.S. strategic planners? Is there a multilateral agenda that could unify these two nations in common purpose? What is the proper structure for two nations that are unlikely to ever become treaty allies? Is the U.S. properly organized within the State Department and Defense Department to deal with a leading power with the potential of India? What is the bilateral agenda that will help build trust and create opportunities for both populations? And, looking back on the relatively short history of U.S.-India ties since India’s independence in 1947, what are the lessons learned about what worked well to bring the two nations together, and what set them apart?

The lessons of the 72-year partnership are of particular importance. Why, for example, do the two nations often repeat cycles of apparent closeness followed by years of distance? Is there a way to end this cycle? This question takes on even more urgency given the shifting geo-political alignments in Asia, and the return of great power competition, as predicted by the National Security Strategy. If, for example, there is a return to a downward slope in bilateral ties because of U.S.-India
trade skirmishes and other areas of non-alignment, will this be a followed by a period of estrangement and mistrust? If so, are the consequences of such estrangement heightened given current global economic, security and political trends?

Of course, the better alternative is to guard against the downturn in relations, to build a stronger base and foundation for cooperation – one that can withstand disagreements and tensions, and move on to solve the larger pressing issues together. To get to that point, however, the learnings of the past are essential, and that is what Chapter Two will address. Chapter Two examines five specific years, in addition to the current time period, and draws key lessons that could help guide the U.S.-India partnership into the future. Instead of repeating and being constrained by the “hesitations of history,” it could be that these lessons propel the relationship forward, and thus are worthy of the additional study and analysis.

Chapter Three goes on to look at the organizational and structural dynamics, and potential areas of deeper collaboration in the years ahead. “Allies absent the alliance” is the title of the chapter. It examines the new realities of the 21st Century: a global system without new military alliances, with new leading powers, and where the U.S. will likely struggle to maintain its dominance as the world’s superpower. The elements of a modern U.S.-India partnership that can advance security and prosperity in this new framework will be examined in greater detail. Again, there is remarkably little existing scholarship on this subject area.

In closing, this first chapter was meant to set the current scene in the Asia Pacific – a region of incredible, fast-moving dynamic growth, but also with the
realities of renewed tensions between Japan and Korea, accelerating concerns of nuclear proliferation in Pakistan, Iran and North Korea, a continued, steady and undeterred rise of China, and with India’s role yet to be fully developed. Much of India’s economic and strategic future will obviously be decided and shaped by Indian leaders and voters; but the richness, durability and power of the U.S.-India partnership will also be key to both nations’ prosperity and security in the years ahead. This chapter also explored some of the real challenges holding India back, despite its enormous scale and demographic advantages. The chapter also covered the U.S. approach to India since 1947, to include why the partnership matters, and where it has come up short, as well as the consequences of that shortfall.

The basic thrust of this chapter was, of course, to recognize the measurable progress in bilateral ties, but also to acknowledge that there have also been significant missed opportunities that have come with a cost to both nations. Little real collaboration multilaterally, deep trust deficits, scant operational security planning, significant gaps in trade relations – these are the modern realities that have to be acknowledged as well. And, yes, much of these current deficiencies and shortfalls stem from the legacies and hesitations of history – hesitations that in this writer’s view can be overcome.
Chapter Two

Five Years in Focus and the Lessons Learned

I. Why These Five Years?

It is difficult, if not unwise, to recommend a way forward in U.S.-India relations without fully appreciating what transpired earlier between the two nations. The bilateral history, at least since India’s independence in 1947, is relatively short, with extended gaps of relative inactivity and with unremarkable ups or downs. But there are also significant episodes of convergence and divergence over this period that are important to study. In order to help analyze elements of cooperation and diplomatic approaches that both succeeded, as well as those that failed, five years in particular (1962, 1971, 1998, 2005 and 2015) are presented below as short case studies.

These five years span a wide range of positive and negative times in the partnership. The 1962 to 1971 period is remarkable for the rapid devolution in ties; the 1998 time frame presents the conflicting roles called upon by the United States as it had to simultaneously impose sanctions on India for nuclear testing, while helping to diffuse a dangerous Indo-Pak crisis; and the 2005 to 2015 period is largely a positive story, with key breakthroughs in ’05 (and beyond) that then led to deeper bilateral – and even some multilateral – cooperation in 2015. This section concludes with a look at today – the Trump approach – and whether it marks a departure from or extension of prior policies. Finally, and perhaps most
importantly, the key lessons to be drawn from the past are put forward for more detailed analyses and discussion.

1962

President Kennedy had developed a personal interest in India. From his time in the Senate and on the Presidential trail, Kennedy had urged closer relations with India (Reidel 49). He was largely focused on advancing two objectives: the first was supporting India’s economic development; and the second was related to strengthening India to help counter the emerging threat posed by China (69, 145). In many ways, these two tracks were inseparable, and they formed the basis for a policy that would be rediscovered by the George W. Bush Administration some forty years later. The crux of the policy was to support India’s rise for the people of India, for United States security interests and to counter-balance the rise of China. That meant helping India become strong economically and militarily. This was “strategic altruism” before it had a name.

In the Senate, on repeated occasions Kennedy voiced his support for more robust support of India’s development and security needs (49-50). In a Senate Resolution he sponsored in 1959, he said on the Senate floor: “I cite India today because of her special importance, representing as she does some 40 percent of the population in the uncommitted world, representing the one great counter to the ideological and economic forces of Red China, and symbolizing for all Asia the
testing ground for democracy under pressure.” He would go on to say “the hinge of fate in Asia” rests with India.

Kennedy carried this view into the White House, and was keen to build upon President Eisenhower’s more ambitious policies toward India and his successful visit there in 1959. By the time of Kennedy’s accession to the Presidency, the situation in East Asia was growing more dire. Communist forces were gaining ground in Vietnam and Korea. China was already lost. And the Soviet Union was aggressively consolidating its power and looking to expand its sphere of influence. Kennedy was especially concerned about Chinese plans to invade India, and he linked the potential ramifications of a Chinese incursion to the broader fight against communism taking place in Asia. According to Listening In: The Secret White House Recordings of John F. Kennedy, the President clearly articulated his view in the Oval Office with his national security team: “I don’t think there’s any doubt that this country [the U.S.] is determined that we couldn’t permit the Chinese to defeat the Indians. If we would, we might as well get out of South Korea and South Vietnam.”

(Widmer)

Before he was even inaugurated, however, Kennedy took one of his most consequential actions toward India and that was through the appointment of the legendary Harvard economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, a close personal friend and

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63 Eisenhower moved beyond development and economic assistance, providing India with C-119 transport aircraft to strengthen India’s Himalayan defenses against Chinese incursions. Eisenhower did not go so far as providing the sidewinder missiles that India had requested, but did arrange for the sale from Great Britain, so as to prevent the Soviets from providing a similar capability. This battle against Soviet – and now Russian – military equipment continues to the present day.
mentor to the young President. When Galbraith received the call from the President, Galbraith reportedly asked the President whether he thought the India posting or potentially serving as Kennedy’s replacement in the Senate (something that had been rumored for Galbraith) would be the more consequential assignment. Kennedy emphatically responded that the India assignment was more important “by a factor of five to one” (Galbraith 1). Galbraith’s subsequent performance as Ambassador, coupled with Kennedy’s strong commitment to India’s defense, helped set the stage for what many consider to be one of the strongest and signature periods of U.S.-India relations.64 This was on full display in 1962.

By 1962, Galbraith and Prime Minister Nehru had developed a close personal relationship. Nehru knew that Galbraith spoke to President Kennedy often and had his close trust. Therefore, Nehru could be assured that Galbraith’s views and commitments represented those of the White House directly. Galbraith was also the textbook American Ambassador, combining a deep knowledge of economics, politics and foreign policy with his personal charm, wit and desire to chart his own course, without direction from Washington. Galbraith set out to visit the vast reaches of India, from the Northeast to the South, where in most places he was the first senior U.S. official to ever set foot (Riedel 67). He aggressively pushed for food aid and development assistance to India to combat famine and food insecurity, including

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64 Perhaps the most comprehensive collection of records, correspondence, notes, diplomatic cables and statements by key U.S. and Indian officials during this period can be found at the Kennedy Presidential Library. Not only do the documents show a whole of government approach to dealing with the challenges and opportunities that India presented, they also show the personal interest of President Kennedy, and the ingenuity of Galbraith, as well as his successor, another renowned U.S. Ambassador, Chester Bowles. See the digitized collection here: https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/about-archival-collections.
modern scientific and agricultural solutions from U.S. experts that would become a key component of India’s Green Revolution (67). He also famously sided with the Indians in their border dispute with China in the Northeast, embracing the so-called “McMahon Line,” which was drawn more favorably for Indian interests, and he did so without official clearance from Washington (120). His border formulation remains official U.S. policy today.

Galbraith’s efforts were supplemented by an unlikely, but powerful diplomat in her own right: Jackie Kennedy, the First Lady. Mrs. Kennedy traveled to India in the spring of 1962 on a historic nine-day visit, where she crisscrossed the country, speaking to large crowds, further solidifying a relationship with Prime Minister Nehru and raising the profile of the U.S.-India partnership. She was invited to India by Prime Minister Nehru during his state visit to see President Kennedy in November of 1961. That was his third meeting with President Kennedy in less than one year. The First Lady charmed India and Nehru, and managed to repair relations that had been damaged by India’s seizing of the Portuguese territory of Goa by force in late 1961, which drew a strong rebuke by the United States in the UN Security Council. The Times of India would later write that she “completely dominated the scene” (83).

The other more visible element of U.S. support to India in 1962 involved the dramatic increase in foreign assistance – nearly $1 billion of development aid began flowing to India in late ’61 and ‘62. The assistance reflected Kennedy’s commitment to support India’s development needs, as he so forcefully articulated when he was a Senator from Massachusetts, but it was a massive amount of aid at the time; so large,
in fact, that the Pakistanis launched a formal objection, and even suspended some U.S. military and intelligence operations that were being planned from Pakistani territory (62). In addition, the first group of Peace Corps volunteers arrived in India during this time. This was also a major Kennedy initiative that had brought support and gratitude in India. Hundreds of American Peace Corps volunteers began serving in India in 1961 and 1962 (69).

The Kennedy and Galbraith policies and public support for India were brought into sharp focus following the outbreak of the Sino-India War in October 1962. With thousands of Chinese troops spilling over the Indian border, Prime Minister Nehru made a series of desperate efforts to seek immediate military assistance from President Kennedy (Kux 207). Prime Minister Nehru sent two urgent letters to President Kennedy, which have since been declassified. Both letters from Nehru to Kennedy, dated November 12 and 19, 1962, can be found at the Kennedy Presidential Library online at: https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKNSF/111/JFKNSF-111-016.

At the time, President Kennedy was confronting his own crisis in the Western Hemisphere with the blockade of Cuba to prevent further Soviet assistance to Cuba’s ballistic missile program. The Cuban Missile Crisis consumed Kennedy and the entire White House national security team.

Meanwhile, the Chinese were planning for thousands of ground forces to cross the Himalayas in the Northeast and Northwest of India, setting up a battle in difficult and dangerous mountain conditions. The timing and basis for the Chinese attacks were based on what Chairman Mao perceived as Indian aggression over Tibet. After giving refuge to the Dalai Lama, committing to purchase Russian
fighters, and growing closer to the United States, Mao was convinced Nehru was poised to seize Tibet or at least undermine its stability (Reidel 103). Mao was wrong. Nevertheless, the invasion was launched, and Indian forces were quickly overwhelmed.

In his letters to Kennedy, Nehru makes an urgent plea for military assistance, specifically air transport, jet fighters and ammunition. “We are facing a grim situation in our struggle for survival and in defending all that India stands for against an unscrupulous and powerful aggressor,” Nehru writes in his first letter. He notes that the Indian Government was following up with a precise list of armaments needed.

The request was such a departure from India’s longstanding policy of non-alignment, and such an aberration for Nehru in particular, who prided himself on not relying on the United States. It even caused Secretary of State Rusk to send an urgent cable to Galbraith asking if the Indians really understood the impact of their request. Nehru’s letter, Rusk wrote “amounts to a request for an active and practically speaking unlimited military partnership between the United States and India to take on the Chinese invasion of India. This involves for us the most far-reaching political and strategic issues and we are not at all convinced that Indians are prepared to face the situation in the same terms.”66 In other words, this would be tantamount to a military alliance, and it was unclear whether anyone but Nehru would accept the bindingness of that arrangement. Nehru went even further in his

second letter asking for American pilots to provide air defenses to back up the Indian Air Force and to protect Indian territory.  

Kennedy’s team was badly divided, not wanting to further alienate the Pakistanis or draw the ire of the Chinese, or become embroiled in another major high-stakes strategic gamble just days after the Soviets backed down from the Cuban blockade. But Kennedy did not hesitate. While he did not fulfill all of Nehru’s requests (no U.S. ground or air forces would be deployed), soon there were massive amounts of U.S. and allied weaponry flowing into India. Some eight flights per day were bringing in twenty tons of supplies to Calcutta and then further moved to forward operating locations (Riedel 121). The U.S. Navy’s 7th Fleet was also mobilized to the Bay of Bengal in a show of support (Kux 207). Public opinion in India also began to shift toward the United States, as American assistance was contrasted against the Soviet Union, which had suspended MIG Fighter sales, urging instead for India to accept China’s proposal for peace talks (Galbraith 445-446). It would not be the first time that Moscow would not be there when Delhi was confronting a crisis.

Only one month later, the Chinese would withdraw to north of the McMahon line and return to the status quo prior to the conflict, but they would claim the disputed territory in the Northwest in Aksai Chin, which they still maintain today.

The battle was short, but it was an effective display of Chinese military power, and

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67 Nehru’s request was specific and breathtaking. In all, he asked for “a minimum of 12 squadrons of super sonic all weather fighters” as well as advanced modern radar systems and two squadrons of B-47 bombers. See Riedel at 137-138 and Prime Minister Nehru’s correspondence to President Kennedy available at: https://historyinpieces.com/research/nehru-jfk-sino-indian-war.
compelling evidence that Indian forces were badly outmatched in numbers and in capabilities. If the Chinese were able to decisively get what they wanted in the Northwest, why did they stop short from seizing additional territory in the Northeast? This was one of Nehru’s greatest fears, as reflected in his desperate correspondence to Kennedy. Many analysts have concluded that Mao did not want to draw Kennedy and the American military into the conflict (Riedel 142). As Bruce Riedel writes in his compelling account of the crisis, “Mao Zedong knew by late November 1962, if not earlier, that India was not alone and that the longer the war continued the more the American and British aid would arrive.” (143)

Thus, 1962 stands out for several reasons. First, America stood by India and was prepared to directly intervene militarily in one of its most pressing crises; American diplomacy was on full display by the President, the First Lady, and a compelling U.S. Ambassador; American assistance spanned the gamut from considerable economic aid to military armaments; the American President was prepared to take steps that undoubtedly would alienate the Pakistanis, the Chinese and the Russians; and the U.S. had expressed a clear preference for who it wanted to see win the race for primacy in Asia – and that was India.

Finally, it is this year in particular where one can see the origins of the fault lines in South Asia, which very much still exist today. The Indian support of Tibet and India’ close relationship with Russia caused China to grow more concerned and take a more hostile approach toward India. U.S. support of India during the crisis, while discounting Pakistani concerns, sparked greater cooperation and alignment between Pakistan and China. And U.S.-India relations displayed some of its
incredible potential, which raised significant concerns in Islamabad, Beijing and Moscow. These same concerns and dividing lines are very much alive and well today.

**1971**

Things can move fast in international politics. That was certainly the case following the high-points in 1962. President Kennedy’s tragic assassination followed by Prime Minister Nehru’s death some months later resulted in new leaders in both nations – leaders who were already skeptical of each other. President Johnson and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had a cordial, but rather distant relationship. Neither trusted the other (Kux 247, 267-268). Johnson was more cautious toward India than Kennedy, and Indira Gandhi was far more distrusting of America than her father had been. Johnson, for example, refused to approve the sale of F-104 fighter jets to India, not wanting to rupture the U.S.-Pakistan security partnership (Kux 230). One can only surmise that Kennedy would have proceeded differently (Riedel 146).

By 1965, a second Kashmir War had broken out between India and Pakistan. The Johnson Administration suspended military assistance to both nations in an effort to bring each side to the negotiating table (Raghavan 232). But it only aggravated each nation, especially India, given its view that Pakistan had initiated the hostilities. Moreover, during the conflict, Pakistan was using U.S.-made weapons against India; the same weapons that U.S. officials had assured India could never be used against them. This generated additional resentment and suspicion of U.S. intentions in Delhi. Relations were trending in a negative direction. President
Johnson became discouraged by the Kashmir conflict and the lack of potential for peace between India and Pakistan. As the American commitment to Vietnam grew more intense, Johnson looked to disentangle the U.S. from South Asia. He largely succeeded (Kux 267-268).

President Nixon took a far harder line against India. Nixon knew India and its leaders. He traveled to India once as Senator and twice as a private citizen before his 22-hour visit to Delhi in 1969 as President. Reports of his meetings with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi were not positive (280).

Nixon was a Cold War warrior. Non-alignment was not something he could easily understand. One was either with the United States and its allies in the fight against communism or against the U.S. and its partners. There was no in between in Nixon’s view. This formed the basis for Nixon's underlying suspicion and basic disdain for India's foreign policy.

On the other hand, Nixon had developed a true fondness for Pakistan’s leaders, its support of American military and intelligence objectives, and its harder line against the Soviet Union. Under Nixon’s rather blunt construct (countries were either aligned with America or they were not), Pakistan was squarely on the U.S. side. They made decisions more decisively. He thought Pakistan could be counted upon, unlike India’s political establishment. This was his firmly held position when he took office in 1968 (Raghavan 247-248).

Relations with India would continue on a steady decline between ’68 and ’71. There were at least five principal fault lines. The first was Delhi’s deepening defense and security partnership with Moscow. Training, equipping and fielding the Indian
military with the most advanced weaponry created a certain dependency between the Soviet Union and India, and Nixon knew it. According to a transcript of a conversation between Nixon and Kissinger from 1969, Kissinger tells Nixon “they (India) have the closest diplomatic ties now with Russia. They leak everything right back to them (Bass 255).”

Second, Nixon’s own personal relationship with Indira Gandhi continued to suffer. He found her to be insufferable and generally anti-American in her worldview. Again, in another transcript between Nixon and Kissinger following a visit to the U.S. by the Prime Minister, Nixon calls her “an old witch” and refers to the Indian people as a “slippery, treacherous people.”68 (Raghavan 255)

Third, there was the growing crisis in East Pakistan, where a large independence movement was becoming more vocal and agitated. It was a dangerous situation, and Pakistan was beginning to lose control of the political and security environment. India lined up behind those Bengalis seeking the creation of a newly independent state, while America backed Pakistani efforts to oppose the growing freedom movement. Significant fighting between Pakistani and Indian forces broke out yet again, leading to a bloody and violent revolution and eventually to the establishment of Bangladesh (Bass).

The fourth fault line continued to be the increasing amount of American military assistance provided to Pakistan. Nixon broke with the U.S. policy of not arming either India or Pakistan with lethal weapons by approving a massive sale of

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68 The Kissinger/Nixon transcripts of these exchanges can be found at the Office of Historian on the State Department website at: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d150.
300 armored personnel carriers, fighter aircraft, ammunition and spare parts to Islamabad (Kux 284). Many of these weapons would be used against India and civilians in the battle over East Pakistan. Once discovered, the arms sales generated a significant outcry in New Delhi, but also in Washington where members of Congress and State Department personnel believed Nixon did not have the authority to circumvent the arms ban that had been put in place against Pakistan (Bass 293-302).69

The final fault line involved China. U.S. policy to China was about to undergo a historic shift. Nixon and Kissinger were actively exploring an opening to establish more formal relations with Beijing. Nixon was determined to reverse longstanding U.S. policy to isolate China by finally bringing it into the family of nations (Kux 288). The plan was highly classified, and it involved working through America’s close South Asian partner: Pakistan. 1971 would bring the totality of these issues to the forefront, and would deliver a new low in U.S.-India ties.

Concurrently, the situation in East Pakistan was grim and growing more deadly in 1971 and it requires more detailed coverage here. Tens of thousands of Bengalis were being displaced to India; those that did not move faced detention and likely death. Some ten million Bengalis would eventually migrate to India, and nearly 200,000 people died in the conflict that ensued. Despite the protestations

69 See also the significant amount of audio recordings, memos and cables documenting Nixon’s frustration with India and preference to support Pakistan in the Nixon Presidential Library collection, including specifically audio recording 624-021, dated Nov 24, 1971 where Nixon tells his Secretary of State to tilt toward Pakistan in the ongoing Indo-Pakistan conflict: https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/white-house-tapes.
from State Department personnel on the ground, including the infamous “Blood
telegram” authored by the American Consul General in Dhaka warning of mass
slaughter, the American position remained one of steadfast support for the Pakistani
military. American-made equipment was even used to brutally suppress the
uprising (Bass 64-68). India would eventually be drawn into yet another full-scale
war against Pakistan to help liberate the Bengali people.

