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INDO-US STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE: AN OVERVIEW OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY COOPERATION

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CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES

Kartikeya — in Indian mythology,
Lord Kartikeya is known as the God of War.

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Indo-US Strategic Convergence: An Overview of Defence and Military Cooperation

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All through the Cold War, Indo-US relations were marked by missed opportunities. Relations between the two began on a good note when India became independent but this did not last. Despite many shared interests and political values, their posture and postulates on international and bilateral issues often remained divergent, conflicting and incongruous. As a result, the two nations could not come together during the Cold War years, and forge a sound bilateral relationship, be it in the field of economics, politics or defence.

However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War changed much of the international alliance structures of the Cold War era. India's rapidly growing economy, opening of its markets allowing greater interaction between the business communities of both nations, globalisation, the revolution in information and technology, India's acquisition of nuclear weapons, the concurrent growth of its military capability that could contribute to the strategic stability in the Asian region and the growing menace of Islamist terrorism paved the way for a positive change in Indo-US relations.

During the Cold War, India and the US had negligible defence relations, barring the brief interlude after the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962. However, after the Cold War, Indo-US defence cooperation has become a reality and the two countries have entered a new era in their relations, marked by frequent joint military exercises and signing of a ten-year defence agreement.

This paper intends to look into the Indo-US defence cooperation in the post-Cold War period. It traces the defence relations between the two nations in the Cold War era and then looks at the defence and military cooperation in the changed international scenario. It explores the developments, bilateral talks and agreements that facilitated military and defence cooperation between India and the US. In conclusion, it explores the dynamics responsible for the increased Indo-US defence ties and future prospects.

A HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF INDO–US RELATIONS: A CONFLICT–RIDDEN PAST: (COLD WAR ERA)

India has long been a nation of immense potential. Its status as the world's largest democracy, with the second largest population market, a democratic parliamentary system of government, and Anglo-judicial system has been in place since the country's inception in 1947.[1] Despite these seemingly positive aspects, the United States and India have not had close relations.

The reason lies in the Cold War dynamics, India's ties with the USSR despite its policy of non-alignment, as well as the complex relationships of the USSR, Pakistan, United States, China and India with each other. India and the US distanced themselves from an idyllic closeness due to their conflicting interpretations of, and strategic approaches to, the Cold War. Each nation pursued different goals: India, to protect its independence by respecting national independence via non-interference, and the United States, to protect its national interests, and project military power in pursuit of the same, containing Communism and maintaining its superpower status.[2]

Pakistan and Kashmir always figured in Indo-US relations during the Cold War. Pakistan allied with the US during the Cold War. It offered the US a foothold in the region, cooperation in an Islamic country, containment of the USSR from a southern vantage point, bases for American missiles to be targeted at points in Russia, and a very soft spoken non-alignment stance. Pakistan further allied with

America using geographic strategies by joining the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), which were aimed at checking the spread of Communism through joint intelligence.[3] India, with its policy of non-alignment, was naturally opposed to these organisations, as well as to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Finally, the war for Bangladesh in 1971 further stressed the rift between the two.[4] During the first half of the 1980s, the Indo-US relations were overshadowed by American perceptions about the implications of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Indo-US relations rarely stayed on an even keel, and tended instead to oscillate between high and low points. The high points were US support in the Indo-China War in 1962—which coincided with the Cuban missile crisis—and US relief programmes that extended from the early 1950s into the next decade. The low points have been more numerous: differences that emerged during the Korean War, India's failure to sign the Japanese peace treaty, the inclusion of Pakistan in the American alliance system in 1954-55, the attempt by the United States to prevent India from using force in Goa in 1961, the US decision to send the carrier *Enterprise* into the Bay of Bengal in 1971, and Indian resentment over the accrual of rupee currencies by the United States. The issue of nuclear non-proliferation was a constant irritant in Indo-US relations. The situation of the Sikhs in the Punjab and the ensuing civil war in Kashmir added a human rights dimension to bilateral relations in the 1980s.