The apparent indifference of President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger to the
killings carried out by the Pakistani military was a calculated position. For them, the
bigger prize was China, and they could not afford to jeopardize the opening that
Pakistan was providing (Bass 103-107). The China outreach was historic in its own
right, and would prove to be the start of decades of difficult diplomacy between both
nations. An additional imperative for Nixon and Kissinger’s gambit was to explore a
U.S.-China partnership that could serve as a counter-balance to the Soviet Union.
But such outreach to China was not possible directly from Kissinger or Nixon. That’s
why the Pakistani role was so important.

Kissinger would later say that neither he nor President Nixon could publicly
criticize Pakistan for the actions it was taking against civilians and others in East
Pakistan, so as not to jeopardize the critical outreach to Beijing that Pakistani
leaders were facilitating (PTI). In July 1971, Kissinger would fly to Delhi and then to
Pakistan for what appeared to be a rather routine visit between two strategic
partners, but upon arrival he would quickly and secretly be shuttled to a waiting
aircraft to fly him to Beijing (Bass 171-173).
One week later, President Nixon announced that Kissinger had actually been on a secret mission to China, and that he (Nixon) would soon be going there as well (Kux 295). India was shocked that it had been used as a cover for Kissinger’s secret trip. They found the entire American strategy to be short-sighted and nothing short of treachery to the Indian people. India would seek its own retribution only weeks later by signing the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty, a pact that assured joint consultations during a crisis and it guaranteed that neither country would support the actions of a third party against the other (Kux 295). While it stopped short of an alliance, it locked in place the guarantees that India needed to deter a Chinese attack. It also sent Kissinger and Nixon reeling. Kissinger would later call the pact a “powder keg” and a “bombshell.” (296)

Meanwhile in Dhaka and East Pakistan, the situation was growing more dire. Pakistani military forces were cracking down on the civilian uprising, forcing even more refugees into India. In November 1971, Mrs. Gandhi began a round of international consultations with the hope of avoiding war, and seeking the global community’s support to pressure Pakistan into backing down from its combat footing and brutal tactics particularly against Bengali Hindus. She even traveled to Washington for what Nixon and Kissinger would later describe as their worst foreign head of state meeting during Nixon’s presidency (Kux 297-299). Nixon urged Gandhi to show restraint, counseled against being drawn into another war with Pakistan and called for immediate negotiations. Gandhi accused Nixon of treating the aggressor (Pakistan) and the victim (India) equally (299). The trip was a failure. War between India and Pakistan would soon follow.
By early December 1971, India and Pakistan were at war in East Pakistan. Nixon firmly believed India was instigating the conflict. He immediately suspended all military and economic assistance. His UN Representative, George H.W. Bush, brought a Resolution to the Security Council calling for an immediate ceasefire. The Resolution was supported by China, but vetoed by the Soviet Union (on behalf of the Indians) with Great Britain and France abstaining (Kux 303). Significantly, Kissinger also sent a message to Chinese interlocutors that he believed India’s actions were a threat to Chinese security, and that the United States would not object if China took efforts to protect its security (Raghavan 259). In other words, the American National Security Advisor was inviting a Chinese attack against India.

Nixon further escalated matters by deploying the 7th Fleet up the East Coast of India, allegedly to aid civilian casualties, but the actual intent was to demonstrate American power and deter further Indian military action (Kux 305). The move did not work, and only served to further undermine trust between America and India. This was the same 7th Fleet that had nine years earlier also sailed to the Bay of Bengal on a mission to deter China and protect India. The times had changed dramatically in a few short years.

1971 marked the modern low point in U.S.-India relations. Personal relations between the two nations’ leaders were badly strained; geopolitical realities created significant fissures, particularly with America’s outreach to China and its deepening defense relationship with Pakistan, and with India and the Soviet Union becoming even closer. The war in East Pakistan brought these different alignments
to the fore, locking in for decades to come a mutual distrust between Indian and American policymakers and bureaucrats.

But at a deeper level, there was an estrangement and divergence on not just strategic matters, but on the allegedly closely-held shared values as well. The Indian narrative is that America not only turned its back on a humanitarian crisis in East Pakistan, it also aided in the slaughter of civilians and innocents with its support to the Pakistani military. Further, Indian strategists argue that the United States was so focused on its new opening with China for history’s sake and for the unlikely potential that China could help America counter-balance Moscow that it was willing to deceive and double-cross a democratic partner in the heart of Asia’s cauldron. Those feelings of deceit and distrust continue to roil the relationship today, and those who ignore that reality are often left disenchanted and wondering why more cannot be accomplished with New Delhi.

1998

The years following ’71 did not witness any marked improvement in U.S.-India relations. American policy in Asia was going through an important transformation. President Nixon made his historic trip to China, while simultaneously trying to extricate U.S. forces from Vietnam, but not before engaging in a brutal bombing campaign of North Vietnam. Security assistance to Pakistan deepened, while ties with India were being broken. In 1972, the Indian Government ordered all Americans tied to foreign assistance programs to immediately leave the country (Raghavan 261). Upon departing his Ambassadorial posting that year, Prime Minister Gandhi told Ambassador Ken Keating: “It doesn’t matter to us in the
least what the U.S. does about debt relief or aid. India will survive and progress with or without help from the U.S” (Raghavan 261).

President Ford would largely continue with this South Asia framework during his two-year presidency, to include lifting an arms sale embargo on Pakistan and delivering it new A-7 fighters (Raghavan 271). But a new issue had also emerged, and that was how to handle India as a nuclear power. In 1972, India tested a nuclear device for the first time, drawing widespread concern from members of congress, the international community and even an aspiring Democratic Presidential candidate, the Governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter. Carter would place nuclear non-proliferation at the center of his approach to India, including during his visit there in 1978 (Kux 354, 356-362). While the visit was cordial, little progress was made in curbing India's nuclear ambitions or bringing it into the international nuclear framework. India's nuclear weapons pursuit triggered a new and dangerous nuclear arms race in South Asia, with Islamabad predictably racing to catch up – and it would.

For the next twelve years, during the Reagan and Bush Administrations, attention turned away from India. Reagan had little interest in cultivating the relationships with Indian leaders. He was, however, squarely focused on the Soviet Union, which was suffering a long and costly adventure in Afghanistan, but was still looking to upend America from its growing dominance in international affairs. Focus on countering Soviet influence meant a return to the South Asian partner that initially helped advance those efforts, and that was not India. Reagan would dramatically increase military assistance to Islamabad, to include a $2.5 billion
assistance package as well as 40 F-16 fighters (382). And Reagan would use Pakistan as a base of covert operations in which to counter the Afghan-Soviet threat by training and equipping a group of battle-hardened fighters, the Mujahedeen, remnants of which would go on to form a number of dangerous extremist groups still very much fighting the West today (384). The U.S. Congress, too, was leaning in on Pakistan security assistance, despite growing concerns over Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, with the Senate Appropriations Committee blocking all aid to India unless military assistance to Pakistan went forward (Raghavan 306). The hyphen in Indo-Pak was alive and well.\(^70\)

The end of the Cold War would bring about a triumphant, unipolar moment for the United States – it had won, for the time being at least, its half-century standoff with the Soviet Union. One consequence for South Asia is that America could be less dependent on Pakistan, and that moment was almost immediately realized. With the official discovery of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program, President George H.W. Bush moved to suspend all economic and military aid to Pakistan. Thus, the battle lines and objectives for the 90s for the U.S. in South Asia were drawn: combat nuclear proliferation and defuse tensions between India and Pakistan. Both objectives would come into sharp focus in 1998.

President Clinton came into office with great hope for a new relationship with India, one that drew upon India’s dynamism, growing economic power, and

\(^{70}\) There were essentially three camps that had emerged in the Congress. The first was largely pro-Indian, influenced by the Indian-American diaspora and which recognized India’s promise as a democratic partner; the second was focused on the Soviet threat, and counted upon Pakistan’s support in this battle; and the third were non-proliferation hawks that cared less about India or Pakistan individually, and more about preventing the subcontinent from becoming a nuclear powder keg.
democratic traditions (Talbot 24). First Lady Hillary Clinton traveled to India in 1995 where she was greeted warmly across the nation. She returned enthused and convinced America should look for a “new opening” to India where it could become a more foundational aspect of U.S. foreign policy (24).

By 1998, the Clinton Administration’s hopes for South Asia had largely been neutralized by the realities of the region, including finding the proper role for the United States in dealing with Indo-Pak tensions, principally Kashmir. In Clinton’s first term, the State Department made a more pronounced effort to settle Kashmir. Indian leaders summarily rejected the entreaty (Raghavan 317). President Clinton eventually learned the limitations of U.S. influence, and thereafter was careful not to be drawn into a long and protracted negotiation that only one side – Pakistan – actually supported (329).

There was also a new and dominant focus of the Clinton team: nonproliferation. President Clinton’s national security team made countering nuclear proliferation and signing and ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (the CTBT) one of its top priorities (317-318). But one of the chief sources of new nuclear dangers came directly from South Asia and specifically from the nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan.

In March 1998, the nuclear risks were made more present with the Indian national elections that brought Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) to power. The election had two semi-conflicting consequences. First, the BJP sought and pursued a more far-reaching strategic and economic relationship with the United States. The BJP also sought to enhance
India’s role on the world stage. Vajpayee wanted India to be treated as an equal with the other emerging powers. There was one certain way to get there, and it involved ensuring India became a nuclear power, and nuclear testing specifically was incorporated into the BJP manifesto. It did not take Vajpayee long to fulfill this campaign objective (319). This was the second big consequence of the election.

Just two months after Vajpayee’s election, India conducted five underground nuclear tests on May 11 and May 13 in the Pokhran desert in the Indian state of Rajasthan. The tests came as a surprise to the United States, and worse, it was an intelligence failure (Raghavan 319; Talbot 50). As former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot writes in his account of this period: “The explosion vaporized thousands of tons of rock, lifted an expanse on the surface the size of a football field several meters in the air, and sent shockwaves around the world, causing needles to jump on seismographs at more than sixty monitoring stations as far away as New Mexico, Antarctica and Mt. Fuji” (Talbot 49). President Clinton, furious at what he believed was Indian duplicity and deception, reportedly told his national security team “we’re going to come down on those guys like a ton of bricks” (52).

The U.S. government’s legal and export control machinery went into overdrive, producing an immediate and comprehensive American response through the imposition of economic sanctions. These included the cessation of defense sales and military-related export licenses, a prohibition on American banks making loans to Indian entities, and denying U.S. support for international lending at the IMF and World Bank (Raghavan 320).
India justified its tests as a way to defend itself against two other nuclear weapons programs – an overt one in China and a covert one in Pakistan. The criticisms from Congress were also strong and swift, including from pro-India members. Senator Jessie Helms, the then-Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, directed his attacks at President Clinton, whom he accused of “six years of cozying up to India,” which weakened the U.S. position and gave India a free hand (Talbot 55). Clinton responded that his mistake was “not cozying up to India a lot earlier so we might have had some leverage” (55).

Meanwhile, the White House was bracing for what it thought might come next: a Pakistani test. The CENTCOM Commander and Deputy Secretary of State were immediately deployed to make the case to the Pakistanis that with “restraint and maturity” they could separate themselves from India in the world’s eyes and develop a more comprehensive relationship with the U.S. and the major powers of the world (Talbot 59). Those diplomatic efforts failed. Just four days after India’s second test, Pakistan went forward with its own set of tests on May 17. When learning of the news, President Clinton expressed his obvious displeasure, telling his national security team: “I’ve wanted to get into that situation out there, but it’s going to be a whole lot harder now” (Talbot 67). At that moment, Clinton did not fully appreciate how much harder it would become.

Two days later, the Pakistani would detonate a second nuclear device to keep pace with the Indian actions. Similar sanctions as those that had been imposed on India were now levied against Pakistan (71-72). The U.S. also went to work to try to regain some normalcy in South Asia. There was an emerging view (though not
yet majority position) that the nuclear weapons genie could not be put back in its bottle, but perhaps a best-case outcome would be for both nations (India and Pakistan) to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treat (CTBT) and be brought within a broader system of international nuclear proliferation controls (195). But even this more modest outcome proved to be elusive.

If the nuclear arms race was not sufficient to consume Washington’s attention, it would soon have yet another major geostrategic event to help manage. In the winter of 1998-1999, Pakistani troops moved across the Line of Control (LOC) in a series of surprise attacks against Indian-held positions (Raghavan 325). The area of the Pakistani operation was an isolated and elevated area of Kashmir called Kargil. The military plan was conceived by Pakistan’s new Army Chief, General Pervez Musharraf, who quickly escalated the conflict by shooting down two Indian Air Force helicopters and deploying additional troops close to the border (Raghavan 325). The aggressiveness of the Pakistani strategy coupled with the Indian response got the immediate attention of Washington, which had already been concerned about escalating tensions on the subcontinent and, in the worst-case scenario, a nuclear conflict.

The dialogue with India led by Deputy Secretary of State Talbot and Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh that had been ongoing to discuss matters of non-proliferation quickly turned its focus to the Kargil crisis. American diplomats and senior military leaders released information showing Pakistan was responsible for

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71 The alternative and probably more mainstream position at the time was for both Pakistan and India to give up their nuclear weapons programs and join the Non-Proliferation Treaty. This had little real chance of happening given India’s concern about China and Pakistan’s concern about India. It was and remains a vicious circle.
the incursion and they called on Pakistan to pull back its forces behind the LOC (Raghavan 326). The Americans also cut off access to $100 million in loans the Pakistanis required. President Clinton thereafter refused to accede to Pakistani demands that Kashmir be part of any negotiated settlement on Kargil. Clinton had no intention of rewarding the Pakistanis for their aggression. If the U.S. policy required hyphenating Indian and Pakistani policy and therefore allocating blame equally, President Clinton was prepared to finally abandon the policy in order to hold Pakistan accountable. It was a major shift in U.S. policy. As Professor Raghavan writes in his compelling account of the conflict in *The Most Dangerous Place*, “the Indians were at once surprised and relieved that the United States was not tilting towards Pakistan” (326).

The U.S. diplomacy continued at a high level, with President Clinton personally intervening and using the full weight of his office to get the Pakistanis to pull back their troops. But it would not be until late July 1999 that Pakistani troops would withdraw behind the Line of Control. And only a few months later, Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif would be deposed by General Musharraf (Raghavan 328). It was a tumultuous period for Pakistan, which came out of the Kargil conflict more isolated and splintered from the U.S. in critically important ways. In contrast, while it was also a difficult period for India, it was indeed a transformative time for U.S.-India relations. President Clinton would finally visit India in the spring of 2000 in

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72 See also a comprehensive collection of documents on Kargil, as well as the evolving position of the United States, at the Clinton Library digitized record collection here: [https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/48318](https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/48318).
the last year of his presidency, creating the gateway for the modern U.S.-India relationship that exists today.

This period reflects many of America’s conflicting roles when it comes to India. First, it served as the keeper of international norms with regard to nuclear non-proliferation. It punished India and Pakistan for their nuclear tests, and then worked within international institutions to guard against further breaches and to impose more global sanctions. Second, it acted as crisis manager between India and Pakistan, attempting to keep tensions from escalating and reducing as much as possible the chance that either side would actually turn to nuclear weapons.

Third, the period following the Kargil crisis was the first real demonstrable time in many years that the U.S. government broke away from treating India and Pakistan relatively equally. By the end of 1998 and into early 1999, Clinton was prepared to abandon the more traditional “Indo-Pak” hyphenation strategy, given concerns about Pakistan’s perfidy and dependability as a close partner (Ganguly 263). Hyphenation was on its last breath, as were U.S. efforts to intervene in the Kashmir dispute. Finally, this period saw increased activism in the Congress and in the Indian diaspora community. Congress tied further military sales to Pakistan’s nuclear programs, but it did not do the same for India. The Indian-American community came out forcefully against U.S. sanctions toward India after the nuclear tests, but they were just as vocal and engaged regarding President Clinton’s trip to India, which again, provided a much-needed breakthrough in ties after a 22-year hiatus of a U.S. Presidential visit. The stage was now set for a deeper relationship.
But that closer partnership would have to wait, as America experienced its own tragic terror attack on 9/11, followed by massive military interventions in Afghanistan in 2001, and then shortly thereafter in Iraq. The 9/11 attacks and its aftermath again brought to light the complexity and contradictions in America’s relationship with Pakistan. Over protestations from the Clinton and Bush Administrations, the Pakistanis failed to take decisive steps to find Osama bin Laden or eliminate his terror network, which included a symbiotic relationship between Al Qaeda (AQ) and the Taliban (Bacon; Raghavan 335-339).

Indeed, the Taliban received safe harbor, training and equipment from within Pakistani territory (Sikri 52-54; Haass 265-266). The Taliban used their freedom of operation within Pakistan to recruit forces and to plan and carry out deadly attacks in Afghanistan either directly or through proxies. Pakistani civilian and military leaders during this critical period, including General Musharraf, promised a crack down on Taliban, AQ, and affiliated groups, but few meaningful steps were taken (Haass 185). Pakistan did allow (under some degree of compulsion) U.S. military and intelligence assets to use Pakistani airspace and to conduct counter-terror operations from Pakistan. While these were controversial steps in Pakistan, the leadership had little choice, and it did mean that the supply of aid, including considerable military and economic assistance, would continue to flow (Raghavan 347, 353, 361).

While India understood the necessity of American engagement with Pakistan in this manner, there were concerns in Delhi that the U.S. had reinstated its tilt
toward Pakistan. With the massive amounts of military hardware and aid, Indian leaders were afraid that it would be nearly impossible to unwind the enhanced level of counter-terrorism and security cooperation, for example (354). But there were other developments coming from Washington that were being watched and welcomed in Delhi – and that was the Bush Administration’s disinterest in ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), let alone getting other countries like India to sign on to its commitments (Talbot 208).

In fact, the Bush Administration’s penchant for unilateralism and its skepticism for binding obligations from international institutions made it far less likely that the U.S. would restart the failed efforts to subject India (and Pakistan) to the international regime governing nuclear proliferation (208-209). On the contrary, the Administration did not feel bound by those rules, and was ready to dramatically alter the system on behalf of India. France had signaled its willingness to explore a special accommodation for India’s nuclear programs years earlier (143). While not yet a dominant international position, there was an emerging reality that India would never give up its nuclear weapons arsenal so long as China and Pakistan maintained their capabilities. It would, therefore, not sign on to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and in the Administration’s view, the CTBT was the wrong vehicle for trying to make India a more responsible nuclear power. The Administration had another plan. It would simultaneously upend the global nuclear order, while also transforming the U.S.-India partnership by changing the global rules on India’s behalf (Raghavan 356). It was a tall order.
There was one other shift in Washington’s thinking that was forcing this extraordinary effort on behalf of India, and that was the accelerating rise of China. President Bush and Secretary Rice expressed significant skepticism at the Clinton Administration’s more engaged approach with Beijing (Talbot 209). Particularly as the U.S. found itself deeply embroiled in the Middle East, and now an intractable conflict in Iraq, the Chinese were moving quickly to expand their influence politically and militarily across the region. The concern was shared in Delhi as well.

The border disputes notwithstanding, the Indian Government was now grappling with the emerging development of a new Asian order where China was dominant. American and Indian interests, therefore, were converging not necessarily to advance a bilateral agenda, but to protect a broader Asian order founded not on Chinese supremacy, but one based on peace, security and freedom in the Indo-Pacific: the so-called liberal democratic order. As former U.S. Ambassador Bob Blackwill writes: “India, driven by its own fears of Chinese domination, supported Washington’s vision over Beijing” (Blackwill and Tellis).

The United States was also grappling with another reality. Given the range of U.S. commitments from the Transatlantic to the Gulf, taking on China or advancing a more ambitious set of initiatives in the Indo-Pacific would be a costly undertaking, both politically and financially (Campbell 17-19). The Bush team grappled with these limitations, as the situation in Iraq grew more dangerous, and American budget deficits and economic uncertainty also began to grow more ominous.

The approach in the Indo-Pacific, therefore, was built on deploying traditional hard-power assets (sixty percent of the U.S. Navy was and remains in the
Pacific theater), with an expanding network of like-minded friends and partners in the region that could help balance the rise of China. In this counter-balancing effort, there was no more important partner than India (Blackwill and Tellis 4). Both Delhi and Washington needed each other in this pursuit, given the mutual interests and constraints that each nation was facing. Developing India’s military capabilities, its power projection abilities, and enhancing its training in integrated military strategies on sea, land and air became firmly part of U.S. policy.

The premise was quite simple: a stronger and more prosperous India was good for the people of India, and for India’s role in the region, and it was particularly important for protecting and advancing America’s strategic interests (3). “Strategic altruism” is how the noted strategic scholar Ashley Tellis framed it. The rough translation was that a strong India, one that is a close partner with the United States, would serve as one of the most effective ways to counter-balance a rising China.

In order to carry out this vision, cooperation would have to accelerate along the defense and security front. That meant more military exercises, a greater liberalization in the export of high technology goods, and new efforts aimed at space cooperation and missile defense (5). The defense track would generate considerable enthusiasm in American industry and in the Pentagon itself. This was a long-awaited defense relationship. India, too, was looking to enhance its standing for the aforementioned reasons, but also because Pakistan had been designated a Major Non-NATO ally by the United States in 2004, a move that took Delhi by surprise (Talbot 222).
The Pentagon was now prepared to make India a full strategic partner. Working with State, the NSC and the Embassy team in Delhi, the U.S. Government was preparing to enter into a formal defense framework agreement, officially designating India a strategic defense partner, while laying out certain key principles. Top among those principles was establishing the foundation for a free and open Indo-Pacific, a vision that would unite India and the United States for the next decade into the current day (Blackwill and Tellis 6).

From the operative text of the agreement here is how the two governments framed the purpose of the enhanced cooperation: “As the world's two largest democracies, the United States and India agree on the vital importance of political and economic freedom, democratic institutions, the rule of law, security, and opportunity around the world. The leaders of our two countries are building a U.S.-India strategic partnership in pursuit of these principles and interests” (Defense Framework Agreement).

The agreement prioritized enhanced defense trade, military exercises, building the capacity of India's military, and significantly, to “collaborate in multinational operations when it is in their common interest.” Such a commitment to multilateral operations with the United States was a huge departure for India and its longstanding preference for non-alignment and strategic autonomy. The agreement and the deepening defense cooperation was also a signal that was received and understood in Beijing, and to India’s dismay, in Moscow as well. The Framework was formally signed in June 2005.
But it was the nuclear basket of issues that would fully transform the relationship. Again, as noted above, the United States was prepared to resume cooperation with India in the civil nuclear arena, and would do so without any such reciprocal requirement for India to forego its nuclear weapons program. (Blackwill and Tellis 5) This was the basic framework for Prime Minister Singh’s state visit to Washington, D.C. in July 2005. The Joint Statement entered into between President Bush and Prime Minister Singh laid out the commitment: “The President told the Prime Minister that he will work to achieve full civil nuclear energy cooperation with India as it realizes its goals of promoting nuclear power and achieving energy security. The President would also seek agreement from Congress to adjust U.S. laws and policies, and the United States will work with friends and allies to adjust international regimes to enable full civil nuclear energy cooperation and trade with India.” (Bush/Singh Joint Statement 2005)

The effort would require the collective efforts of President Bush’s senior national security team to convince international partners to approve the arrangement; it would require a comprehensive effort in Congress to amend the existing laws governing civil nuclear cooperation (non-NPT nuclear-weapons states were not eligible for civil nuclear technologies or fuel and this key tenant was enshrined in U.S. law); and it would mobilize the Indian diaspora into action in a concerted and unprecedented manner (Raghavan 356-357; Chakravorty 279-280)

Again, while the legal and regulatory mechanics on how to implement the deal were complex, the basic thrust of the arrangement was straightforward: India would become eligible for civil nuclear trade, technical assistance, fuel and related
technologies, if it brought its civilian program under international safeguards. The military program would remain out of bounds of the international community. The proposal immediately drew opponents, not just non-proliferation hawks globally, but ironically, in Delhi as well, given what they believed to be an intrusion into India's internal affairs and sovereignty (Ganguly 264; Vickery 79).

The Bush team had its work cut out for it internationally. The civil nuclear agreement would require approval from the 48 members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. There were a significant number of skeptics, including countries that had taken a leadership role in combatting proliferation and upholding the key tenets of the NPT. These included Ireland, Austria and New Zealand just to name a few (Beda). They were unmoved by the strategic case, and believed the U.S. was on a dangerous path by rewarding India's flouting of the non-proliferation rules. Pakistan would be next, they and others warned, suggesting that Pakistan would demand a similar civil nuclear cooperation deal and use its advocate China to block India until such a deal was on the table. China also expressed its reservations. The Chinese did not want to normalize India's nuclear weapons program under any circumstances, and this deal would in fact tacitly accept India's arsenal (Small 51).

It would take three years and the full weight of the U.S. Government, including personal interventions by President Bush, Secretary Rice and others, to clear all the NSG objections (Burns 257-261). The significance of the approval from an Indian perspective was not simply the fact that the NSG had given way to this unique accord -- it was equally as significant that the United States went to bat for India in a concerted and relentless manner. While some nations thought the U.S.
was breaking the system, the Indians saw it as America righting a system that had been for too long unfairly stacked against Indian interests. For this, a significant amount of goodwill was generated, goodwill that repaired much of the damage from the ’70s and during the Cold War. The efforts laid the foundation for even deeper and more complex cooperation in the years ahead (Saran 237-239).

Beyond the required international clearance, the House and Senate also had to act to amend U.S. law to allow the deal to move forward. A carve out for India, and India alone, would have to be written into U.S. law. This was an unprecedented undertaking for a country that had not been top of mind for most policymakers. But there was a growing impetus for the action by lawmakers, and that was due to the increasing influence of the Indian American community, which for the first time was becoming more engaged in politics.

Indian American groups of all kinds came out in force, storming Capitol Hill to make the case for the civil nuclear agreement. A few groups mastered the details of the agreement, but most that intervened made a more general argument, drawing upon their growing influence in business and politics, and conveying to members of Congress that this was one singular priority for the diaspora community. The diaspora groups were also motivated by the transformative nature of the agreement, and the potential it had to jettison some of the historical baggage that held the relationship back. (Vickery 61-63; Chakravorty 279-280).

Congress held hearings in the House and Senate, and the Senate even went into a rare closed and classified session held in the Old Senate Chamber in order to consider more sensitive details about the deal. In the end, the legislative pathway
would also take three years, with the first piece of legislation – the Hyde Act – passing in 2006, and the final bill, following NSG action, advancing in 2008. The Indian American community’s support turned out to be a decisive factor in moving some opponents, some non-proliferation hawks and some who had only recently come to appreciate the political power of this community (Chatterjee).

President Bush would travel to India in March 2006, capping off an intensive year-long diplomatic and political effort to substantially deepen the U.S.-India partnership. By that time, as promised, the Indians had developed a separation plan, walling off the civilian from the military nuclear facilities, and agreeing to the internationally-mandated set of inspections. The plan still had its opponents in D.C., globally, and in Delhi, but President Bush and Prime Minister Singh had managed to break out of existing paradigms on several fronts.

The U.S. found a new middle ground approach to handling India’s nuclear program; it battled for India in the international community and in multilateral institutions; it surged forward on defense cooperation; and with this 2006 visit, the two countries began to construct the components of a full-scale partnership, one that spanned trade, security, energy, and democracy. And back in Washington, the Indian-American community was energized and ready to deploy to help move the civil nuclear accord through Congress, which had become an essential player in institutionalizing ties. In retrospect, regardless of whether India would ever build U.S.-sourced civilian nuclear reactors now seems somewhat beside the point. Rather, it was the totality of U.S. efforts across several domains, not to mention America’s tacit acceptance of India’s nuclear weapons arsenal that led to the
transformation in ties. The question, however, was could this progress be sustained.

2015

In the years following the 2005 and 2006 Singh and Bush state visits, the efforts turned aggressively to the NSG, and required Congressional and Parliamentary approvals for the civil nuclear accord. 2008 would be the critical year when each institution would give its approval. The Indian Parliamentary debates were intense. They brought back much of the historical baggage. Hard core nationalists and socialists were united in opposing the U.S. plan. The votes were so close that the Singh government was almost toppled (Vickery 80). Once the Indian Government decided to move forward, a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was reached on August 1, 2008, and a

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73 Some commentators have suggested that the signing and passage of the civil nuclear accord in Delhi and Washington was the single biggest achievement in U.S.-India ties over the past 72 years. This view tends to ignore many of the earlier developments with Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Clinton, and subsequent events with President Obama and Trump. There is no question that the deal would rank in the top five most important developments between the two nations, but again, this would be the case not because of the nuclear energy the deal might one day deliver, but largely for these three reasons: (1) the United States accepted India as a nuclear weapons power; (2) America went to bat for India in the international system to redress what India believed was an unfair and badly skewed non-proliferation regime; (3) the U.S. Congress and the Indian American diaspora became fully engaged in forging a significant foreign policy victory. Definitely a significant achievement, but it also has to be considered among the tapestry of other complex, durable and historic undertakings over seven plus decades.

74 The Indian parliamentary vote was essentially a vote of no confidence on Prime Minister Singh, the UPA Government and its embrace of the civil nuclear agreement, and specifically the 123 Agreement that laid out the separation plan for Indian civil and military programs. The Government prevailed on that vote 275 to 256.
Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver was secured on September 6, 2008, allowing the deal to come into force (80-81).75

There was new-found excitement for the relationship, but global developments were moving quickly, and not to either nation's advantage. By mid-2008, a historic economic crisis would plunge the major economies into recession. Republicans would soon lose the White House and the Congress. In India, on November 11, 2008, the specter of cross-border terrorism would return, as a coordinated and deadly multi-day assault on hotels and civilians in Mumbai would be carried out by Pakistani based and financed terrorists. The U.S. went back into its familiar role of crisis management, trying to assist India with the sharing of intelligence, but simultaneously urging restraint in India's response (Raghavan 360). The Singh government did exercise significant restraint, but that decision would also take a political toll on the Prime Minister's standing (Nayak 66).

President Obama came into office enthused about India. Like President Kennedy, President Obama had a certain fondness and appreciation for India developed over many years, from his Indian roommate in college to his outreach to the Indian American community as a Senator and Presidential candidate. His Administration would soon include more Indian Americans than any prior Administration (Deccan Chronicle ). The first State Dinner of his presidency would be held for Prime Minister Singh – that was a deliberate decision taken to continue to build on the success of the prior Administration.

75 The House of Representatives would pass the measure on September 27, 2008 with a vote of 298 to 117, and the Senate moved convincingly thereafter on October 1, 2008, with President Bush signing the legislation on October 8, 2008.
But intervening events in India and the region would cause the President and his team to wait. Prime Minister Singh’s United Progressive Alliance II Government would begin to face mounting political opposition, dropping public support, and a gridlocked parliament. Legislative progress and economic reforms ground to a halt. The nationalist movement gained ground. And the signature Civil Nuclear Agreement was dealt a severe blow when a coalition of parties came together to pass the equivalent of a poison pill for nuclear cooperation (Auner). From 2010 to 2013, civil nuclear cooperation between the U.S. and India would grind to a halt, while Prime Minister Singh and his government were growing weaker.

Meanwhile, over the course of this period, the U.S. had not only surged troops in Afghanistan in an effort to defeat the Taliban and related extremist groups, but it also dramatically increased military and economic assistance to Pakistan. The efforts were led by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the long-time foreign policy hand who knew well how to shake-up the U.S. bureaucracy and open up a significant new flow of American cash and supplies to Islamabad. The effort was sharply criticized in Delhi, as many saw the cyclical nature of the American strategy, showering aid on Pakistan while naively hoping that authorities there would finally crack down on extremist groups operating within its borders. In return, as it did in

76 The new law championed by Prime Minister Singh’s opponents would expose U.S. and other multinational companies along the entire civil-nuclear chain to unlimited liability, contrary to international conventions. The legislation was inspired by those who wanted to make sure India would not become a victim to any large scale accidents, as was the case following the Bhopal chemical tragedy, where thousands died and corporate actors largely emerged unscathed. The legislation was also supported by those who believed the civil nuclear agreement was an intrusion into India’s internal affairs, particularly the separation commitments and the opening of India’s civilian programs to outside inspectors. While Prime Minister Singh and his team tried to improve the legislation and limit the damage, the reality is that the liability issue brought the U.S.-India civil nuclear cooperation to a grinding halt.
the 60s and 70s, America got critically important access to Pakistani territory to carry out strikes against Al Qaeda and its affiliates (Raghavan 361-364).

One other development during this time was also causing ripple effects in New Delhi, and that was the deepening engagement between Washington and Beijing. To be sure, the areas for concern about Chinese aggression in the South China Sea (and beyond) and the treatment of its own people were still dominant in the agenda, but many believed Washington was actively moving toward a “G-2” world, where the U.S. and China would shape the modern rules of international commerce and engagement (Raghavan 365; Burns 261). It was these two gigantic economies and militaries that could help diffuse tensions and maintain global peace and prosperity, according the advocates for this arrangement. But it was also the cause for significant alarm in Delhi, where the critics saw only American naiveté and recklessness (Saran 243, 272).

In December of 2013, tensions between the U.S. and India spiked when an Indian diplomat was arrested in New York City on the grounds that she had engaged in human trafficking to bring her household help into the United States. The diplomat was charged, detained, questioned over multiple hours and strip-searched. The incident generated a massive public outcry in India (Kugleman). The Government followed suit with its own retaliatory actions against U.S. diplomats and facilities. By the spring of 2014, relations were in a difficult spot. That quickly began to change with the election of Narendra Modi, the charismatic (and

77 A tax investigation was opened against the U.S. Embassy school, the security barricades were removed from in front of the Embassy, airport privileges were revoked, and visas and dialogues were canceled.
controversial) former Chief Minister of Gujarat. He won a massive victory over Prime Minister Singh’s Congress-led coalition in May 2014.\(^78\)

Predictions in the U.S. government were that Narendra Modi as Prime Minister would not be particularly inclined to further develop American ties. After all, as Chief Minister he had been denied a visa to travel to the U.S. for nearly ten years after it was determined that he was complicit (through his inaction) when over a thousand Muslims were killed in riots in Gujarat (Mann). Most thought he grew disenchanted with the U.S. over this time. These predictions turned out to be wrong.

Soon after he was elected, Modi began planning an official visit to the U.S. In September 2014, he would speak to thousands in Madison Square Garden, telling the crowd that India was back, and that the U.S. and India needed to be better and stronger partners. He would then travel to Washington for extended meetings with President Obama, including an impromptu visit by the two heads of state to the Martin Luther King Memorial. Modi told Obama he wanted to solve the problems with civil nuclear liability and that there was much more the U.S and India could be doing on clean energy, infrastructure development and defense. He wanted to work out disagreements on agriculture at the WTO, and he wanted to be more explicit in shoring up the Indo-Pacific against authoritarianism. It was music to Obama’s ears, and the kind of forward leaning posture that Obama had been waiting for from India since he came to office in 2009. Modi would take another key step. He invited

Obama to be the Guest of Honor at India’s Republic Day in January, the day when India commemorates the passage into law of its constitution (Mohan 120-126).

By early 2015, the Obama Administration had taken a harder line with Pakistan and China. Relations with each country had taken downward turns. The discovery and killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in a compound just feet away from a Pakistani military base simply reinforced a long-held U.S. view that Pakistani authorities were harboring the world’s most wanted fugitive.

Concurrently, the war in Afghanistan dragged on with increasing casualties and with terror attacks from Pakistani based groups like the Haqqani Network on the rise (Raghavan 363). It was enough for Obama to begin the process of decreasing America’s military and economic support to Islamabad.

Chinese relations as well were taking on a more realpolitik approach. The prospect of a G-2 was long dashed, and contrary to the foreign policy elite, China was not interested in political reforms or a more accommodating posture in the South China Sea. Increased U.S. engagement was not changing the Chinese calculus, and therefore, the efforts to work with like-minded partners diplomatically and to create a networked security architecture across the Indo-Pacific was essential (365). India once again reemerged as one of, if not the most, critical partner in this effort. Thus, President Obama’s January 2015 trip could not have been more importantly timed. He would also be the only U.S. President to ever visit India twice during his Administration, an achievement that was not lost on Indian interlocutors.

The Republic Day visit had four critically important components. The first was a breakthrough on addressing the liability issues on civil nuclear cooperation
India finally accepted the international frameworks on capping liability, and it did so through executive order and a Ministry of Justice memorandum. The underlying law remained on the books, which created some concern among the corporate players, but both nations largely succeeded in moving past the liability issue and tried to generate much of the excitement over civil nuclear energy cooperation that was present in the 2005 to 2008 period.\footnote{There were of course other issues impacting nuclear power. The Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan had caused many countries, including both Japan and Germany, to rethink the commitment and safety of nuclear power. In addition, other forms of non-fossil fuel were becoming more available and more affordable, particularly solar and wind. And finally, there were real financing issues and financial viability issues surrounding the key players including the Export Import Bank, as well as private players like Westinghouse. Thus, while the liability issues may have been sorted out, there were still significant countervailing pressures on successfully rolling out new nuclear power facilities.}

The second major component was India and the United States’ most forward leaning joint declaration on the challenges and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific. The declaration entitled “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” reaffirmed each nation’s desire to combat terrorism, proliferation, ensure the seas remained free and open, and for commerce to be carried out pursuant to the Law of the Sea treaty. Further areas of emphasis and cooperation included the need for inclusive economic development and improving regional connectivity. A focus on resolving disputes peacefully and pursuant to international norms was also a key element. The declaration even embraced India’s interest in joining the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation organization (APEC), a major change in U.S. policy. No such declaration had ever been signed between the two countries. While the declaration did not mention China by name, the subtext was clear: a stronger U.S. and India partnership committed to the principles of a
liberal democratic order would help balance China’s rise and its semi-authoritarian impulses and impacts across Asia.\textsuperscript{80}

Third, during the visit, the President was able to speak out about some of the risks India faced from communalism and nationalist trends impacting the strength of India’s democracy. It was a controversial gambit. No U.S. President had ever taken that message directly to the people of India. “India will succeed so long as it is not splintered along the lines of religious faith -- so long as it's not splintered along any lines -- and is unified as one nation,” Obama said in a nearly one hour address. He stressed the country’s shared values and common colonial histories, and ensured the audience understood that America was still on a journey to form a more perfect union – a fact that became clearer as the first African American President described his own challenges with racism in America. It was a forceful, honest and compelling accounting of the great promise both nations shared, but with the equally ominous warning that internal divisions based on race, ethnic identity and religion threatens the progress and prosperity of Indians and Americans alike.\textsuperscript{81}

Fourth, Obama’s visit laid the foundation for what would become one of the defining areas of cooperation in the year ahead: a shared commitment to moving to a more renewable energy mix, supporting India’s ambitious target of 175GW by 2022 and, most significantly, working collectively toward the conclusion of the Paris

\textsuperscript{80} The full text of the Joint Strategic Vision can be found here: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region

\textsuperscript{81} The speech, which was delivered at Siri Fort in New Delhi, can be found here: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/27/remarks-president-obama-address-people-india.
Climate negotiations to combat climate change (Mohan 128). The Paris negotiations would take on a heightened significance as Obama and Modi developed a closer relationship over the year, and as it became more obvious that the totality of the deal hinged on countries like India coming on board. That would be no easy task, as just five years earlier India, along with China and other rising nations, scuttled the Copenhagen Agreement, demanding that there should be a bifurcated system for measuring decreasing carbon emissions – one system for developing countries and a more ambitious set of standards and targets for advanced nations. The same paradigm was being carried into Paris. Obama’s focus was to quash bifurcation, and Modi was his best chance.82

Over the course of 2015, Modi and Obama met a half dozen times, which was also unprecedented. They were developing a close personal relationship and were joined together less by ideology and more by their unexpected and unlikely accession through the ranks of the rough and tumble of political life in Delhi and DC. Political elites doubted them, and yet, there they were together on the world’s stage commanding democracies of over 1.5 billion people. As Obama said in his Siri Fort speech, “we [are] proud to live in countries where even the grandson of a cook can become President….and even a tea seller can become Prime Minister. “

This was the glue that held them together, and allowed them to break through the bureaucracies in both nations to make progress well beyond defense and civil nuclear cooperation. The intensive and laborious efforts of the prior 15

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82 The full joint statement from the U.S. and India issued at the close of President Obama’s Republic Day visit can be found here: [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-statement-shared-effort-progress-all](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-statement-shared-effort-progress-all)
years were beginning to bear fruit in this year, as a more full scale, comprehensive relationship began to develop. Cooperation in third countries also started to take shape, as both nations began working together, albeit cautiously, to include combatting food insecurity in Africa and training women entrepreneurs in Afghanistan. Dialogues on higher education, homeland defense, cyber security, deep space exploration, maritime security, and East Asia were added to the existing government-to-government working groups, bringing the total number of dialogues to around three dozen. And beyond Paris, cooperation in multilateral institutions was beginning to show some gains. The U.S. and India worked through a difficult set of negotiations in Kigali to limit HFCs and in Seoul to agree on some modest global health targets.