Apart from these factors, the negative perceptions about India in the US were also responsible for the low level of Indo-US ties. India has been often neglected by American policy-makers in the past as their impression about India was based on ignorance and misinformation. Anglo-American concerns as well as US-Soviet competition and Indo-Pakistani rivalry complicated Washington's bilateral ties with New Delhi. As Norman Palmer observes, members of Congress, whether consciously or not, have often given offence to India and damaged bilateral relations by their outspoken criticisms of Indian lead-

ers, policies, and ways of life, particularly during debates on foreign assistance and nuclear issues. [5]

Apart from the strategic factor, there were many others which were responsible for the low level of Indo-US cooperation in the post-Cold War era. Before World War II, American contact with India (with the exception of missionary activity) was nominal, and political and economic relations between the two countries were sporadic. The relative lack of contact has been responsible for uninformed perceptions.[6] Public opinion surveys consistently documented that most Americans have misconceptions and negative feelings about India and Indians. School textbooks, the media, and academic writings in the US depict India as a backward society. Ironically, India's culture gets blamed, and a rejection of Indianness by Indian students was encouraged as a marker of progressiveness.[7] American legislators and decision-makers are subject to the same impressions as the general public. In the view of John Mellor, US policy is the product of similar stereotypes, in which India is portrayed "as poverty-stricken and helpless."[8] Certainly, during the 1971 Bangladesh crisis, President Richard Nixon's tilt toward Pakistan "was influenced by his long-standing dislike for India and the Indians."[9] A similar sentiment is attributed to President Lyndon Johnson, who "regarded Indians as weak and indecisive."[10] A high-ranking former official of AID (Agency for International Development) who had been posted in New Delhi, described "a majority" of key players in the White House, the State Department, and Congress as *ab initio*, anti-Indian.[11]

It can be also interpreted that the misunderstanding on the part of strategists and policy-makers of both the countries led to such negative perceptions between them. In fact, the requirement of that period was that the Americans needed to be better informed and educated about the futility of the Cold War, and about the arts, culture, and history of India. On the Indian side, the government officials needed to convey correctly the messages of India. All these factors

resulted in the very low level of Indo-US cooperation, be it political, economic or defence, during the Cold War era.

MODEST BEGINNING IN INDO-US DEFENCE RELATIONS

The security and defence perceptions of India and the United States during the entire Cold War period were so divergent and conflicting that they could not collaborate on security and defence issues. There was hardly any significant economic cooperation and political convergence between India and the US on various international issues that could enable them to enter into strategic and defence cooperation.

The perceptions of leaders of both nations were incongruent. Truman was uncomfortable with Nehru's efforts during the Asian Relations Conferences of 1947 and 1949 and the Afro-Asian Conference of 1955. The Nehru government, on the other hand, was concerned about the political fallout of the formation of NATO, SEATO and CENTO and the potential negative impact of Cold War polarisation and confrontation limiting India's autonomy of decision-making in pursuit of its interests. It needs to be recalled that India's policy of non-alignment goes back to the pre-World War II period.

India's opposition to a UN General Assembly resolution on February 1, 1951, that branded China as the aggressor in the Korean War, and its support to China for permanent membership in the UN Security Council[12] resulted in the US Battle Act of 1953, which barred US aid to any country that traded in strategic goods with China.[13] Pakistan's entry into the US alliance system during the time of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (1953-59), led the Indo-US bilateral differences to resurface.[14] Again, Indo-US relations went low after Washington's critical reaction to the merger of Goa in India in December 1961.

Despite the differences, some initiatives were taken during the Cold War years too. The US strategists saw India as the "pivotal" state of the region and Pakistan as a useful place to base long range US bombers, as well as a poten-

tial ally to best serve US interests in the tense Persian Gulf region.[15] Also, the US Administration took a strong interest in India in the 1950s and 1960s with the hope that New Delhi could emerge as a credible balancer to Communist China. This was the period of the greatest US involvement and interest in South Asia. Both humanitarian and security concerns worked to India's advantage. From 1954 to 1964, American aid to India totalled $10 billion, and relations between New Delhi and Washington approached the point of an alliance during the Sino-Indian border war.

India-US defence relations date back to the 1950s when the two countries engaged in joint exercises along with the British and Australians.[16] The US approved the sale of 200 Sherman tanks worth $19 million,[17] and S-55 helicopters and 54C-119 Fairchild military transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force(IAF). These were not in use in the US and were not of the Combating System or of the US Force Structure Group (FSG) weapons. Overall, Indian defence procurement from the United States during the early years was extremely limited: the defence equipment was of indifferent quality and the US was not forthcoming in giving the kind of weapons that India required.

During the Indo-China War in 1962, the US provided military supplies to India. This assistance came in the form of small arms, ammunition and communication systems for mountain warfare. In a short reconciliation period after the Sino-Indian border war in 1962, the US gave economic assistance for fiscal years 1961-62 and 1962-63 in excess of $2 billion, to blunt the Communist influence in South Asia.[18]

In fact, this much talked about Indo-US cooperation was not upto the mark as far as arms supply was concerned. After the 1962 War, when India asked for assistance, the US was not forthcoming in giving the kind of weapons that were required by India. (Arms aid to be given for winter clothes and small weapon systems was very limited). This lukewarm response from the US can be seen in the context of the United States' involvement in the Cuban crisis. Other factors

such as India's position on the nuclear issues irked the United States; India's involvement with the Communists and the Sino-Soviet rivalry had come up, and this Chinese attack was not measured as a determined Sino-Soviet move. Moreover, there was fear among US strategists that closeness with India would hamper US-Pakistan relations and compel Pakistan to get closer to China.

Opening of Defence Cooperation

During the Cold War, in the 1980s, a change in Indo-US defence cooperation was visible. In the wake of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the United States offered to sell American military hardware to India as well. An Indian team visited the United States in 1980 to explore the possibility of buying TOW anti-tank missiles and long range howitzers. The Carter Administration reversed its earlier policy of disapproving the use of an advanced American electronic guidance system in India's Jaguar aircraft[19] and in the nuclear field, it permitted two more enriched uranium fuel shipments to Tararpur.

It appeared as if Carter was providing incentives to India in the wake of the Afghanistan crisis so that India, as a result of improving Sino-US ties and rearming of Pakistan with the US weapons, did not move further towards the Soviet Union. As India was seeking to diversify its sources of military acquisition, scientific and technical cooperation and trade and investment destinations, improvement of relations with the US was considered to be important. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the US and India in 1984 on transfer of technology. In exchange for alterations to India's own export-control regulations, the United States would begin allowing access to civilian and dual-use technologies as well as some military assistance, subject to previous restrictions imposed by US law. Under this agreement, sensitive technology transfers took place.[20] India received super computers, General Electric (GE) F-404 engines for the light combat aircraft (LCA) programme,[21] LM-2500 gas turbine engines for upgrading Indian naval ves-

sels, night vision devices for tanks as well as permission to co-produce the devices, co-production of the Northrop Corporation TF-5 aircraft in India and F-5 tooling facility, at 5 per cent of the original cost. In terms of export licenses issued by the US in 1987, India ranked number seven.[22] In the period 1984-88, there was a five-fold increase in US government approvals of civilian technology exports to India.[23] The MoU did lead to a surge of technology licences to Indian companies and government institutions, but mainly for the items that were below the level of state-of-the-art technology.

Since 1985, policy-makers in the Reagan Administration began to use the term "opening to India." The US defence secretary visited India in 1986 and 1987, and his successor Frank Carlucci, in 1988, paved the way for improving ties between the US and India. The US also indicated the desire to forge closer relations with India and vice versa.