And as the Paris negotiations continued, the U.S. and India ramped up the pace and intensity of discussions. The negotiations became personal to each leader, with Obama calling upon Modi to demonstrate India’s leadership and not to be stuck in the paradigms of “developed” versus “developing” of the past. Modi implored Obama not to discount India’s vast development needs, the aspirations of its people to develop and industrialize as fully as America did in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the significant disparity in India’s per capita income versus the West. He also did not want to be talked down to by Western powers. There would be no return to a kind of soft colonialism. Obama understood that, and he treated Modi and India as equal partners (Rhodes). The end result was a breakthrough that left bifurcation in the past, but did allow for differentiation in how each nation would meet its agreed upon green house gas emission targets. The signing of the Paris
Agreement was clearly an environmental breakthrough, but it also gave the global community a view into what was possible when India and the United States could come together on a central issue of our time.

This analysis of 2015 is not to suggest that everything was in perfect alignment. It was not, and there were familiar disagreements about Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. But 2015 does reveal the promise of a full-scale partnership; it demonstrates what can happen through the building of personal and trusted relationships; it shows how India on the global stage can have an impact; it demonstrates the importance of a common vision for the Asia Pacific; and it shows how both nations can collectively have a dialogue on the most sensitive internal issues like minority rights and the protection of diverse populations. The momentum from this year would continue well into 2016, when Prime Minister Modi would give his joint address to the Congress and proclaim that the U.S. and India had indeed gotten past “the hesitations of history.”

**Today**

President Trump has taken two fairly divergent policy pathways in India. The first approach saw significant continuity with the Bush/Obama strategies, which were largely carried forward by National Security Advisor McMaster, Secretary Tillerson, and Secretary Mattis. It would be Mattis, however, that would become India's biggest advocate in the first 18 months of the Trump Administration, arguing for India to be exempt from sanctions directed at those who purchase advanced Russian military equipment (Banerjee). Mattis also led the way in approving the export of unmanned drones, India's first Category 1 system, which
historically had been limited to close treaty allies. He also approved the re-naming of Pacific Command to Indo-PACOM, in a symbolic, but important gesture to India.

General McMaster would preside over Trump's first National Security Strategy, which warned of the new great power conflict, principally with China and Russia, but also signaled a special role for rising and middle powers like Japan, Australia and India. Secretary Tillerson also gave a forward leaning speech on the importance of India in the Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy (this was the follow-on to the Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia Pacific). President Trump, too, was on message, railing on Pakistan in a speech at Fort Meyer and in a series of tweets that berated Pakistan’s failure to crack down on terror groups. It was all welcome developments in Delhi.

But with the changes in personnel (Tillerson, McMaster, and Mattis were all ousted), came a decided shift in policy and soon thereafter, an asymmetry in the

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83 These were unarmed Guardian drones in a sale of some $2 billion. More on that sale and export approval can be found here: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/us-clears-sale-of-2-billion-guardian-drones-to-india-modi-trump-meet/articleshow/59331536.cms.

84 More on the re-naming of PACOM can be found here: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-defense-india/in-symbolic-nod-to-india-us-pacific-command-changes-name-idUSKCN1IV2Q2.


86 Tillerson gave the remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). The full remarks are here: https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/event/171018_An_Address_by_U.S._Secretary_of_State_Rex_Tillerson.pdf?O0nMCCRjXZiUa5V2cF8_NDiZ14LYRX3m.

87 The Trump Fort Meyer speech can be found here: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/world/asia/trump-speech-afghanistan.html; and the Pakistan tweet is here: https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/947802588174577664?lang=en.
approach. The U.S. Trade Representatives Office (USTR) would soon command the policy process, taking the lead from the NSC, State and Defense. The personnel involved seemed largely comfortable with the strategy. Bolton was no admirer of India. This stemmed from his days when he was the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and Non Proliferation during the Bush Administration, where reportedly he opposed the extraordinary accommodation for India as part of the civil nuclear accord (Chaudhuri). Likewise, neither Secretary of State Pompeo nor former Secretary of Defense Shanahan or his successor Mark Esper were India hands, not to mention that they were also tending to multiple crises in other parts of the globe and seemingly somewhat relieved USTR had taken the reigns of the policy.

Trump and Modi did develop a unique friendship, and seemed to have an easy rapport, but underlying it was a tension resulting from an intractable trade dispute, as well as new found concerns on strategic matters such as Afghanistan negotiations, Russia sanctions, Iranian oil sanctions, and the overall approach to China. There were also larger concerns about the Administration’s larger policy objectives in Asia, and how India would fit into the broader strategy.

By the time of the UN General Assembly in September 2019, both sides knew something had to give or the relationship was headed back to one of the cyclical multi-year downturns that had occurred repeatedly in the two country’s shared histories. Thus, a memorable gathering between Trump and Modi in Houston, Texas before fifty thousand diaspora members followed by the expected announcement of a small trade deal helped ease some of the recent tensions and set matters on course for the near term. That small trade deal has yet to be finalized (Linscott).
But developments over Kashmir, including Trump's offer to mediate, and his glowing praise for Pakistan's leader, brought back new concerns about the desire of U.S. officials to balance Pakistan and India (Lee). Has the hyphen returned? It remains to be seen. And, while an interim trade deal may settle some of the short-term concerns, it will not address many of the longer term, structural market access and business fairness issues that continue to plague many U.S. companies and investors. In sum, President Trump seems to have moved to a more transactional approach to India, while the strategic convergence of the prior two decades, as well as the democratic foundations and shared values of the partnership, appear to be second order considerations. Trump, for example, seems content to give Modi a pass on the human rights concerns emanating from India's annexation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, its national registry effort, and on its controversial citizenship bill. Only time will tell if the start of a new downward cycle has begun.

II. A Summary of the Key Events on the Timeline

To recap, here are some of the major developments from these five years:

1962
- Kennedy comes into office with a positive view of India, and an interest in supporting India. A trusted partnership develops between Nehru and Galbraith, who Nehru knows speaks for the President.
- U.S. policy focuses on supporting India's rise – internally with massive development aid, but also supporting and protecting India from external threats, mainly against communism and primarily threats from China.
- The U.S. comes to India's defense when China invades India, providing significant military armaments and logistics support, while discounting Pakistani concerns. The fault lines that led to a China-Pakistan axis of cooperation originate from this period.

1971
- Nixon allows his personal animus toward India and Indian leaders to impact the bilateral relationship, as the relationship heads to a modern nadir.
• Primacy is given to Soviet containment and outreach to China; both come at the expense of America’s relationship with India.
• Pakistan receives maximum support, including in its efforts to suppress a liberation movement in then East Pakistan. The U.S. would turn a blind eye to massive humanitarian abuses committed against Bengalis, as Kissinger deploys his trademark realpolitik approach to Asia.

1998
• President Clinton tries unsuccessfully to intervene in the Kashmir dispute and to get India to sign the CTBT; instead, he is confronted by both Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, which lead to severe and comprehensive sanctions.
• A new and dangerous border war breaks out between India and Pakistan at Kargil, and the U.S. plays its essential role in negotiating a settlement. Along this journey, President Clinton moves firmly toward de-linking/dehyphenating Indian and Pakistan policy, which was a significant shift in policy.
• President Clinton makes a hugely successful visit to India in 2000, marking the modern start to U.S.-India ties, with greater aspiration and hope for the future partnership.

2005
• President Bush abandons the CTBT and NPT framework of prior years and largely accepts India’s status as a nuclear weapons power, with some additional requirements to include separating and declaring India’s civilian nuclear program.
• Significant effort would go into locking in an exemption in the global nuclear energy architecture for India, with intense international diplomacy by U.S. officials, allowing India to participate in civil nuclear trade. The Indian American diaspora and Congress would also play critically important roles.
• The U.S. also declares India a Strategic Partner and enters into a defense framework agreement; President Bush and Prime Minister Singh would develop a close relationship and participate in two state visits in two years (’05 and ’06).

2015
• President Obama becomes the first U.S. President to visit India twice during his presidency, and he develops a close partnership with an unlikely ally in Indian Prime Minister Modi, a right of center nationalist.
• Both nations sign onto a first of its kind and expansive vision statement for the Indo-Pacific, designate India a Major Defense Partner, and launch new initiatives across multiple domains to include cyber security, space exploration, and trade leading to a more full-scale partnership with India.
• President Obama and Prime Minister Modi commit to reaching an agreement to combat climate change, and after months of exhaustive negotiations, strike
a deal to agree to the terms and ratify the Paris Climate Accord, demonstrating the vast potential of the world’s two largest democracies on the global stage.

**The Lessons Learned**

While the preceding examination of the five years in focus is an important analytic exercise, the real value is to extract the lessons from this period, as there were gains and setbacks, periods of convergence and estrangement. Obviously, much has changed over the prior five to six decades, with shifting geo-political alignments, new trading blocs and defense partnerships, but many of the key lessons are very much applicable today. Eight key lessons are set forth below.

**(1) Dehyphenation and Nuclearization Were Critical Turning Points.**

Two policy changes transformed the relationship with India. The first was the eventual phasing out of the need to balance India and Pakistan policy (the so-called “Indo-Pak” hyphenation), and the second was the U.S. decision to drop its longstanding objections to India’s possession of nuclear weapons.88

*Dehyphenation*

The dehyphenation happened over time, with President Clinton making a more decisive policy shift following the Kargil conflict. But the roots of delinking Pakistan from India policy stemmed from a devolution in ties and trust with Pakistan, while the partnership with India was growing and maturing at great speed. Pakistan confronts very real security and development challenges, but it has

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88 One of the additional factors contributing to the hyphen is the how the State Department and other national security agencies are organized, with Pakistan and India in the same bureau, which contributed to the perceived need to maintain balance. Some have suggested that India and China should be in the same bureau, so that more deliberate attempts at balancing can take place. This organizational issue is covered in greater detail in Chapter Three.
also taken key decisions that have driven America and Islamabad further apart, including the rise in power and influence of Pakistan’s military and intelligence forces, the harboring of extremist groups within Pakistani territory, the deepening partnership with China, and the growing risk from nuclear proliferation.89

*Civil Nuclear Accord*

Nuclearization is essentially what took place with the advancement of U.S.-India civil nuclear accord. Yes, it brought India’s civilian programs under international safeguards, inspections and protocols, but it was also, de facto, the international community’s acceptance of India’s military nuclear arsenal. This could not have occurred but for America’s leadership. The policy reasons for the move can be debated, but there can be no doubt about the positive impact the decision had on U.S.-India ties.

As has been stated earlier, the positive consequences from the initiative had far less to do with the delivery of more civilian nuclear power, but more to do with elevating India’s standing and demonstrating U.S. resolve in addressing what India believed were clear inequities in the multilateral system. Allowing for civil nuclear cooperation was only a first step, however, in the view of senior Indian diplomats. They see admission to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, APEC, and even a seat on a reformed UN Security Council, as appropriate next steps. They also acknowledge that only the United States has the ability to move the international system in such a

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89 The hyphen that still exists and that continues to have ramifications is the “Af-Pak” hyphenation. As has been covered here, the continuing inability to find the pathway to a lasting peace in Afghanistan has drawn greater scrutiny on Pakistan’s role in funding, training and facilitating extremist groups, including the Taliban. It has caused a significant fissure in U.S./Pakistan relations, and has created greater latitude for deepening U.S-India ties that may have been more restrained in the past because of Islamabad’s and Washington’s apparent alignment.
manner so as to accommodate India’s interests and address its sense of unfairness. Therefore, righting the international system to give India a seat at the so-called “high table” will continue to be a defining element of cooperation.

(2) The Soviet Union was the dominant third country that impacted U.S.-India ties in the 20th Century, but that role now belongs to China. So much of the American approach in South Asia following India’s independence through the early 1990s was through the prism of the Cold War. As Nixon so forcefully believed, a nation was either with the United States or it was against it. India’s non-aligned position caused the U.S. to look to Pakistan, where it found a willing partner and a basing location for intelligence collection efforts. This led to a security and aid partnership that caused the drift, tilt and eventual estrangement in relations from 1963 to 1998. It didn’t start out this way, as both Eisenhower and Kennedy took more nuanced approaches, and saw the advantages in supporting a democratic India as a bulwark to the spread of communism broadly, not just from the Soviet Union, but from China as well. But eventually, Pakistan would also provide a pathway to Beijing for Kissinger and Nixon. The liberation of East Pakistan was perhaps the final straw that ensured the U.S. and India divide deepened for years to come. But, again, the roots of this divide originate in the effort to contain Moscow.

With Russia in seeming decline and with China’s rise continuing at a dramatic pace and scale, the attention of U.S. policymakers has turned to how to manage and respond to China’s sprawling influence. The U.S. approach has veered from

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90 These intelligence efforts included over flights by the U2 spy planes, including by Francis Gary Powers, who would be shot down and captured in the Soviet Union. His flight was launched from Peshawar.
increased engagement to greater competition, and even confrontation. Despite the shifting strategies, the one pillar that has remained relatively constant for the past two decades has been the importance of India in creating the architecture to help reinforce the democratic order in Asia and help counter-balance China’s rise. For the foreseeable future, this foreign policy challenge of how to handle a rising China will continue to consume American – and Indian – strategic thinkers and policymakers. So long as it does, this will be the new glue holding the U.S. and India together; a bond based not so much on shared values, but more so on shared fears.

(3) Neither side aspires to have an Alliance. If the 20th century liberal democratic order was built upon the alliances and institutions of the post-war period, then the 21st century is on track to offer a very different order where countries work together in more agile, non-alliance frameworks. Some of these may be mainly economic, including through free trade and investment agreements, while others may offer more flexible and non-binding vision statements like the Joint Strategic Vision and Free and Open Indo-Pacific statements of the past five years.

But the absence of a treaty framework does create deliberate ambiguity and doubt. Perhaps that doubt is desirable. For example, in India’s case, it is unclear who would come to its defense and in what capacity in the event of a conflict with China. That may keep tensions low and not risk provoking China with a formal defense treaty. But on the other hand, it also leaves India vulnerable and uncertain about how much it needs to prepare individually or whether it could rely on outside help. Recall the urgent letters from Nehru to Kennedy in 1962. Ultimately, no U.S. ground or air forces were directly provided, but supplies, weapons and ammunition
were supplied in large quantities. It was not the support Nehru wanted in his moment of desperation, as U.S. officials on the National Security Council cautioned India about the request—do the Indians really want this kind of relationship with the United States, they asked?

That begs the question, therefore, what can the arrangement look like and how can nations in this century, principally the U.S. and India, weave together a close partnership that achieves the objectives of an alliance, without compromising either nation’s sovereignty or restricting the pursuit of national interests. The components for this framework are laid out fully in Chapter Three, but at a minimum, 21st century relationships with middle and rising powers will include a mix of military, economic, people-to-people and other government-to-government elements that build a degree of stickiness, durability and trust, without guaranteeing a mutual defense commitment of the kind that formed the foundation of 20th century alliance frameworks.

(4) In a multi-polar world, India has choices, and it is exercising those choices aggressively. The international system has undergone dramatic changes from the bipolarity of the Cold War to the unipolar moment experienced by the United States to the more multi-polar arrangement taking hold today. At the same time, U.S. foreign policy has been undergoing a historic shift. President Trump ran on a foreign policy platform of “America First.” Alliances have not served the nation well, America has given far more than it has received in its international partnerships, and trade deals have come at the expense of American workers, according to the Trump construct and the electorate who thrust him into office. In
its implementation, Trump’s foreign policy has been about curtailing U.S. engagements overseas, castigating allies for not doing more, and bringing troops home from Syria and Afghanistan. From India’s perspective, this moment has also been about American retrenchment within Asia.

Retrenchment, coupled with lingering doubts about American reliability that stem from the events of the early 70s, the sanctions of the 90s, and the continuing security partnership with Pakistan, creates the impetus for India to find other close partners, beyond the United States. This has played out in recent years, with India increasing its ties with Japan, Australia, Germany, France, the Gulf Countries, and even Israel. India’s security partnership with Russia has intensified as well, with a flurry of major defense and energy deals announced over the past several years.

This is a reminder that the power dynamic has shifted, and India now holds many of the cards. As noted in Chapter One, India presides over the fastest growing economy with the largest consumer base; it aspires to be the world’s third’s largest military; and it sits in a critically important geopolitical location. It should come as no surprise that other nations, beyond the U.S., are competing for India’s attention. The U.S. will have to be agile and attentive to India’s interests if it wishes to remain in the top tier of nations closest to India moving forward.

(5) The downgrading in the importance of shared values in the relationship comes with consequences. Shared ideas and values form the foundation for U.S.-India ties. We have seen this throughout history as many of the great writers, philosophers and leaders like Thoreau, Gandhi and Dr. King were influenced by each other, drawing inspiration from common democratic principles
of tolerance, non-violence, inclusion, and social justice. Recall also the importance
that Eisenhower and Kennedy placed on supporting India – the democracy in South
Asia – at a time when democratic principles and values were under considerable
strain. Bush and Obama also drew heavily on India’s democratic trajectory as a
basis to advance and build the relationship. Many advocates for stronger U.S.-India
ties assert that these ideas, principles and values are what set this bilateral
partnership apart from others.

But the history also includes periods when values have been downgraded.
Clearly, this was the case during the Nixon presidency. Nixon not only harbored
personal animus against Indian leaders, it mattered little to Nixon that India was a
democracy or that Indians and Americans shared many of the same values. This
was consistent with the signature realist approach that Nixon and Kissinger
constructed. During that time, there was only one over-arching American interest:
contain the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. Somewhat predictably, the
relationship with India went into a long downward spiral.

There is another consequence to the downgrading of shared values. It does
give India (and to some extent the United States) the space to pursue policies that
they might not have otherwise have chosen. Over the years, the United States has
provided the guardrails against more aggressive Indian behavior toward its
minority communities and civil society. Recall Obama’s Siri Fort speech and the
admonition against splintering the nation along ethnic, religious or sectarian lines.
Not that the U.S. can so easily change Indian behavior, but when the United States
moves to a fully transactional partnership where shared values are not part of the
dialogue, then India obtains greater freedom of action. This can be seen with the recent annexation of Jammu and Kashmir, with the Indian Government facing few consequences for its actions, including and especially from the United States, which has remained exceptionally muted.

(6) The U.S. has played multiple roles in South Asia, including crisis manager and enforcer of global non-proliferation norms. Those roles may no longer be viable. The 1998 to 1999 period illustrated the often competing roles played by the United States in South Asia. It first had to handle the dual nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, resulting in not only U.S. sanctions, but also an American led effort to try to contain proliferation in South Asia and continued weapons development. Additionally, only months later, the United States was brought in to help reduce tensions and find a diplomatic solution to the Pakistani Army's incursion into India at Kargil. It would require diplomacy at the Presidential level to help bring calm to the region. It also changed President Clinton's perception of Pakistan.

Crisis Manager

But these roles may no longer be viable for several reasons. First, with increasing U.S. retrenchment in Asia, and with India’s growing stature on the international stage, there are even fewer pathways available for American intervention in reducing Indo-Pak tensions. While the Pakistanis still seek U.S. help to level the playing field with India, the Indian position has hardened, thereby limiting options for U.S. diplomats. This has certainly been true with regard to Kashmir. The Obama and Trump Administration’s efforts, including personal efforts
by President Trump, to mediate an end to the longstanding border disputes have been publicly and forcefully rebuffed by India.

Second, the prospect that the U.S. is viewed as an honest broker between India and Pakistan is also decreasing. Growing American convergence with India has certainly raised questions about its role as a neutral arbiter and its ability to engage in shuttle diplomacy.

For example, subtle, but nonetheless significant, changes in U.S. policy regarding cross-border attacks originating from Pakistan have brought this tilt toward India to light. In prior years, including in the aftermath of the tragic 11/11 attacks in Mumbai, the U.S. policy was to urge restraint and to help bring the perpetrators to justice. In recent times, however, following cross border incursions, U.S. policymakers did call for restraint, but there were also very specific and clear enunciations of India’s right to self-defense. This has provided India with somewhat greater latitude in its response options and likely narrowed American options to simultaneously call for Indian restraint.