There was a new beginning in Indo-US defence cooperation in 1989 when apart from the official dialogue, Track II diplomacy entered the scene. The defence minister of India, on his visit to the US, was accompanied by high level civilian and armed Services officials to the United States. This served as a major effort to remove mutual misperceptions and enhance understanding among the strategic communities in both countries. Since then, there have been frequent high level exchanges of visits between the armed forces personnel as well as civilian officials dealing with security issues between the two countries.

Defence and Military Cooperation in the Post-Cold War Period: Cooperative Engagement

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cold War came to an end, paving the way for a new international matrix in which India had to place itself. India, in a significant departure from the Cold War paradigm, allowed US military planes to refuel at Bombay's Sahar Airport during the Gulf War for the liberation of Kuwait from

Iraqi military occupation. Despite good relations with Iraq, India condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and adhered to all 12 mandatory United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions on sanctions against Iraq.

In December 1990, an American defence delegation, headed by Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs Henry Rowen, came to India and had fruitful discussions in the field of defence cooperation. The growing trends of Indo-US defence cooperation during the 1980s were substantiated by efforts to increase reciprocal exchange of information and personnel in the 1990s under what came to be known as the "Kickleighter Proposals", after a former commander of the US Army in the Pacific, Claude Kickleighter. This proposed to augment the level of Indo-US defence cooperation, and improve military-to-military relations cooperation through joint seminars, training, and establishment of steering committees. The two nations conducted joint naval exercises in May 1992 and September 1994 in the Indian Ocean.

Clinton's tenure saw Indo-US military cooperation developing according to the Kickleighter Proposals. Indo-US naval exercises in the Indian Ocean were symbolic of the changing nature of Indo-American security cooperation. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the US Department of State kept up a series of dialogues to remove misperceptions and improve mutual understanding on other international political and security issues, particularly the problems related to nuclear and missile proliferation.

Agreed Minutes on Indo-US Defence Cooperation

As part of its general engagement with the armed forces of other nations, India had begun a series of military exercises with the United Sates. During the visit of US Secretary of Defence William J Perry, on January 12, 1995, the two countries signed the Agreed Minutes on Defence Relations Between the United States and India. Hailed as a "milestone" and "beginning of a new

era" in bilateral relations, the Agreed Minutes covered Service-to-Service, civilian-to-civilian and cooperation in defence production and research. Three separate groups were established to foster greater interaction and facilitate discussion: [24]

- Joint Defence Policy Group (DPG) of the Ministries of Defence for tackling issues of defence cooperation. It was to review the issues of joint concerns such as post-Cold War security planning and policy perspectives on both sides, to provide policy guidance to the Joint Technical Group and Joint Steering Committee. The joint Indo-US Defence Ministry-Department of Defence Group also tackled sensitive issues like the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)and Kashmir.[25]
- Joint Technical Group (JTG), for discussing issues related to defence research and production cooperation which was to develop the scope and content of further expansion of cooperative defence research and production activities. However, this was to be within the laws, policies and treaty commitments of each country.
- Joint Steering Committee (JSC), to increase the frequency and scope of Service-to-Service cooperation. It was agreed that the emphasis of such cooperation would be on professional contacts and functional cooperation, high level exchanges, presence of observers at each other's military exercises, attendance at seminars on subjects of mutual professional interest, professional/technical training and joint exercises at progressively higher levels of scale and sophistication.[26]

The Agreed Minutes were not free from conditions. The US secretary of defence had made it clear that defence ties with India were not going to be at the cost of Pakistan and signing of the agreement did not mean arms transfer or even joint technology development. However, the Agreed Minutes on Defence Cooperation promoted mutual understanding, familiarisation and confidence-

building through exercises, exchange of doctrines, high-level visits, courses, seminars and a focus on areas of mutual interest. And by 1997, the two countries had sponsored five joint exercises between the army, air force and navy.

Defence Policy Group

The Defence Policy Group (DPG) led by the defence secretary on the Indian side and the under secretary of defence for policy on the US side is the primary mechanism to guide indo-US defence ties. The DPG till now has held seven meetings since its inception. Sub-groups such as the Defence Production and Procurement Group, Military Cooperation Group, Joint Technology Group and Senior Technology Security Group report, and provide inputs, to the DPG. [27]

The seventh meeting of the India-US DPG, held in Washington, DC, on November 21-23, included an intensive exchange of views on the international strategic and security situation and on the further development of bilateral defence cooperation as envisaged under the Defence Framework agreed between US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and Indian Minister of Defence Pranab Mukherjee on June 28, 2005, in Washington, DC. Both view their bilateral defence cooperation as an important facet of the India-US global partnership, reflected in the India-US Joint Statement of July 18, 2005.

The DPG reviewed the reports of the four sub-groups: Military Cooperation Group, Joint Technology Group, Senior Security Technology Group and Senior Technology Security Group and Defence Procurement & Production Group (DPPG). The newly constituted DPPG held its first meeting in Washington DC, on November 18-21, 2005, and discussed ways to strengthen cooperation in the field of defence supplies as well as industrial and technological cooperation between the USA and India.[28]

Although, the influence of the DPG has been limited to the defence Services level, these meetings have provided direction to the ministerial level

talks. However, cooperation on United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations has worked to the advantage of both countries.

Nuclear Test

The basic difference on nuclear issues of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) during the Cold War era and then its extension, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in the post-Cold War era continued to play a limiting factor in Indo-US defence cooperation. While both the countries advocated non-proliferation as a part of the overall objective of nuclear disarmament, the United States espoused a doctrine of nuclear deterrence for all five nuclear weapon states, simultaneously denying the same to the rest of world. India did not sign the CTBT because of it being discriminatory and biased in favour of the nuclear-haves.[29] Again, the passage of the Brown Amendment, which was a one-time presidential waiver of sanctions imposed on Pakistan under the Pressler Amendment, signed into law by President Clinton on January 27, 1996, worsened its relations with the United States. Politicians from across the political spectrum urged renewed acceleration of India's short-range Prithvi and medium-range Agni missile delivery systems. The Prithvi missile was tested which indicated that India would not compromise with its national security. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), then the main opposition party, renewed its call for a nuclear option.

Although India had walked out of the NPT in spite of sponsoring it in 1965, it had never confronted the dominant discourse of the international system so directly as when it walked out of the CTBT negotiations, and then challenged the existing international norms when it ended its self-imposed 24-year moratorium, and embarked on a series of nuclear tests on May 11 and 13, 1998.

As a result of India's nuclear test, the United States imposed mandatory sanctions and mobilised other nations, in particular, Japan, to cut economic assistance to India. France and Russia were more sympathetic to India but

could not prevent the United States from creating an international framework of the UNSC Resolution 1172 in June 1998, which laid down that India sign the NPT and address the Kashmir dispute. China and the UK were far more aggressive on this UNSC Resolution. Also, during his visit to China in June 1998, Clinton announced a new strategic partnership with China and condemned India's nuclear test. These developments seemed to worry India and brought it on the back foot as the UN Resolution seemed to internationalise the Kashmir dispute, leading to UN intervention, which Pakistan had always wanted. The US-China convergence of interest for putting down India[30] and also mandating China to oversee nuclear developments in South Asia was another disturbing factor for India.

The difference of opinion on nuclear issues prevented any substantial progress in Indo-US defence cooperation. Sanctions imposed in the defence area included suspension of cooperation on the LCA, which was started during the Rajiv Gandhi regime, and India could not even get spares of its British Sea King helicopters and Harrier fighters which had certain American components. Although, some of the sanctions were eased, it once again reestablished the image of the United States as an unreliable partner to India in the areas of defence and security.

Jaswant-Talbot Talks

India's nuclear defiance of the United States in 1998 and the reconciliation and lobbying done as a follow up could be considered as the most complex, daring and successful political manoeuvres the nation had ever initiated.