*Enforcing Norms*

With regard to combatting nuclear proliferation, American efforts in South Asia have waned in recent years, even as the proliferation risks have increased. Not only has nuclear weapons production in Pakistan and India continued, but Pakistan has also moved out with the development of tactical and battlefield nuclear weapons. Recent American efforts to extricate itself from the Iran nuclear deal, international arms control treaties, principally with Russia, as well as proposed plans to engage in nuclear weapons modernization, have also called into question
the American resolve for leading on non-proliferation. Nuclear security dialogues with India and Pakistan are largely moribund, and even American efforts in the multilateral level are waning, as evidenced by its inability to secure admission for India into the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Beyond nuclear proliferation, upholding global norms, especially in South Asia, has grown more difficult with America’s increasing suspicion of multilateralism and international norms. On climate change, for instance, American’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, which brought the U.S. and India so close together, has had a decided impact on the ability for American influence on a wide swath of environmental issues in India. Similarly, on human rights, such as combatting human trafficking and child labor, reducing the prospect of communalism, and creating the space for civil society to properly function – all these efforts, which were indeed already difficult, have largely disappeared from the bilateral dialogue with India.

(7) Congress and the diaspora are essential players in achieving the status of natural allies, absent the alliance. Passage of the civil nuclear agreement demonstrated the significant impact of both Congress and the Indian American diaspora in building a modern U.S.-India partnership. As non-treaty partners, India and the United States will have to look at other institutions and mechanisms for bringing the two nations closer together. Congress can help institutionalize the gains in the relationship long after particular political leaders or parties have come to power.
Some have suggested that a trade or investment agreement with India should be prioritized, which would require Congress to take the lead role in evaluating and passing the agreement into law. That pathway will not be easy or non-controversial given India’s often difficult market access and intellectual property issues. The diaspora community will likely have to be called upon again to help move skeptical legislators along the way to final passage of any agreement.

In the defense and security arena as well, Congress was instrumental in moving the defense framework and strategic partnership forward in the mid-2000s, and now again, will be essential in developing the major defense partner paradigm, which was uniquely developed for India. How to maintain Congressional and diaspora interest and involvement going forward will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Three. Especially as executive branch officials in both nations become either overwhelmed with the totality of global issues or disenchanted on aspects of bilateral ties, legislative actions and people-to-people connections can help fill a void and make critical advancements to help round out the totality of the partnership.

(8) Developing Personal Relationships and the Habits of Cooperation

Matter: This may seem like an all too obvious point, but in the U.S.-India context, personal relationships seem to take on greater weight. This was the case with Nehru and Kennedy, Nehru and Galbraith, Bush and Singh, and Obama and Modi. So long as the U.S.-India relationship remains somewhat fragile, with the clear memories of the distinct paths during the Cold War creating some drag on the forward progress, particularly in each nation’s bureaucracy, then certain intangibles
become even more important in moving the partnership forward. That's where the personal relationships come into play.

Nehru defied his establishment by asking Kennedy for help during the Chinese incursion; Kennedy bucked many on his team by leaning so far into the Indian relationship, putting the partnership with Pakistan at risk; Bush and Singh’s personal rapport was critical to sustain difficult legislative victories over a period of three years; and Obama and Modi moved each government forward on climate and into a full-scale partnership when Delhi and D.C. were not fully prepared to go there. The contrast with Nixon or Johnson with Indira Gandhi also demonstrates what can happen when relationships turn toxic.

Beyond the personal relationships, building the habits of cooperation is also important given that the relationship still stands at a relatively early age if one were to treat the end of the Clinton Administration (e.g., the Kargil mediation, lifting of sanctions and the Clinton visit to India) as the actual start of the modern U.S.-India partnership. Using, therefore, the year 2000 as the baseline puts the relationship in a different light. Expectations for progress may be more modest, as there is a recognition that the bureaucracies, legislators, policymakers and militaries have not been working with each other for decades, but rather for only twenty years or less. That means regular meetings, conferences, track 1 and 1.5 dialogues, study groups, exchanges, and forums of all kind are essential. The proliferation of U.S.-India working groups from the Bush through Obama Administrations was often subject to some criticism, but one of the real benefits was not simply the policy pronouncements that were made, but also the greater understanding that was
reached about each other. Tackling the trust deficit must remain a core objective for stronger ties to succeed. Developing personal relationships and building the habits of cooperation are key components of that objective.

_Looking Ahead_

The thrust of this chapter was to delve deeper into five specific periods of bilateral ties, examining the key historical developments, and examining when and why the relationship surged, flattened, or fell short. The chapter then attempted to draw forward those key lessons, so as to learn how to avoid future downturns, to accept modern realities of what is possible, to stimulate new periods of growth and development, to focus on what may be achievable in the years ahead, and to avoid the potential for cyclical or regular downturns. A central theme of this chapter, and indeed this dissertation, is that history matters in this partnership, perhaps more so than most other relationships, and it's essential that the historical lessons are fully understood.

The third and final chapter takes these lessons forward with practical policy recommendations. It is, in many ways, the roadmap for how the U.S. and India can become “natural allies” without the binding quality of a mutual defense treaty or actual alliance. The chapter will look at the structure, diplomatic practice, and areas that should be developed further, as well as those areas that are likely to not bear fruit. It is meant to be a more practical guide based on real-world trends and the shifting geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. The chapter also includes underlying theoretical arguments in the international relations field on balancing, ideas, the habits of cooperation, the importance of individual leadership, and economic
engagement. All are important bedrocks of modern international politics and must be carefully assessed in the U.S.-India bilateral context as more practical foreign policy decisions and diplomatic structures are developed in the years ahead.
Chapter Three

Allies Absent the Alliance

I. The Emerging Disorder

The debates continue about the global order taking shape in a post-American world. This is not to suggest that American power is considerably weaker than in preceding decades. If anything, the American economy and military power have only grown stronger in recent years. American GDP per capita has climbed steadily, unemployment is at historic lows and military spending is at all time highs. But there have been at least two significant changes that raise questions about the emerging international order and America’s role in it.

The first is the apparent desire of the American people to withdraw from the leadership role that the United States has played since World War II in building, shaping and preserving the rules-based liberal order. This is not strictly a Republican or Democratic phenomenon, though President Trump has been the most vocal about bringing troops home and disentangling from international commitments. These calls for American withdrawal from the world are also not new over the course of U.S. history. Consider the strong sentiments and prevailing national mood for global disentanglement and withdrawal following World War I, the Vietnam War and after the second Iraq War as well (Kagan 14-15). It may not be isolationism, but there are gnawing doubts today among the general electorate about the wisdom of America playing its 70-year role in upholding the democratic order, and these doubts have been manifested in U.S. politics, and now U.S. foreign policy.
The second development is the increasing distribution of power on the world stage. A greater number of players are engaged in an ever-more difficult competition in crafting the rules for the 21st century order. The competition emerges from the rise of China, the reemergence of Russia and the increasingly important role played by the middle powers. The last U.S. national security strategy referred to this period of one as renewed great power competition, particularly from Russia and China. China’s rise and Russia’s intentions were covered in detail in Chapter One. And, certainly, the rising and middle powers are increasingly filling the void left by the United States, and seeking to make their own imprint on the evolving order. Established powers like Germany, France, Japan, and Australia, in addition to the BRICS, plus increasingly influential nations like Turkey and Iran, are all playing larger and more consequential roles on the world's stage. The result is a sharing of power across more players and more regions, with growing competition, and as a consequence, a greater struggle in shaping the global order (Haass 201-205).

With the U.S. in seeming withdrawal, and an increasingly vocal set of global actors, the international order has become more fragmented, less certain, and more unstable. Foreign policy commentators like Richard Haass refer to the new order as a “world in disarray” and noted conservative scholar, Robert Kagan, suggests that the “jungle has grown back,” denoting an even more chaotic order (Kagan 10). Robert Kaplan, the author, suggests in a recent book that “Western civilization...is being diluted and dispersed” and that it is lost in a “web of history” with a decomposition process that has already begun (Kaplan 6). He goes on to suggest
that both China and Russia have desires of increasing imperial dimensions, even as they weaken from economic stresses; that partly explains their nationalism, which they need to support cohesion during times of great chaos (32-33). Author Fareed Zakaria argues that the greatest threat to the democratic order is actually the United States, as it goes about weakening and upending the alliances and norms that are required for peace and stability and standards in international life (Zakaria).

These warnings of a world in chaos following U.S. retrenchment are not new. Political scientist Samuel Huntingdon warned that declining U.S. influence globally would lead to “more violence and disorder and less democracy and economic growth” (Huntingdon 83). He called American primacy “central to the welfare and security of Americans and to the future of freedom, democracy, open economies, and international order in the world” (83). And Robert Gilpin argues that the decline of political leadership by the United States, coupled with the diffusion of economic power and the reemergence of economic nationalism, will necessitate a very different international order from the current day (Gilpin).

There is reason for concern. As some have feared, there has been a steady decline in democratic strength and a corresponding increase in semi-authoritarian regimes in South America, Asia, and Europe.91 And as the colonial lines drawn by the British across the Middle East continue to evaporate, difficult struggles for peace, identity, and economic security have created massive refugee movements

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and human suffering, giving extremist groups a continuing lifeline to the disaffected (Kaplan 7-11).

Is the world worse-off and on the verge of sliding into a global conflict? No one knows for sure, of course, and contrary to this recent data and the realist school of thought, there is a vocal group of liberal internationalists who, while concerned about recent American trends toward retrenchment, posit that the world is indeed safer because of institutions, international trade and commercial linkages, and emerging global standards upholding human rights and restricting the use of force to a limited set of circumstances.92

The point of raising these debates and trend lines here is not to prove one side right. No one theoretical framework can explain the complexity and speed of today's global developments. But there are some widely accepted elements that do impact upon the future of the U.S.-India partnership, namely that the 21st Century order will likely be more difficult to manage; U.S. retrenchment will have a sizeable impact; an increasing number of players will fight for their respective interests; and technology, migration, and growing claims of identity will play an even larger role in the years ahead.

With this complex backdrop, one could surmise that like-minded nations working together on behalf of the liberal democratic order will be critically important. As Kagan writes so compelling, the fate of liberalism and democracy is never settled; if democratic states refrain from continuing to shape the world order, others will, and it will be replaced or upended if it is not protected (Kagan 151, 162).

92 These positions are reflected in a number of prominent political scientists, including John Ikenberry, John Ruggie, Robert Keohane and Joe Nye.
Can the U.S. and India take on that responsibility? After all, the two nations collectively include nearly 1.7 billion citizens living in democratic systems. Certainly, there is great promise. But as has been detailed over the course of the first two chapters, while there has been good progress bilaterally, both countries have yet to identify and define what kind of partners they wish to be. Prime Minister’s Vajpayee’s and Prime Minister’s Modi’s call to be “natural allies” has yet to occur in practice or in spirit, and few believe an actual alliance will ever be negotiated. It is worth pausing here briefly to take on the alliance issue -- why is not possible and what will the alternative structure entail?

*Whither The Alliances?*

Following World War II, the United States set out to shape the post-war order, with a sweeping transatlantic and multilateral architecture in Europe, contrasted with a series of bilateral arrangements in Asia (Cha 2). While the European security model was centralized through NATO, the Asian model was implemented through a series of bilateral arrangements that sought to maximize U.S. interests, exert influence in key nations, and to constrain certain anti-communist leaders and states (3). What emerged in Asia was a hub and spoke security model, with the U.S. at the center of this wheel, and with each of the security partnerships constituting the spokes, which in themselves had little cooperation or coordination between them (3). It would be decades before Asia would develop its own more regional based political and economic architecture with APEC, ASEAN and the East Asia Summit.
The hub and spoke model remains largely in place today, though under considerable strain. The Pentagon has been attempting to move to a more “networked security architecture” or “principled security network” where there is greater connectivity amongst the participants in the network or spokes, and where the reliance on the U.S. as the central player is minimized.\textsuperscript{93} As noted, this is indeed still a work in progress. What is not under consideration, however, are additional bilateral military alliances in Asia, or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{94} In fact, the U.S. has not entered a traditional treaty-based, mutual defense military alliance in the past sixty years.

There were at least three reasons that America abandoned its pursuit of alliances in the form of mutual defense treaties. First, the exigencies and crises of the post World War II period would eventually stabilize; while containing the Soviet Union and countering communism globally would remain America’s top strategic focus, it could achieve its objectives through NATO and the bilateral treaties that had been established in Asia. Second, American policymakers would eventually come to see the treaty commitments as not only advancing American interests abroad, but also constraining American choices should the mutual defense provisions be triggered. To bind American decision-making in the way the treaties envisioned would eventually be viewed as too great a compromise on American


\textsuperscript{94} To be clear, the term alliance here is defined to pertain to that narrow group of relationships bound by some degree of mutuality and reciprocal defense commitments to defend against threats. Article 5 of NATO is one such requirement, as is American defense treaty relationships with Japan and Korea and the Philippines. Strategic or security partnerships, absent this treaty-bound set of defense requirements, are not included in this definition of “alliance.”
prerogatives and on its sovereignty. Finally, U.S. defense officials and diplomats would come to find regional defense arrangements and new architectures such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), including more loosely arranged strategic partnerships, preferable to treaty alliances, which were far less elastic or agile. If the U.S. was seeking maximum flexibility and autonomy in deciding when, how and whether to support a partner militarily, it could do so through these new arrangements, as opposed to the more binding treaty arrangements (Menno).

These more loosely governed security partnerships utilize a range of U.S. tools such as defense sales (many of which are financed or subsidized fully by the United States), military exercises and training, intelligence sharing, security dialogues, and non-binding vision statements committing to uphold a certain set of principles and values. The net result is the weaving together of a broad tapestry of cooperation that serves multiple purposes to include: (a) enhancing the capabilities of the partner state ideally, so that it can take on some degree of burden sharing in the security domain; (b) giving the U.S. leverage and perhaps an inside track in helping to shape the partner's foreign policies; and (c) creating some degree of ambiguity in whether and how the U.S. would intervene to help the partner if threatened or attacked, which keeps potential adversaries guessing about how to assess the costs of an attack. The security partnerships have been effective, and they have proliferated. The mutual defense treaty, on the other hand, as a tool of foreign policy, has become a historic relic.
There is one additional obstacle to India and the United States entering into a formal treaty and that is India’s fear of coming too close into America’s orbit or sphere of influence. India seeks as a paramount national imperative not to be “entrapped” by U.S. foreign policy, both for political reasons and due to strategic concerns. The politics of India, where nationalism is on the rise, and where anti-colonial feelings still permeate the body politic, allow leaders little room to negotiate any formal agreement with a Western power that in any way could be perceived as subjugating India’s interests. Binding commitments, by definition, in India are often perceived as limiting India’s autonomy and freedom of action.

Moreover, as Glen Snyder writes in his work on alliances, after the alliance formation, some countries are confronted with either (a) abandonment; or (b) entrapment. In the abandonment scenario, the concern is that the other nations will fail to live up to the binding commitments made in the underlying agreement. And in entrapment, it is the inverse concern of being lured into another nation’s conflicts, which could come at great human, financial and political cost (Snyder 466-467). India, indeed, shares both of these concerns simultaneously even as it considers non-binding defense arrangements that are far less onerous than any treaty undertaking.95

How, then, can the U.S. and India become the “natural allies” envisaged by Indian and American leaders, absent a true alliance? And how, can the approach go

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95 These other security arrangements include the so-called defense foundational agreements, such as the logistics agreement (LEMOA), the communications agreement (COMCASA) and the basing and supply agreement (BECA). These agreements, which fall short of any alliance type commitment, have taken over a decade to complete in the bilateral channels, and the remaining ones are still under consideration.
beyond simply one of a security or strategic partner? How can the lessons of history be applied while collectively tackling the very real challenges to the global order today; and how can the partnership take on the kind of binding quality with a degree of “stickiness,” committing each nation toward the fulfillment of shared objectives, without compromising either nation’s sovereignty or freedom of decision-making?

As was discussed in Chapters One and Two, the current bilateral construct, while resulting in good progress over the past 18 years, has left significant gaps, with India not being a top foreign policy priority of the U.S., with little operational application of the existing security partnership, with continuing trade and economic frictions, and little ability to advance or discuss shared values. The current approach is in need of a reset. The remaining pages of this chapter delve more deeply into the components of a modern, flexible and effective U.S.-India partnership; one that advances each nation’s interests, while serving a broader global good as well. These components are:

(1) Ensuring the right bilateral structure exists to maximize the benefits of cooperation (pages 148 to 160);

(2) Highlighting the role that ideas and institutions play in the relationship (pages 160 to 173);

(3) Placing adequate attention on China and finding the right mix between engagement and balancing (pages 173 to 181);
(4) Building the economic linkages that transcend national capitals and that continue to link the two nations in important ways (pages 181-190); and

(5) Continuing to find ways to institutionalize key aspects of the relationship – in this role, the U.S. Congress will be critical; and so, too, will be working with diaspora groups (pages 190-196);

II. Structure and Organization Matters

Is the United States properly organized to capitalize on a stronger relationship with India? Probably not. There are at least three main problems with the current structure: (1) there is a misalignment in approaches between the State and Defense Departments; (2) as much as the hyphen between India and Pakistan was to be dropped from U.S. policy some 20 years ago, it is still very much alive within the State Department’s South and Central Asia Bureau (SCA); and (3) the way in which the two governments interact is still very uncoordinated, unfocused and erratic. Each of these is addressed further below.

State and Defense Department Misalignment

The State Department has six regional bureaus covering the globe, with each bureau led by an Assistant Secretary. The South and Central Asia Bureau is the Department’s newest bureau, created in 1991 through an act of Congress.96 Reports at the time indicate the State Department did not want or seek the new bureau, but Congress, particularly Representative Steve Solarz, then a senior member of the

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House Foreign Affairs Committee, was insistent.\textsuperscript{97} At that time, India resided in the Near East Bureau. Under the Solarz legislation and initiative, India would move to the new SCA Bureau, which would also include Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Some 15 years later, the Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan would also be included within the Bureau.

The Defense Department also has six regional unified combatant commands, each led by a four-star flag officer, and each comprised of multiple services and vast capabilities.\textsuperscript{98} Responsibility for India resides in the newly named Indo-Pacific Command (or INDOPACOM), headquartered in Hawaii. The Indo-Pacific Command includes some three dozen countries, spanning a wide swath of Asia from India across East and Southeast Asia to Australia, covering 50\% of the world’s population.\textsuperscript{99} CENTCOM, meanwhile, starts where the Indo-Pacific Command stops in South Asia, by picking up those nations west of India, which includes Pakistan through Central Asia, and also Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf and Middle East.

As noted in earlier chapters, one legacy (and current) issue that continues to divide U.S. and Indian policymakers is America’s security partnership with Pakistan. While the overall numbers in the amount of security assistance have come down in recent years, a significant military and intelligence relationship still very much

\textsuperscript{97} Congressman Solarz was apparently annoyed that the Assistant Secretary for the Near East did not have enough time to spend on India or on him, thus he pushed for creation of a new Bureau dedicated to South Asia, and India in particular. See https://www.rediff.com/news/special/no-putting-india-pak-in-same-basket-us/20160202.htm.

\textsuperscript{98} There are a total of 11 combatant commands, with six regional commands. More details can be found here: https://www.defense.gov/Our-Story/Combatant-Commands/.

\textsuperscript{99} For more information about Indo-Pacific Command, see: https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/.
exists. Several hundred million dollars annually continues to be appropriated for Pakistan security assistance, in addition to the vast arsenal of U.S. military hardware already in the country, which requires regular service and maintenance by the Defense Department and U.S. contractors. The security partnership is, thus, ongoing despite its challenges.

Much of the advocacy for the Pakistani assistance -- the direct support, the training, the exchange programs, and weapons procurement programs -- are run by CENTCOM. It is a core part of their mission, and exceptionally well-trained professionals carry out this mission to support Pakistan, principally in its fight against extremist groups, on a day-to-day basis. There is, however, regrettably often little coordination between CENTCOM and INDOPACOM on their military assistance strategies, resulting in an actual seam in how U.S. security policy is carried out in South Asia between the two largest and most conflict prone nations – India and Pakistan.

The SCA Bureau, meanwhile, sits straddled between CENTCOM and INDOPACOM. Those within SCA who work on India, from the defense staff in New Delhi through the U.S. Ambassador and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for India, are generally unaware of the CENTCOM strategy and assistance plans for Pakistan. Ideally, through the National Security Council process and greater inter-agency coordination, the Indo-Pak seam between the two commands would be minimized and there would be full and complete coordination within the SCA Bureau and in the implementation of security assistance programs in Islamabad and New Delhi. But, regrettably, that is rarely how the system works in practice.
To confuse matters even further, the State Department Bureau that is synched with INDOPACOM is the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific (EAP) Affairs, which overlaps completely with the combatant command’s area of responsibility, that is, except for one nation: India. Again, while senior officials in EAP can work hand-in-hand with INDOPACOM on a joint diplomatic and military strategy for the region, India and its corresponding SCA Bureau are not part of that conversation. Thus, too few truly coordinated regional discussions blending diplomatic, economic, political and military tools take place within the U.S. bureaucracy because of these seams and stovepipes. This is especially problematic when the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” has become a cornerstone of the Administration’s policy in Asia, which is meant to be an integrated, multi-sector and agency approach.