Initially condemned by the Clinton Administration, the tests precipitated the longest series of high-level bilateral talks led by US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot and Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh (which started on June 11, 1998) in the history of the US-India relationship. For the first time, there was a mutual attempt to structure the relationship inde-

pendent of Indo-Pakistani or Indo-Russian concerns. In all, the US had eleven rounds of talk with India and this dialogue covered the broad issues ranging from the questions of proliferation and nuclear policy to larger issues such as the shape of the international system, terrorism, and strategic cooperation between the two states.[31]

In the meantime, in 1999, the Kargil conflict took place which helped India put across strongly its point on defence and security concerns. In the Kargil case, for the first time, the US Administration viewed the Kashmir problem objectively. The policy-makers regarded the whole episode of Kargil in an impartial way and found that Pakistan was guilty. The Jaswant –Talbot talks and the lobbying activities that were on going in parallel, helped clarify the US apprehensions, misconceptions and misperceptions about India's nuclear posture. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), and National Association for Software Services and Companies (NASSCOM) delegations ably articulated the adverse impact of economic sanctions on the US-India relations and paved the way for a bigger dialogue which many would not have imagined during the Cold War.

BUSH REGIME AND PENTAGON DIALOGUE: MILITARY–TO–MILITARY COOPERATION INTENSIFIES (2001 ONWARDS)

The Bush Administration and, especially, the Pentagon, redefined the defence cooperation with India. They saw a strategically important India as a potential partner in providing peace and stability in the Indian Ocean and in shaping a new Asian balance of power. In the begining, the Bush Administration viewed China as looming large, and India as a partner to counter China in Asia. In May 2001, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage came to India to explain President Bush's strategic framework that included the missile defence programme; he hinted at a new beginning with India and countering of rogue states,

namely Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and some in India's neighbourhood.[32]

India's support to the missile defence system and full cooperation with the US after 9/11 was seen positively by the Pentagon. In fact, since September 2001, and despite a concurrent US rapprochement with Pakistan in its war on terrorism, US-India security cooperation and the military-to-military cooperation increased extraordinarily in the scale, scope, range and frequency of joint exercises. The two nations had at least one joint military exercise or engagement each month which focussed on improving the capacity for combined military operations across the board by special forces against terrorists, maritime interdiction, search and rescue, airlift support, logistics transport and airborne assaults. The India-US Defence Policy Group (DPG) — moribund since India's 1998 nuclear tests and the ensuing US sanctions —was revived in late 2001 and began to meet frequently. The chiefs of the defence Services as well as political leaders visited each other's capitals more frequently.[33]

At the end of 2002, the Bush Administration made early breakthroughs in arms sales to India: simplification of the congressional notification of arms sales to India, sale and lease of fire finder radars, fast track delivery for spares of Sea King helicopters, consideration of the sale of special forces' equipment and the sale of GE engines and avionics for the Indian LCA. Since October 24, 2002, only those major defence equipment (MDE) items costing more than $14 million require congressional notification. This change puts India in a category with American treaty allies such as South Korea and Japan.[34]

There was also substantial change in the US funding in international military education and training to India and the joint military exercises. In fiscal year 2002 (FY 02), India received no foreign military financing assistance, but obtained $1,012,000 in international military education and training funding. In FY 03, India did not obtain any foreign military fund, but received $1,000,000 in international military education and training assistance. For FY 04, India was allocated $1,250,000 in international military education and training.[35]

Setting a new trajectory in the Indo-US defence relations, Washington cleared the sale of the latest Patriot anti-missile system to India in 2005. An offer of this kind of system, commonly known as the PAC-3 (Patriot advanced capability-3) anti-missile defence system, is a big step in this regard. The commercial military sales to India have also seen a sharp rise, having tripled from US $ 5.6 million in 2003 to U.S.$ 17.7 million in 2004, and surging to US $ 64 million in 2005.