There are at least two solutions to be considered to address the misalignment: one is a Defense Department solution, and the other is a State Department solution. The military option is to consider moving India into Central Command and out of the Indo-Pacific Command. The diplomatic option is to consider moving India out of the South Asia Bureau and into the East Asia and Pacific Affairs Bureau. While these may seem like overly inane inside-the-beltway discussions on structure, they each would have real world impact, if implemented.

Moving India into the Central Command would likely face significant opposition in New Delhi, as it would perceive its military cooperation with the United States now linked, coordinated or balanced in some way with Pakistan within CENTCOM. There are also more practical concerns about potential exercises
in the theater of operation, which invariably would require India and Pakistan to work together, or at least share information with each other. That possibility, at least at this point in time, therefore, would not be workable. Additionally, India sees its future in East Asia, tied to the technologic and economic powerhouses like Japan and Korea, where India’s capable military, especially its navy, could engage in training and exercises with like-minded militaries, and where the nations involved would share somewhat similar concerns about the rise of China. That means India remaining firmly in the Indo-Pacific Command.

The remaining possibility, therefore, is the diplomatic option of moving India into EAP. This is a proposal that requires some careful consideration, as it would have considerable benefits in constructing a more unified Asia policy, but it could also leave the SCA Bureau gutted of its largest country. Importantly, it would also address another concern, which relates to the fact that the hyphen between India and Pakistan is still alive and well within the SCA Bureau. This is discussed further below.

**Eliminating the Bureaucratic Hyphen**

Bureaucracies have their own internal politics and decision-making processes that can be contentious at times, as various organizational units fight against each other to see that their solution emerges as the decided-upon policy (Allison, Conceptual Models). Advocates for the process suggest that this is the best way to produce an output that is well-debated and examined from all sides. Within the bureaucracies or departments, there are further silos, where at least in the State Department, staff are focused on a set of regional or functional issues, and these are
then broken down even further, perhaps by country or by single issue. This is indeed the case in the SCA Bureau at State, where there are two distinct teams – one for India, and one for Pakistan. Each of these teams is comprised of talented professionals looking to achieve a degree of success for the relationships on which they are working.

In his classic work on organizational and bureaucratic politics, Harvard’s Graham Allison examined the decision-making process leading to President Kennedy’s blockade of Cuba during the 1962 Missile Crisis. In his bureaucratic model, he concluded that each component of the inter-agency came to the table with preconceived interests and biases. They carried out their work in individual stovepipes, and with a fairly high degree of competition between the various units of government, each thinking that its way was the best way forward for the President. To reach a consensus position required bargaining and power sharing amongst the various players at the table (Allison, Conceptual Models).

The same kind of bargaining and power sharing takes place within the State Department’s regional bureaus, as advocates for particular regions, countries and issues jockey for primacy and for “wins” in the portfolio in which they are working. Often, this is a contest over resources or the Secretary of State’s time for a visit, meeting or summit. But, in other cases, there are likely competing interests between the policies formulated for two nations, which are often not reconcilable. This is particularly true where there are significant tensions between the countries, as is the situation with India and Pakistan.

100 Of course, there are other sections and teams working on Central Asia, Afghanistan and the other countries of South Asia.
The Pakistan teams and the India teams work rather independently, despite being housed in the same Bureau. The Deputy Assistant Secretaries responsible for each nation are supposed to confer, but certain plans and policies may get quite advanced before real consultations occur. Where there are significant potential collateral impacts of a planned policy initiative, the Assistant Secretary will try to resolve the differences internally. At times, if the impact or policy initiative is so consequential, it may trigger a formal White House process to review and reconcile the proposed policy.

As Allison points out, in the federal bureaucratic system, including in the Department of State, the bargaining of the various players involved in the decision-making process tends to produce brokered solutions, where each player can walk away with a win, real or perceived. This can lead to more balanced and less ambitious outcomes, as the push and pull of the policy process does not allow one particular office or account get too far ahead. Again, this is especially true where the sensitivities between two nations may be particularly acute, as they are between India and Pakistan. What develops, therefore, is a bias toward incremental change, so as not to upset or destabilize either the U.S.-India or U.S.-Pakistan relationship. The end result becomes a kind of continuously hyphenated policy process and set of outcomes, where the key players, while competing aggressively, will in the end not seek to unduly privilege one country over another in order to minimize disruptions within the U.S. government and within the region. Thus, the hyphen lives on.

This is, however, yet another reason to consider moving the India portfolio into the EAP Bureau. Not only would there be complete alignment with Indo-Pacific
Command as discussed above, but the predilection toward maintaining some degree of balance between India and Pakistan policies would be less relevant. A strong and growing U.S.-India relationship, far from causing imbalance within EAP, would also likely serve key goals within the China account. If properly calibrated, progress with India could bolster the democratic rules-based order in Asia. Moreover, India views itself as a growing Pacific power. The Prime Minister has even developed his own “Act East” set of policies, in order to materially change India’s focus from one of conflict and risk in the West to one of commerce, commercial opportunity and connectivity in the East.101

Moving a major account like India into a new Bureau is not risk-free. Clearly, one would have to assess carefully the impact to the countries and issues remaining within the SCA Bureau; and more fundamentally, whether an SCA without India is big enough and busy enough to justify remaining a stand alone, separate Bureau. The other related issue is what would happen to those nations bordering India on the North and East, mainly Nepal and Bangladesh and Bhutan? Would those nations also have to move to EAP? Probably so, which then raises yet another question as to whether EAP would at some point, grow too large and unwieldy, especially with three larger powers of Japan, India and China. Finally, what about the Senior Director for South Asia on the National Security Council? Would his or her jurisdiction have to change as well? These are all resolvable questions, however, with some careful study and planning. The goal should be to move

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101 More on India’s "Act East" policy can be found here: https://www.brookings.edu/research/acting-east-india-in-the-indo-pacific/
forward confidently with an India policy that is fully aligned and coordinated with the military’s combatant command and State Department’s regional bureau, and that is not restrained by internal organizational balancing dynamics.

Engagement with a Purpose

The way the U.S. government has engaged with India over the past several decades has evolved considerably. The rise and fall of these engagements tracks, in many ways, the good and bad times in the relationship. There was a flurry of wide-ranging engagements, across topics and agencies, during the later part of the Eisenhower and Kennedy years, followed then by almost no engagement thereafter except for sporadic security-focused discussions between senior officials, and most of those from very different points of view (Johnson and Nixon with Indira Gandhi, for example). The Clinton Administration attempted to renew and strengthen engagements along two fronts: (1) non-proliferation; and (2) regional security. The non-proliferation dialogue was a failure, while the regional security focus helped deliver an important peace agreement with Pakistan following the Kargil invasion. But the real surge in government-to-government ties occurred from consideration of the civil nuclear agreement in 2005 to the early part of the Trump Administration.

The 2005 to 2016 period in particular witnessed a proliferation of government-to-government dialogues in defense, space cooperation, trade, health, energy and homeland defense. The deepest cooperation, outside of the State Department, occurred in the Pentagon and active military channels. By 2015, economic and foreign policy issues were consolidated into one comprehensive, annual meeting called the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue (SCD), chaired on the
U.S. side by the Secretaries of State and Commerce. But this dialogue was discontinued by the Trump Administration, and replaced with another defense/foreign policy engagement called the “Two plus Two” chaired by the Secretaries of Defense and State.

There will never be a centralized plan and schedule of engagements that two governments as large and complex as the United States and India could simply roll out year after year. But there can be a more methodical and unified plan to engage the Indian government on several fronts, with a set of more connected themes and objectives. This will take direction from senior leaders on the American side, as well as buy-in from the Indian government. But based on the historical lessons covered in Chapter Two, there are at least three ways to improve the engagements:

(1) Connect more fully the economic and strategic issues. These are currently treated in separate streams of engagement and communication. The line between a strategic and economic matter has become less clear in recent years, with the increasingly important impact that trade and commercial matters can have across the totality of a bilateral relationship. This is obviously playing out in real-time today with the U.S.-China trade and technology disputes. The resolution of these issues will affect strategic ties with China. It is another reason the U.S.-China commercial and strategic dialogues have been consolidated for a whole of government approach annually. There is no reason to follow a different playbook for India, where the trade and economic matters are of increasing centrality to the relationship, and where, like China, these issues can poison
strategic cooperation and affect the overall direction of ties if not
nurtured carefully.

(2) **Focus the areas of cooperation to a manageable number.** During the
heights of cooperation in the Obama Administration, the number of
government-to-government dialogues had grown to nearly 40+
engagements. The proliferation reflected the deepening of ties, which did
help to build trust and cooperation where it had not existed before, such
as in joint peacekeeping training or disease eradication efforts. Those
efforts should obviously continue where appropriate, but government-
sanctioned dialogues should be more focused and limited in number in
order to reflect and advance bilateral priorities. Given the demands for
competing resources over the time and attention of U.S. and Indian
officials, the focus would likely be a welcome development, and it would
aid in ensuring the dialogues would actually take place on a regular
calendar. Again, based on historic precedent and current issues of
concern, the dialogues could, for instance, continue to focus on:
(a) defense cooperation; (b) trade; (c) cyber security; (d) climate; (e)
health; (f) immigration and consular matters; (g) high tech; (h) space
cooperation; (i) infrastructure and connectivity; and (j) regional security.
This is just one possible list, and each Administration will have to reflect
its own priorities, but the dialogues should reflect a careful inter-agency
process where the key bilateral priorities are identified, perhaps for a
multi-year period, where the dialogues are used as an instrument to advance those priorities.

(3) **Regularize head of state engagements.** There may be no more precious commodity than the time available to a head of state for the meetings he or she conducts with foreign leaders. These are hard to schedule, with each engagement fought over by the White House and inter-agency players. Regular meetings and engagements are generally reserved for close allies and partners. Prime Minister Abe of Japan has met or spoken by phone with President Trump some 50 times in the past three years, for instance.\(^{102}\) Visits between U.S. and Indian leaders have not occurred with any degree of reliability. Recall the 22-year gap in visits of a U.S. President to India from President Carter to President Clinton. From 2010 to 2014, President Obama and Prime Minister Singh had few official engagements on the margins of other bilateral forums; and from the summer of 2017 to 2019, President Trump and Prime Minister Modi did not hold any separate bilateral meetings. Two years can be an especially long time, given the speed of global events. The historical record illustrates how important the heads of state meetings can be in U.S.-India ties by developing trusted relationships, even personal friendships, and breaking through the blockades of each bureaucracy, when necessary. A relatively modest goal would be to aim for one annual bilateral meeting between the American President and Indian Prime Minister. This

meeting does not have to take the form of an official summit or state visit, and could even occur on the margins of a regularly scheduled multilateral gathering like the G-20, the East Summit or the UN General Assembly. The more important outcome is for the meeting to occur annually, and for both bureaucracies to go through the planning process to identify the top issues and resulting deliverables. This kind of preparation will help sift through the range of complex matters that could be on the agenda, narrowing the focus to the most vital for each nation. If the U.S. aspires to a more fulsome relationship with India, taking somewhat extraordinary and unconventional steps may be required. Locking in an annual head of state meeting could be one such step.

This first section was meant to remind readers that the structure, shape and frequency of engagements can matter, just as much as the topics discussed in those engagements. But the content matters too. The following sections attempt to get more into the core areas of cooperation that could form the basis for a modern and durable partnership with India.

III. Ideas and Institutions

Ideas

Over the 72 year relationship with India since its independence, the American approach to India has taken a decidedly realist approach at times. There is no better example than the Nixonian policies attempting to contain the Soviet Union, develop outreach to China, and reward a willing partner in Pakistan,
regardless of the costs to India. Recall Nixon’s and Kissinger’s view that it did not matter whether or not India was a democracy. U.S. interests were paramount.

Contrast Nixon’s approach with Eisenhower in his second term, or with President Kennedy’s or President Obama’s views, namely that it, in fact, mattered greatly that India was a democracy. Shared values connected the two nations in a manner that was unlike many other bilateral partnerships, particularly those in Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. All three Presidents believed it was critical to support the Indian model as a counter to China’s more authoritarian framework it was espousing across Asia. President Obama took the values conversation a step further, introducing the strength and inclusiveness of India’s democracy as a topic for the bilateral dialogue. He cautioned India against being splintered along religious or sectarian lines, and warned of the dangers to India by explaining the American experience along these same lines, and his own difficult times confronting racism.\footnote{See President Obama’s remarks at Siri Fort in New Delhi on January 22, 2015, which can be found here: \url{https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/27/remarks-president-obama-address-people-india}.} Though difficult at times, it was a bilateral conversation that was grounded upon a set of ideals and ideas.

It is these and other ideas that make the U.S. and Indian partnership distinctive and resilient during times when the two governments may be disengaged or worse, temporarily estranged. One way to think about the kinds of ideas – and values – that bind both nations together is to divide them into three groupings. The first is a set of ideas surrounding the colonial experience and the fight for social, economic and racial justice. These are best reflected in the writings and
actions of Henry David Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King. The second grouping concerns the ideas surrounding the core pillars of the American and Indian democracies, and the commonalities that exist. These beliefs and practices can be found in recent times in the correspondence and teachings between B.R. Ambedkar, India’s constitutional architect, and Professor John Dewey from Columbia University, one of Ambedkar’s professors at Columbia. The third grouping is a product of the last two decades, and these are the shared ideas and values surrounding the functioning of the international system and the promotion of the liberal democratic order, especially in Asia. There are some core principles that India only first publicly embraced with the United States in 2005 in the Defense Framework Agreement and then again in January 2015 in the Joint Strategic Vision Declaration. Each of these three categories is examined further here.

**Social, Economic and Racial Justice**

Thoreau was a leading transcendentalist of the mid-1800s whose *Civil Disobedience* became a clarion call for the marginalized and oppressed around the world. Decades later, one of those fighting injustice in Johannesburg, South Africa, was a young Indian lawyer, M. K. Gandhi. When writing his *Letters To America* in 1942 where he argues for U.S. support in India’s independence movement, Gandhi writes: “You have given me a teacher in Thoreau, who furnished me through his essay on the ‘Duty of Civil Disobedience’ scientific confirmation of what I was doing in South Africa” (Hendrick 462). Gandhi expresses a similar expression in his letter to President Roosevelt during that same time period, noting “I have profited greatly by the writings of Thoreau and Emerson.” (462)
What were these ideas? American philosophers like Thoreau had built upon the American revolutionary experience to preach a more universal justice against oppressive and unjust governments through principled, peaceful resistance. Thoreau, for example, writes in *Civil Disobedience*: “Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also prison,” and that “a minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then” (Thoreau). Resistance was not only required, it was part of an individual’s duty, but not through violence and armed struggle, rather through discourse, service, and if necessary, through peaceful protest and civic action.

One should not so easily suggest that Gandhi’s legendary stature and achievements are due to handful of Western philosophers and writers. That would greatly oversimplify and understate the historic quality of his own persona and achievements. But there can also be little doubt that the concepts expressed by the mid 19th century American writers did influence Gandhi’s worldview, and did help shape his philosophy of non-violence and passive resistance, or “Satyagraha.”

Gandhi’s work would go on to influence a leading American civil rights icon, Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. King would later write: “It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking” (King ch. 6). He goes on to state that Gandhi’s non-violence philosophy “was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom” (ch. 6). Underlying the Thoreau, Gandhi and King connections was a fundamental sense and yearning for fairness and justice for all peoples, regardless of economics, social status, race or identity; and a sense that
governments, if left unchallenged, could not only corrupt, but could oppress the vulnerable, weak and voiceless. These are the uniquely American and Indian sentiments that helped shape each nation’s respective histories. They are a shared value system, rooted in post-colonial experiences, that very much live on today in the fabric and political movements of both countries.

**Democracy**

B.K. Ambedkar and John Dewey’s journey together conveys a similarly important impact on society, law and justice. Ambedkar was an Indian “untouchable” who overcame significant odds to lead Indian constitutional and legal reform efforts, fighting for the marginalized classes. Canadian scholar Arun Mukherjee calls Ambedkar “a man of action, a political leader who fought a battle for the rights of the most marginalized people in India, a battle this comparable, in many ways, to those fought by leaders like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela” (Mukherjee 348).

John Dewey was an acclaimed American scholar who taught at Columbia University for three decades. He was a leader on social reform, and particularly focused on the kind of education required to build successful, inclusive and vibrant democracies. He would teach Ambedkar for three years while he was a student at Columbia. Dewey and Ambedkar’s collective view was that societies must continue to evolve. The human condition is one that requires constant reform and learning; and much of a nation’s history and practice must not necessarily be carried forward for future generations. In fact, much of it, such as caste-based discrimination in India, or racial segregation in the United States, must be forcefully rejected.
Ambedkar was the practitioner of this calling, while Dewey was the teacher and theorizer. As Mukherjee so vividly explains, “Dewey only played with the matches when he reflected in the subjunctives about the pernicious effect of idealizing the past. Ambedkar actually set the ‘dead wood’ afire.” (349)

Again, collectively, the two set out to forcefully defend inclusive democracies. Dewey thought the democratic ideal was embodied in the slogan of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity (351-352). He would go on to write that “a democracy is more than a form of government, it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (351). He further emphasized the need for all social groupings within society to be heard and to be able to participate on equal terms, regardless of their particular material means or power; this was a critical aspect of democracies he called “social endosmosis,” which rejects the divisions between a privileged and subject class (352).

Ambedkar would put these important philosophies into practice when he was called upon to lead India’s drafting process for its constitution as the government’s first Law Minister in 1947 (367). He was consumed with ensuring India’s constitution had such safeguards to ensure all members of society were heard, represented and could stand on equal footing with the rich and powerful. And it was not enough for just the lower and marginalized classes to vote and to be heard on the streets. Ambedkar (and Dewey) strongly believed that the historically marginalized groups must also participate in the government itself, through elected and administrative offices (362).
Thus, Dewey and Ambedkar outline what have become core tenets of American and Indian political and legal philosophy: governments must be constructed for the people and of the people in order for the rule of law to matter. Inclusiveness, free speech, transparency, the equal application of the rule of law – all were required in modern-day democracies to treat all fairly, to curb the excesses of men, and to guard against corruption and a consolidation and misuse of power by powerful interests. Ambedkar would ultimately resign his post as Law Minister in 1951 as he grew disenchanted with the progress made in advancing his, and by extension, Professor Dewey’s, views on justice and inclusion. Such are the struggles that continue today in both nations to form a more perfect union. Shared democratic values, shared struggles to secure that democratic future, and shared sacrifice are very much part of the bilateral fabric that continues to bind both nations together.

The International Order

The final category of shared ideas, ideals and values surrounds the building and sustaining of the international order. As has been covered here in prior chapters, for decades India was reluctant to play a leading role globally in promoting such values outside of its own borders. It was non-aligned and practiced strategic autonomy, and it was giving neighbors and partners the chance to develop their own systems, free from what could be perceived as outside interference. But as India became a more confident player in the international system, as some of its mighty development challenges were brought under better control, and as the China model began to challenge the prevailing order in Asia, India became more
outspoken and engaged. In the bilateral channels, this first comes to light with India entering into the Defense Framework Agreement with the United States in 2005.104

The relevant components related to key concepts and ideas includes the following:

- As the world’s two largest democracies, the United States and India agree on the vital importance of political and economic freedom, democratic institutions, the rule of law, security, and opportunity around the world.

- Changes in the international security environment have challenged our countries in ways unforeseen ten years ago.

- The U.S.-India defense relationship derives from a common belief in freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, and seeks to advance shared security interests.

The Framework went on to declare a number of shared security interests, which included defeating terrorism and religious extremism, preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and significantly, protecting the free flow of commerce via land, air and sea lanes. As noted, this was the first effort by both nations to declare a shared vision for upholding the rule of law, committing to institutions and jointly noting the importance of political and economic freedoms. It was a significant departure from the past, and an important statement of where both countries stood on key ideals and big ideas.

Over the next 10 years, in the heads of state visits in 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2010, the accompanying joint statements took the defense framework vision further, expressing support for joint democracy promotion efforts, including this 2009 statement that included some forward leaning language on shared values:

The two leaders noted that the shared values cherished by their peoples and espoused by their founders – democracy, pluralism, tolerance, openness, and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights – are acquiring an increasingly greater prominence in building a more peaceful, prosperous, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. These values are exemplified by the vibrant linkages between their peoples, which are a unique asset for both countries, and are reflected in the role played by the Indian-American community.105

But it was the January 2015 Joint Strategic Vision For the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region that most crisply and boldly set out the two country's hopes and expectations for upholding the liberal rules-based order in Asia. The declaration went on to pledge to develop regional security and infrastructure, to uphold the Law of Sea and to resolve disputes peacefully, to combat proliferation, and notably, to work together across the region “to promote our shared values that have made our countries great,” including a commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.106 So, in a few short years, the commitment to work across Asia to promote shared values had taken root.

From the ideas and values on social justice and equality shared by Thoreau, Gandhi and King; to the democratic ideals, social inclusion and equal representation


advocated by Dewey and Ambedkar; and to the more pan-Asian commitment to support democracies and promote shared values and uphold the liberal democratic order, as reflected in the evolution of ties from 2005 to 2015; the United States and India have shared a critically important set of values together, based on key ideals and ideas, and grounded in justice, fairness, and mutual security. Maintaining the high-level attention and commitment to these values would seem to be a critical component of developing U.S.-India ties in the years ahead.107

Institutions

Institutions can play a more prominent role in helping to forge stronger U.S.-India ties. On the one hand, institutions have been important in advancing some top priorities, such as when India and the U.S. came together to agree on the terms of the Paris Climate Agreement within the UN Climate Change Conference. Additionally, the framework for the U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement emerged from the international non-proliferation regime and the Nuclear Supplier’s Group, also a key institution. And American support to reform the UN Security Council permanent membership to include India was an important signal that institutions had to be reformed in order to better represent India’s 1.3 billion people. But as was discussed at the close of Chapter One, the past practice of recent decades has not resulted in active cooperation or consultation with India within international

107 There are, of course, other shared values that are difficult to measure, but no doubt account for the significant convergence between Indian and American entrepreneurs and innovators; the increasing tie-ups between U.S. and Indian start-ups; and the rising number of Indian students in American universities, not to mention the four million Indian Americans in the United States that are often referred to as the “model minority.”
institutions. In fact, most of the engagements within the institutions point to confrontation or disengagement, not cooperation.

Absent institutional cooperation, it will be difficult for the U.S. and India to develop a deeper and more trusted relationship. While political scientists debate the effectiveness and importance of institutions in the international system, the reality is that institutions play a key role in the Asian security and political landscape. From ASEAN to the East Asia Summit to the Asian Development Bank and APEC, in addition to the new trading regimes of the Trans Pacific Partnership (now known as the CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Asia is brimming with an array of institutions that have taken on increasing power and influence in recent years.

As India begins to play a more active role on the world’s stage, it will no doubt play an increasingly important role in these institutions, not to mention the more global institutional arrangements like the G-20, and the slew of UN-related development agencies like the World Food Program, the UN Climate Conference, UNICEF, and financial institutions like the IMF, IFC and World Bank. Proponents argue that institutions enhance cooperation, allow for a greater dissemination of information to more parties, facilitate dispute resolution, and perhaps most importantly in the U.S.-India context, they deal effectively with power asymmetries (Ikenberry). After all, the legitimacy and proper functioning of the institution relies

Contrast John Ikenberry writing in "Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Power" with John Mearsheimer’s contrary views in “The False Promise of Institutions.” Ikenberry argues that institutions have created a constitutional bargain between the U.S. and weaker secondary states in which the U.S. has shown strategic restraint, making its preeminence acceptable to other states and has resulted in amore stable and durable U.S. leadership role. Mearsheimer, on the other hand, finds that institutions are merely a reflection of states’ self-interest, and that there is minimum empirical evidence that institutions have an impact on state behavior.
upon all members to accept the rules and outcomes, regardless of a country’s size, power or wealth. This is how the U.S. and its allies were able to successfully build the post-war institutions, as they agreed to give up their relative power in order to generate a degree of order to construct a rules-based system (Haass).

Critics contend that the order and the underlying institutions are nothing but the manifestations and preferences of the hegemon (Mearsheimer). It is an important point for the United States to continue to be sensitive to, especially in the Indian context. Again, much of the salience of the civil nuclear deal was due to the American effort to right what the Indians perceived was an unjust global system that unduly favored Western interests, and unfairly penalized India’s nuclear programs. There will be a continuing need for the United States to ensure that key institutions like the Security Council and G-20 are adequately reflecting India’s views and aspirations, and are perceived to be fair, which is a critical way to ensure Indian participation and hopefully leadership within those bodies.

So, what is that agenda that India and the United State can work on in the various institutions? **There are at least three promising areas.** The first is to continue to build on the climate and clean energy work that was successful at Paris. Granted, the current U.S. Administration may not be receptive to this focus area, but future mainstream Republican and Democratic Administrations are likely to revisit the importance of upholding global limitations on fossil fuels and dangerous emissions contributing to climate change. **Second,** the Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy and its precursor (the Joint Strategic Vision Statement on the Indo Pacific) can be most fully advanced if the core elements of those declarations are taken up
by Asian and global institutions. Combatting proliferation and upholding the rules pertaining to freedom on navigation, for example, will require multi-country and regional approaches, not just the United States and India working together in isolation of other partner nations in Asia. Finally, Indian – and American – economic prosperity and opportunity throughout Asia will require institutional cooperation. This is especially true when constructing alternative visions to China’s Belt and Road Initiative, as both the United States and India set out to build greater air, land, and sea connectivity across Asia to better improve commerce and human mobility.

Ideas and institutions are often viewed to be the cornerstones of liberalism and liberal internationalists. The critics contend that such concepts ignore the harsh realities of the world, an anarchic system that caters to the powerful, not to ideals, norms or the bureaucrats that run the institutions (Mearsheimer). States, they posit, will pursue their interests at all costs, leading to a brutal system of international competition that gives rise to conflict as up and coming powers challenge the status quo (Gilpin). Values may be nice in the abstract, but they have no place in a system that values only relative power (Waltz).

But history has proven otherwise in the evolution of U.S.-India ties. One sees the strong connections on norms, values and ideas over the past decades, particularly on social justice, democracy, and now upholding the liberal order. And, similarly, the future portends good progress for U.S.-India cooperation in international and regional institutions for a number of reasons, as India gains greater confidence on the world stage and as America sees the advantage in
achieving more durable and broadly accepted gains, even if it has to subordinate some of its power to the institutions and its myriad of players.

IV. China’s Rise

As was discussed in Chapter One, there is no bigger security and economic threat to India’s future -- and America’s -- than the rise of China. Scholars will continue to debate whether the West is bound to fall into “Thucydides Trap” as the rising and revisionist power challenges the hegemon and the international structure it has constructed (Allison, Destined for War). Both nations are building a comprehensive approach to dealing with China’s rise that includes diplomatic engagement and tough economic negotiations, but both are also preparing for a more confrontational outcome.

It is worth reviewing here briefly the threat America and India are attempting to address. The first is a military concern. No nation has modernized its military faster in recent years than China. Its Army, Air Force and Navy all now rank as second in size to the United States, with an increasingly growing set of lethal capabilities (Campbell 157). What it has not been able to develop indigenously, China has procured from Russia, purchasing some $40 billion in defense equipment just over the past three decades (The Economist). China has even taken an aggressive posture in militarizing outer space, deploying sophisticated satellites to increase its communications and surveillance capabilities, while also developing a set of counter-space capabilities to deny its adversaries the ability to use space-based assets during a conflict or crisis (DIA Report). The development of nuclear propelled submarines, advanced missile defense systems, aggressive cyber
capabilities, and the modernization of its nuclear weapons arsenal are all raising alarm bells across Asian and Western capitals (DIA Report).

The military capabilities have been complimented by an aggressive connectivity and influence campaign across Asia under the “One Belt One Road” rubric, which is a multi-billion dollar annual effort to build infrastructure, conduct aggressive, sometimes coercive, diplomacy, and remind friends and foes alike that China’s presence is dominant, present and ever-lasting (Khanna).

China and Pakistan have long maintained a close partnership, mainly to give China access to key strategic areas, while delivering Pakistan aid and arms, and which results in India having to defend the entirety of the Northern and Western borders, a kind of “strategic encirclement” (Mohan 106-108). China has similarly sought to exert extreme political and economic influence over Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka as well (Allison 20-21). China has even played a prominent role in the Afghan peace talks, much to the dismay of the Indian Government. A once distant Moscow has also become increasingly closer to Beijing in recent years, not solely to advance defense and energy sales, but also to link arms with China in blocking western influence across Eurasia (The Economist). And China’s more aggressive activities across the South and East China Seas, proclaiming ownership over contested land masses, or denying freedom of navigation and movement in international waters, has roiled Japan, Korea, the Philippines and other maritime nations (Mohan 159-161, 166-168).

But the battle China is waging is not merely an effort over infrastructure or economic connectivity; it is also very much a contest for ideas, with the liberal
democratic, rules-based order going head to head against the so-called “China model” across the Indo-Pacific. The China model is a state-centered, nationalistic model, where order and discipline are paramount; where individual freedoms give way to state interests; where state sovereignty takes priority in the international system; where few rules of the road govern inter-state relations; and where the powerful dominate (Kaplan). It is the antithesis of the liberal post-war order, and this is perhaps the most heated and high-stakes contest playing out across Asia today.

The U.S. approach to Beijing under prior administrations involved a mix of engagement along with efforts at containment. Neither approach necessarily changed China’s steady march forward. The Chinese Communist Party, particularly under Xi Jinping, consolidated even greater power. There was no liberalization of political rights or an opening of the Chinese economy, as some had predicted; only greater influence and success in economic and military growth, while expanding its regional influence (Campbell and Ratner). This is not to suggest that China has moved forward unchallenged or without its own share of domestic issues. The brutal oppression of the Uighurs in Xinjiang; the simmering tensions in Tibet; the massive democracy protests in Hong Kong; the mishandling and disinformation surrounding its management of the Coronavirus crisis; its own slowing economy – all have caused some to reexamine whether China can maintain its tight grip on its own population (Stephens).

The Trump Administration rejected President Obama’s signature effort to isolate China economically through the Trans Pacific Partnership trade agreement, exiting
the formal negotiations shortly after he took office. Instead, the American approach over the past two years has been to impose steep tariffs, and launch and threaten an aggressive series of trade enforcement actions aimed at ending forced technology and intellectual property transfers, forcing open heretofore closed sectors to foreign investment, and seeking lower tariffs for the import of American goods. The U.S. effort has also focused on increasing the costs to American companies that have significant manufacturing and sourcing in China, incentivizing their return to the U.S. And even though there has been some cooling of trade tensions with an interim “phase one” trade agreement, American interlocutors appear to have been caught off-guard by China’s willingness to prolong the trade war. As of today, despite the phase one agreement, most experts predict a long, more heightened battle with China on trade policy over the coming years.

One other vector of concern to U.S. officials is China’s aggressive deployment of advanced technologies, such as AI, facial recognition, advanced surveillance and cyber intrusion capabilities. It has led to the banning of certain Chinese software and hardware in U.S. networks and government-backed systems. For example, Huawei has found itself black-listed from the U.S. market. American officials also extensively lobbied foreign governments to block Huawei from their networks for fear of giving the Chinese back-door access to sensitive data (O’Flaherty). Privacy concerns have become paramount. Even a Chinese-owned social media company like TikTok caused government officials to issue warnings to U.S. government employees about downloading the software for fear of elevating the risks of data privacy and security breaches (Togoh).
The Indian approach to addressing China’s rise has in many ways mirrored the U.S. effort of recent years. Through a mix of dialogue, diplomacy, significant economic engagement, and yes, a military build-up and partnerships with like-minded nations (e.g., Japan and Australia), India has attempted to maintain cordial relations, while planning for something more dire. There have been warning signs and flashpoints, such as during the standoff with the Chinese Army at the Doklam Plateau near Bhutan in the summer of 2017.

The China challenge for both India and the United States is vexing and without an easy way forward. It has also brought the U.S. and India closer over the past two decades. Many in India complain that the U.S. has simply been using India as a counter-weight to offset China’s rise. India’s Foreign Minister even recently complained that his country would not be used as someone else’s wedge in a balancing competition. But the reality is far more complex. In actuality, India knows it cannot match Chinese military or economic might alone, a realization it likely came to all too late. The partners that can help in its defense and balancing strategy in the Indo-Pacific are the United States principally, but also Japan and Australia. Thus, far from the U.S. using India for its own strategic interests, India has made its own calculation that it needs U.S. support.

This convergence of interests and concerns around China’s rise helped lead to the U.S.-India defense framework agreement being signed in 2005, coupled with

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109 India’s Foreign Minister Jaishankar, in an interview with the German publication Der Spiegel, said: “I find the idea of being someone else’s pawn in some great game terribly condescending. I certainly don’t plan to play the counterweight to other people. I’m in it because of my own ambitions.” The full interview can be found here: [https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/indian-external-affairs-minister-on-kashmir-climate-trump-a-1296790-amp.html](https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/indian-external-affairs-minister-on-kashmir-climate-trump-a-1296790-amp.html).
the military exercises, defense sales, and eventually the Joint Vision Statement on the Indo-Pacific issued by President Obama and Prime Minister Modi in January 2015. That statement did not include a reference to China, but the sub-text was all too clear: the U.S. and India are united in espousing their support for the rules-based liberal order and all that it stands for. That vision statement would be supplemented several years later with the Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy that attempted to build out the 2015 statement even further.

Efforts to bring in Japan and Australia have also been moderately successful. The U.S., India and Japan launched a trilateral military services exercise, as well as a political dialogue at the Foreign Minister level. Additionally, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Australia, Japan, India and the United States was launched in 2017. China has taken note of all of these activities, raising its own set of concerns. In short, however, the sum total of the U.S. and Indian efforts still lacks an overall strategy or agreed upon idea of what should be included or excluded in attempting to balance China’s rise.

Much has been written, of course, about balance of power theory and how and why states balance against other states. Scholars have long noted that balancing behavior is endemic to the international system, as states compete in an anarchic world, while attempting to maximize power (Morgenthau). Other states in the system balance against the powerful players, attempting to prevent the rise of a

110 China has raised concerns about the Quad security dialogue, as well as the trilateral military exercises between the U.S, India and Japan. See: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-quadrilateral-cooperation-dialogue-china-japan-us-6106772/.
hegemonic power and to minimize significant differentials in relative power (Waltz). Steve Walt refined the theory even further, indicating that states balance against perceived threats, and not necessarily powerful states (Walt). Balancing can be in the form of the deployment of military assets and establishment of military alliances (so called “hard balancing”), or in the form of institutional tactics, trade, and assistance to third countries (“soft balancing”) (Waltz; Pape). Regardless of how one wants to characterize the American and Indian efforts, there can be little doubt that much of it now concerns this maintenance of an Asian balance of power, which attempts to keep China’s rise in check. The U.S. and Indian efforts are also geared toward offering an alternative model to countries and citizens across Asia.

U.S. and Indian officials have no doubt taken on a difficult task. An American and Indian-led balancing strategy could run the risk of antagonizing or provoking China, drawing even more players on each side of an increasingly divisive battle. The U.S. and India will, therefore, have to proceed cautiously, as they have been for the past two decades. Engagement and dialogue with Beijing will continue to be essential, even as balancing strategies move forward. Moreover, China cannot become the target or organizing principle of U.S. and Indian cooperation, as that would surely provoke a Chinese response, and it would end up minimizing the more positive and values-based elements of U.S.-India ties.111

Given this backdrop, it is essential for both the U.S. and India to continue to build strong ties across multiple domains. In defense, this means: (a) additional

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111 Scholar David Kang takes a contrary view, arguing that the U.S. should not aim to balance China’s rise. In fact, it is because of the rise and increasing power of China in Asia that has kept the region relatively free and stable, he argues. It is a provocative argument, but an important one nonetheless. See Kang’s book China Rising: Peace, Power and Order in East Asia (Columbia University Press 2009).
defense sales and co-production opportunities that enhance India’s military’s capabilities; (b) additional military exercises, including increasingly complex training missions, with a goal towards better mutual understanding, enhanced skills building, and greater coordination, communication and interoperability between U.S. and Indian systems; (c) the institutionalization of the “Quad” between the U.S., India, Japan and Australia – nothing could be more persuasive than these four nations coming together militarily as a reminder of the like-minded nations willing to defend and protect the rules-based order; and (d) at the proper time, moving from exercises to actual operational activity between the two militaries, which could entail humanitarian and disaster response missions, freedom of navigation over-flight or sea-based missions, or conducting counter-piracy or counter-proliferation missions together.

Stronger economic relations, including finding common cause within larger multi-lateral trading blocs, will be critical, and so too will be the U.S. and India working together in institutions. Again, the objective is not to target China, but to continue to advance an open, liberal and market-oriented and rules-based approach to the 21st Century order.

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112 Some have suggested that the quad military arrangement could be the defining security institution that has been lacking in US-India security ties. The argument is that the bilateral security priorities become embedded within the quad structure. But the Quad, too, has its limitations. Australia and Japan, while the closest of security partners with the United States, have their own complex relationships with India and with China. Moreover, there is far more defense integration that can take place bilaterally first between the US and India before moving out to different platforms of other nations. In sum, while the Quad is important and will undoubtedly be a key characteristic of the overall security umbrella, it is not a substitute for a modern security institution or in lieu of an alliance. Rather, as argued here, the modern security institution for the U.S. and India is actually comprised of multiple different pieces – security, economic, values, political, and more. This is how to best manage the expectations and interests of both nations in this century, given the shared vision for the Indo-Pacific, the need to project power and deter threats, but also with the need to maintain some degree of autonomy as well.
Finally, as the world’s two largest democracies, both nations need to find a more proactive and ambitious democratic agenda that extends across the Indo-Pacific. The battle for ideas and models of governance is well underway across Asia. If the U.S. and India fail to make a case for the post-war democratic order, that space will be filled with counter-democratic forces, espousing nationalistic and strong state-controlled systems that could upend the rights and way of life for hundreds of millions.

V. Economic Interdependence

Economic ties have been an important, if not divisive, element of U.S.-India ties. From 1947 to 1990, trade and investment between the two nations was unusually small and inconsequential. Far from having commercial linkages, the early American economic policies directed toward India were focused on providing billions in developmental assistance and food aid to stave off humanitarian crises. Eventually, India as an independent nation would regain its economic footing, shedding the impacts of millennia of colonial and mogul rule.

But the underlying tensions in Indian economic theory, which are alive and well even today, continue to impact U.S.-India trade ties. As was explained in Chapter One, Nehruvian and Gandhian socialism has been a key feature of Indian economic and political life. This is more than an economic theory; it is also a way of life, a governing model, and a societal compact with the Indian people. Unlike many western, more market-oriented economies, India’s founding principles ensured village life and the well being of villagers was of paramount importance. The State had a special obligation to provide the infrastructure, the subsistence, the health
care and support for the general well being. Strong state-structured and centralized support and planning to a largely rural and village-based population was how the Indian economy was programmed.

Over time, as India’s population and its needs and capacities grew, along with the development of Indian universities and cities, the economy also began to undergo an important shift. Beginning in 1991, modest economic reforms and market openings would take place, but India would still lag far behind the East Asian economies and never experience the dramatic growth propelling China and the East Asian economies ahead.

But India now ranks as the world’s fastest growing developing economy, with all the promise of a younger, more educated and healthier population. Despite real headwinds from legacy societal and developmental factors, the overall assessment for India’s economy in the next ten years remains quite positive. While this should also mean more positive and vibrant U.S-India economic ties, that assessment is less certain, as structural and historical factors very much impact today’s commercial outlook.

But overall, economic cooperation is an element of the relationship that will take on more importance, not only to serve the needs of American businesses, consumers and investors, but also as a strategic matter, as both nations weave together the fabric of a modern day partnership – “natural allies,” absent the alliance. The American and Indian models would also stand in sharp contrast to the China economic model being aggressively exported across Asia.
Economic relations between states have long been a critically important element of the international system that gives rise to greater stability, according to most liberal internationalist scholars. Increases in trade and economic ties and shared commercial interests have led to states maintaining a separate peace with each other (Doyle). This economic interdependence between nations makes war economically harmful. With modern advances in transport and communications, states no longer need to seize territory or expand political frontiers by force. The rules-based system can now deliver as much prosperity through open and fair trade, without the costs of war (Angell). As Immanuel Kant wrote nearly 225 years ago, “man’s natural spirit of trade is more powerful than his desire for war.”

Since the end of World War II, the international economic order that has emerged has created a permissive environment for large and small nations alike, which has facilitated congruence in trading relationships, as rules and norms have emerged that have been enforced and, at most times, equally applied through institutional frameworks (Ruggie). Obviously, domestic factors also play a sizeable role in impacting how open and how much trade a nation engages in, as certain constituencies and domestic coalition groups could be impacted negatively by select trade policies (Rogawski).

India and the United States are both facing such domestic pressures today, with powerful constituencies fighting against further trade liberalization. And while the U.S. economy is performing relatively well, with low unemployment, income inequality has grown sharply, as have budget deficits, while the Indo-Pacific has surged ahead, resulting in a gradual but decided shift of economic activity from the
Atlantic to the Pacific (Mastanduno). Yes, the U.S. is still the dominant economic player in absolute terms, but it has found itself more vulnerable and constrained, as ironically, the international economic system that the U.S. constructed is now providing significant competition and pressures on American workers and industries. India, too, faces such domestic pressures and a slowing economy, and increased calls for a return to the founding economic principles of the nation: inward, state-centered, nationalistic, with a focus on the protection of workers, farmers and rural populations. Both the U.S. and India have also forged ahead alone in recent years, rejecting broad global trade pacts, including TPP and RCEP, in favor of bilateral arrangements.

Amid these challenging circumstances and each nation’s increasing nationalist tendencies, there are several important reasons to forge ahead to try to build bilateral economic ties. The first is very simply that the two nations actually need each other economically. The American economy is still the world’s largest, but it desperately needs new and growing markets in which to sell its goods, and to manufacture at competitive costs. India, meanwhile, will soon be the largest consumer market, with an increased manufacturing and production capacity, allowing for the diversification of supply chains and an opportunity to shift production away from China. India, therefore, can be an increasingly important partner for U.S. companies and industries in the coming years. Further, American investors are making significant investments in key Indian sectors and Indian infrastructure; and in a marked departure from the past, over the past decade, Indian investors and companies have invested billions in the United States, creating
over 100,000 new American jobs.\textsuperscript{113} Again, the partnership can be mutually beneficial for each nation, at a critical time, amid global economic uncertainty.

Another reason to encourage greater private sector and commercial linkages is to support and compliment the work of governments in attempting to solve many of the public sector challenges confronting both nations. The reality is that both governments are not equipped to solve many of the most pressing societal problems confronting their citizens. The private sector has filled much of this role, generating new innovations and deploying their own solutions in public-private partnerships and with academia and civil society. It is the private sector that has brought innovations to India, for example, on smart cities and smart grids, in renewable energy storage and transmission, in moving to a digital economy, and in the breakthroughs in disease prevention and health care.\textsuperscript{114} In these sectors and beyond, U.S. and Indian business have found common cause in serving the broader public, while also providing returns for their investors.

Yet, perhaps most importantly, the wide range of commercial and business ties can provide the glue or stickiness that can hold two societies, and ultimately, two nations, together, particularly when government cooperation cools, or worse, becomes estranged. The business and trading ties are enveloped in a wide range of regular personal contacts, contractual arrangements, research agreements, travel,

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\textsuperscript{113} For a more detailed summary on Indian companies and investment in the United States, see the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) report here: http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/CIIReport.pdf.
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conferences, joint product development, with the parties vested in a common set of business objectives. Even when disputes arise, the process of working toward a resolution, whether in arbitration, the court systems, or in difficult negotiations, helps build up the mechanisms and protocols to not only deal with current disputes, but also to help build more advanced commercial systems that can withstand and facilitate even deeper and more complex arrangements. Thus, business ties cannot only produce an important boost for market opportunities, research and innovation, they can also build the foundations for deeper cooperation across domains.

But developing these ties in a more sustained and comprehensive way still faces real challenges on at least two fronts. The first of these obstacles concerns the relative inequities in the size and stage of development in the two economies. As noted earlier, the American GDP per capita is some thirty times the size of India’s. And the American economy dominates about one-quarter of the world’s economic activity.  

Yes, the Indian economy, despite its slowing, is gaining ground and by 2030 could be the world’s third largest economy when measured in PPP terms. But at least today, the disparities are massive, and they lead to inequities in bargaining power and the risk of American firms overwhelming particular Indian industries and sectors. The default Indian position has been to resort to protectionist measures, which only serves to heighten some of the underlying tensions, and exacerbate an already uneven, non-transparent and immature business regulatory environment.

115 https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/
The second major divide concerns the absence of structural mechanisms to resolve disputes when they arise or to generally govern the growing complexity of business ties. There is no bilateral investment treaty, no free trade agreement and no regular economic dialogue of any import between the two nations. The trade policy forum is held only intermittently. The Treasury Department and Federal Reserve have limited interactions with the Indian Ministry of Finance and Reserve Bank of India respectively. And, each year, the U.S. Trade Representative's office releases a damming report on the absence of adequate intellectual property protections in India, putting it on its priority watch list for the world’s worst offenders, a designation that is met with derision and disdain in India each year.\footnote{See USTR’s 2019 Special 301 Report, pages 51-53, found here: \url{https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2019_Special_301_Report.pdf}} This is the modern reality of how the two governments interact on complex finance, trade and economic concerns.

There is a better way. Here are a few ways to improve the current interactions, making them more durable, and part of the overall tapestry of ties:

(a) \textit{Build up the structural connections.} This means giving investors and companies greater certainty about the safety and stability of their investments. One major way to achieve this is through the negotiation of a bilateral investment treaty (BIT), which perhaps most importantly, would govern how to handle disputes when they arise. The U.S. has BITs with 42 countries. India should now
be one of them. Perhaps a free trade agreement is possible in the future, but the BIT is a good first step.

\[ \text{(b)} \]

*Work through institutions.* Recall that international institutions help create a more level playing field, as the very large powers are required to play by the same set of rules and follow the outcomes adjudged by institutional players. Given the disparities between the American and Indian economies, institutions provide that more neutral and level forum in which to engage. While the WTO is one of those institutional channels, thus far the WTO has been used as a place to litigate U.S.-India disputes and accuse each other of trade violations. But the WTO and the international trading system could be a place where a proactive agenda between the U.S. and India is forged. APEC membership for India should also be explored.

\[ \text{(c)} \]

*Eliminate the divide between the strategic and economic.* Economic issues are strategic issues, and they should be treated as such. The economic power, prosperity and stability of India was a strategic concern of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, and then again from 2000 to 2018. It is not today. How the Indian economy fares in Asia, along with its capacity to compete, innovate, and create jobs for its people, can have very significant ramifications for the people of India, and its overall standing in Asia, including its ability to compete with China. A strong U.S.-India economic relationship
should be part and parcel of building deeper strategic ties in the
years ahead. The success of The Free and Open Indo Pacific
Strategy will depend upon it.

(d) **Facilitate commercial linkages.** While the two governments may
get bogged down in prolonged bilateral trade disputes, each
government can on its own take steps to incentivize joint research,
build linkages with academia, research institutes and national
laboratories, and where appropriate, explore avenues for wide
deployment and even commercialization of the discoveries and
innovations that can help deliver real solutions within both the
public and private sector domains. The governments can also take
steps to improve the business conditions. In India that means
improving legal and regulatory certainty, building greater
transparency in decision-making and stability into the commercial
rules and regulatory process, protecting intellectual property and
opening long-time closed sectors, consistent with national
interests. And in the United States, this means re-examining the
treatment of Indian workers and students. Are the immigration,
tax and social security policies fair and consistent with how we
might treat other allies? This deserves a fair, sober and detailed
assessment.

In short, it would be difficult to envision building a modern alliance with
India that does not include a full and robust commercial component, with the rules
and institutions to go along with it. In this century, the attainment of a “natural allies” designation will have to mean far more than defense cooperation only.

VI. Congress and the Diaspora

The Constitution provides Congress with distinct duties in shaping U.S. foreign policy, often times pitting the executive and legislative branches in direct tension. This “invitation to struggle” envisions the President taking a lead role in executing foreign policy and commanding the troops, but with Congress vested with significant powers in raising and supporting the military, approving international agreements, and appropriating funds for war, diplomatic and intelligence operations (Scott and Carter).

Congress has played an important role in advancing U.S.-India ties, but the role they have played is just in its infancy. There is far more Congress could do. In the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations, Congress actually appropriated vast amounts of development assistance to India, both as a humanitarian matter, but also as a strategic concern as well, as few wanted to see India fall to the communist wave sweeping across Asia. Kennedy and Nixon were shaped by their Senatorial experiences in how they viewed India. Kennedy came away convinced India was of a vital U.S. concern. Recall his Senate speech where he said the “the hinge of fate in Asia” rests with India. Nixon, however, came away with a far different impression, which played into the Cold War dynamics at the time. Nixon threw his loyalties to Pakistan, and so the Congress would be divided for the next several decades as well, with members split between India and Pakistan allegiances. During this time there
were few constituent pressures to support either nation, as there were in fact few constituents from South Asia. That would soon change.

Congress would eventually turn its attention to concerns over nuclear proliferation in the region. Congressionally authorized and appropriated Pakistan security assistance would continue to grow over the years, until concerns over Pakistan’s trustworthiness as a partner would come into sharp focus. Following President Clinton’s dehyphenation of the two nations, Congress would follow suit, and look to support the executive branch as significant gains were made on the India account, while not coincidentally, significant concerns were also being raised about China’s rise.

Congress would perform its most significant act in bilateral ties by tacitly accepting India’s nuclear weapons program and by changing the rules of the non-proliferation regime that had been embedded into U.S. law, a move that would allow India to trade and receive civil nuclear fuel and technologies. Congress also, for the first time, felt the pressure of the Indian diaspora, which had grown sizably in numbers and power since the 60s and 70s.

Since the passage of the Hyde Act in 2008 memorializing the civil nuclear accord, Congress has searched for its role in how best to support and advance U.S.-India relations. They have done some important work in the defense arena, locking in the defense framework agreement, helping with the defense export control reform process, and recently, attempting to flesh out what it means to be a Major Defense Partner of the United States. But in many ways, the work is just beginning.
There are at least three important areas in which Congress can bolster the U.S.-India partnership. The first is in helping to institutionalize the gains. The second is in internalizing and reflecting the popular support conveyed by the diaspora community, and the third is in Congress nudging the executive branch to carry out its foreign affairs functions with respect to India, as part of Congress’s oversight role. Each is examined further here.

**Institutionalization**

The work product of Congress provides an important legal and political guide that expresses the political will of the country and of particular members of Congress. In the legislation, the committee reports, the floor statements, hearings and debates, Congress provides a running record for contemporary players, but also for history’s sake. The work of Congress, unless overturned by a Court, survives particular political personalities, parties and popular sentiments. It has a certain durability or institutional quality that helps embed in law and society the will of the people over generations.

Recall that the U.S.-India relationship has no treaty, no secretariat, no office or staff that provides the record of what commitments are made between the governments or how they will be carried out and when. The partnership is still very ad hoc in nature, with individual Presidents or Prime Ministers being able to surge forward – or backward. This is rather unsurprising, given the immaturity of the partnership, and the suspicions that loom over it.

But Congress can help address these deficiencies through its legislative functions. Congress can embed in legislative language – whether binding or
aspirational – a record and a roadmap on U.S.-India ties. Should it actually pass binding legislation, which is its most powerful authority, that action could help shape the direction of U.S.-India ties for years to come. The same is true, though admittedly with less impact, in the promulgation of reports and in the holding of hearings that are generated in the course of its oversight responsibilities. This “institutionalization process” helps memorialize and solidify the gains made, and allows future leaders in both countries to learn and build from those gains.

**Engaging the Diaspora**

The second area where Congress can be effective is in representing and channeling the nation’s political sentiments on the direction of U.S.-India ties. Typically diaspora groups and constituents make Congress aware of particular issues of concern that impact them as immigrants or business owners or otherwise could advance the bilateral partnership from a foreign policy perspective. This could take the form of support of cultural and religious holidays like Diwali (Congress authorized, for instance, the U.S. postal service to issue a stamp for Diwali at the diaspora’s request), or it could be seeking Congressional intervention on immigration and consular issues impacting the movement of Americans and Indians between the two nations. Or businesses, perhaps as part of a commercial association focused on India, could take up with Congress certain issues in trade, market access or some other perceived or real obstacle in transacting business.

Much has been written about the power of diaspora groups in the development of U.S. foreign policy. It should come as no surprise that this is a uniquely American experience, where various ethnic constituencies become
assimilated, but yet retain strong personal feelings to their countries of origin (Shain). American pluralism helps give rise to and sustain various groups that have grown in size and influence over the years. As their members have become more successful in various professions and accumulated more wealth, their political clout has grown as well. Congress caters to the various groups, with members of congress trying to be responsive to the diaspora communities within their districts or states. This has certainly been the pattern for the Indian American diaspora.

It is important to remember that ordinary citizens have little ability to express their foreign policy preferences directly to the executive branch. Short of writing letters, they have no real input in the foreign policy development process. But these same citizens, including members of the Indian diaspora, have their own Representatives and Senators to engage with and to help shape Congressional actions and preferences. Again, during the civil nuclear accord, the Indian diaspora weighed in strongly with members of congress, hoping to convince them of the urgency and importance in moving forward with a special exemption to the NPT for India. They prevailed. This give and take with Congress is exceptionally important in not only satisfying the interests of constituents, but also in educating members of congress and their staffs on the range of issues involving India and U.S.-India ties. As the power of the Indian American constituency grows and becomes more organized and unified, this engagement with Congress could take on even greater weight, as their influence could actually move Congress to get things done in an otherwise gridlocked institution.
Oversight

The third area where Congress can play an instrumental role in moving U.S.-India ties forward is in the conduct of its oversight functions and in its ability to direct the Administration to act, either by legislation or simply through its political power where, depending on the issue and situation, it may have significant leverage. As noted earlier, Congress and the executive branch have shared powers in the conduct of foreign policy, and many times these legislative and executive branch powers come into conflict. This “invitation to struggle” is an important part of the policy development process – a constitutionally mandated give and take, where different interests and perspectives (hopefully) drive toward a unified policy outcome.

Congress has a number of important tools at its disposal. It, of course, could legislate, requiring the executive branch to take some action, produce a report or other requested information, for example. It could hold oversight hearings, bringing to light certain deficiencies with a current policy. Or, it could work collaboratively with the executive branch, suggesting certain pathways, which could ultimately be rewarded by more appropriated money or with a pledge to offer greater political support. Horse-trading between the executive and legislative branches does indeed occur in the course of these interactions.

In the U.S.-India context, Congress should push the Administration to do more on building out India’s designation as a Major Defense Partner and in continuing to reform export licensing for defense and high tech products and technologies. It could push the Administration to consummate the civil nuclear
accord more than a decade since its passage. Similarly, congressional pressure and oversight would help develop newer, and sometimes more difficult, areas of cooperation such as in counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, homeland defense, non-proliferation, cyber security and human rights. In the economic sphere, Congress could express its desire to see a bilateral investment treaty or free trade agreement, as it would play a key role in approving each agreement after each was negotiated. In short, there are an unlimited number of areas in which Congress could engage, nudge and direct the Executive Branch to do more to support the bilateral partnership. It is an essential role.

**VII. A Policy Roadmap**

Taking into account the materials presented here in this chapter, as well as Chapters One and Two, the following section is an effort to convert the ideas and analysis into an actual policy agenda. This is a complex, yet necessary, task. To focus exclusively on history or on the theoretical will not advance ties in a practical way. Therefore, in this concluding section, a number of practical steps are set forward, based on the learnings of history, as well as the ideas set forth in this chapter on what a modern partnership could look like, or in other words, how to become “natural allies” absent the alliance. Ten such recommendations are set forth below.

1. Within the State Department, consider moving India out of the South and Central Asia Bureau and into the East Asian Bureau to ensure greater alignment with the combatant command and to guard against the internal balancing that takes place within the Bureau.
(2) Consolidate and focus the multitude of government-to-government dialogues to a more manageable number, with a greater concentration on those areas of primary importance; and also regularize head of state visits to at least one per year.

(3) Reconnect the strategic and the economic, given the centrality of trade and economic matters to the strategic partnership; also consider bringing back a unified high-level dialogue that brings a whole of government approach where the foreign policy, defense and economic matters are tackled together, as is done with the U.S.-China Strategic and Commercial Dialogue.

(4) Maintain the high level attention and commitment to shared values between the two countries, to include human rights, basic constitutional freedoms in the U.S. and India, and to include democracy promotion in third countries.

(5) Develop a closer and more focused working relationship in international institutions, tackling topics of mutual interest including climate change and operationalizing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

(6) In building the economic ties between India and the United States, both nations should conclude a bilateral investment treaty, deepen their cooperation within international institutions, and facilitate commercial linkages through joint research, public-private partnership opportunities, and facilitating greater people-to-people contacts and
opportunities in education and trade, which may require future consular and immigration reforms.

(7) The U.S. and India should not shy away from working cooperatively in addressing China's rise by focusing on constructive engagement, diplomacy, building economic ties with China, while the U.S. and India enhance their own security ties and deepen their overall partnership; both countries should also be actively offering an alternative to the “China model” to other nations in Asia, which may be tempted to abandon or weaken the rules-based order.

(8) The U.S. and Indian militaries are well-placed to take on greater complexity in their exercises, but also they should explore conducting actual joint missions together in the humanitarian arena, or in counter piracy or in countering weapons of mass destruction; they should also continue to work aggressively to build out and define what it means to be a Major Defense Partner of the United States.

(9) The U.S. Congress can and should become far more involved in the relationship, in order to institutionalize the relationship, enhance its durability and to ensure there is broad political buy-in for India-centered policies; areas of focus for Congress could include building out the Major Defense Partner designation, working on trade and a bilateral investment treaty; focusing on addressing the immigration concerns of Indian workers and their families; and working closely with and highlighting the contributions of the diaspora.
The U.S. should not so easily give up its role as crisis manager in South Asia, as there is no other nation to take its place; and it should similarly not shy away from or abandon its leadership role in curbing nuclear proliferation in South Asia; moribund dialogues on this subject with India (and Pakistan) could stand to be rejuvenated.

VIII. Conclusion

This chapter started with a somewhat sober assessment of the coming world order, an order with more players, more contested views, and with real challenges to the post-war frameworks. Moreover, this order will likely see the United States as a leading, but not necessarily dominant, player, with the alliances and mutual defense treaties it negotiated in Europe and Asia following World War II now a product of history, not the future.

Against this rather dower global projection, Chapter One described a vibrant Indo-Pacific region on the rise, with India poised to seize the lead in key economic and demographic categories in a few short years. A country bustling and growing at rapid rates – more educated, healthier, with less poverty, and more military power. A democracy in a part of the world where few such democracies prosper. And a nation with a now two-decade modern and growing relationship with the United States that both nations are attempting to get back on track after recent disturbances on the trade front.

But over the course of all three chapters, a different narrative also emerges. While the U.S.-India relationship holds so much promise, it remains fragile, underperforming, and with the hesitations of history hovering over it. Few practitioners
or academics have paused long enough to better understand these hesitations, their origins, and whether they can be overcome.

This study attempted to shed some light on the history – both its positive elements, and the long period of estrangement during much of the Cold War. It endeavored to look at American and Indian thinking during the prior decades, along with the motivators that explained the periods of alignment and the corresponding periods of non-convergence. Much has changed globally, with the U.S. role in the world, with Russia, China and Pakistan, but many of the underlying hesitations still remain, including America’s security partnership with Pakistan, India’s military relationship with Russia, not to mention India’s own rise, and America’s loss of its unipolar position.

The situation is complex, so much so that U.S. interlocutors often grow understandably frustrated with the lack of demonstrable progress over a period of many years. No one approach or international relations school of thought will deliver the hoped-for results. Rather, as documented here, a blend of realism and liberalism, coupled with structural change, is required in the years ahead. Contending with China’s rise will be critical, but so too will be nurturing the ideas and values that give the two nations a special status together in the international system. Practitioners will not have the luxury of choosing one ideological approach over another.

Rather, it will require a firm understanding of this bilateral history, a commitment to reevaluating the structure of how the two nations interact, an effort to get Congress and the diaspora more involved, and a building of deeper economic
ties. Institutional cooperation will help advance bilateral priorities, and likely give the Indian Government greater confidence to work collaboratively with the United States in what is often perceived as a more balanced and equalized environment. Individuals and governments alike will have to do their part. Military cooperation must advance beyond the practice and learning phases to the operational settings, allowing for true burden sharing and power projection to deter the very real threats to the democratic order. It is these, and the many other steps noted here, that are essential in bolstering the liberal order, strengthening it, and making it more inclusive and responsive to the modern powers of this century. The U.S. and India may never have a treaty alliance. And that is ok, if not preferable, but they can put in place the areas of cooperation and shared vision that gives the partnership a certain “stickiness” and durability. And they can have far stronger cooperation. The world will be better off because of it.
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