The armed forces of the two countries have been holding joint exercises since the resumption of defence cooperation between them. Joint exercises between the US and Indian militaries have become routine, and are expanding greatly in scope. The joint exercises include the following:

2002: In 2002 alone, six major joint exercises were held. Indian and US special forces conducted the airborne joint exercises, "Balance Iroquois" in Agra in May 2002, and "Geronimo Thrust" in Alaska in September-October 2002. A joint air transport exercise, "Cope India" was conducted in Agra in October 2002 aimed at improving interoperability between the two air forces.[36]

2003: Air Force: combined air force exercise in Alaska. **Navy:** complex "Malabar 04" naval exercises off the east coast in November 2003; naval search-and-rescue exercises through 2003-04. **Army:** A peace-keeping command post exercise was held jointly in New Delhi in April 2003 and special forces of the two countries conducted the joint counter-insurgency exercises "Vajra Prahar," in Mizoram in April 2003. In September 2003, US special forces conducted a combined exercise with Indian commandos based in Jammu and Kashmir, in "high altitude, dry and rocky terrain similar to that in which Osama bin Laden is reported to be hiding... [these exercises] helped train US forces in terrain that would otherwise not be available to them in the United States."

2004: Air Force: "Operation Cope India 04" in February 2004 at Gwalior (the first ever Indo-US fighter aircraft exercises, held over 10 days) and "Cooperative

Cope Thunder" in Alaska in June 2004. **Navy:** anti-submarine warfare exercise in April 2004, and "Malabar 04" exercises off Goa in October 2004. **Army:** peace-keeping operations workshop, continuing special forces "Iroquois" series of exercises, and "Operation Yudh Abhyas 04" (in Mizoram again). The US marines also conducted a high altitude artillery exercise in November 2003.

2005: Air Force: Indo-US aerial war-games at Kalaikunda ("Cope India 05") in November 2005. **Navy:** biggest-ever Indo-US joint naval exercise, including aircraft carriers, guided missile destroyers, frigates, helicopters, spy planes and fighter aircraft. **Army:** 2005 US "Roving Sands" missile defence exercise in the US, to which Indian forces were invited.

2006: Army: Joint Indo-US Army exercise code-named "Shatrujeet" or "Victory Over the Enemy" in Belgaum, in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, in October 2006. The exercise was aimed at joint Indo-US counter terrorism training in a semi-urban terrain with a view to enhance interoperability at a functional level.[37]

The rationale behind these exercises was to develop 'interoperability', the ability of the two forces to communicate, coordinate and fight together, and enhance the cooperative security relationship between the two countries.

In the first term of the Bush Administration, in contrast to the intensification of military contacts, there were not as many remarkable results in three other areas: sales of major combat systems, bilateral defence industrial collaboration, and combined military operations. However, India's support to the president's missile defence programme (which broadly comprises air; sea, land-based systems and space-based early warning satellite components that protect US allies from the enemy country's missiles) had created enthusiasm and hopes in the Bush Administration. But opposition to comprehensive Indo-US cooperation on missile defence in the United States, the issue of nuclear stability and the probable reaction from China dampened this missile defence programme. In the case of

combined military operations, except for naval cooperation, cooperation could not be extended during Operation Iraqi Freedom because of India's refusal to send its troops in alliance with the US troops due to India's own stakes in the Gulf region.

The dialogue on missile defence mandated by the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) continues even today but that does not imply that India seeks to purchase various terminal missile defence systems, either from the US or elsewhere.[38] India's strategy seems to be to secure Indo-US ties to advance its own technical and doctrinal understanding of strategic defence; bolster its own indigenous research and development effort in the near term; and secure US commitments to sell the most sophisticated missile defence systems necessary to neutralise specific missile threats facing India— all while it continues to examine various American, Russian, Israeli, and European missile defence systems and sub-systems for their relevance to its long-term interests.

NEXT STEPS IN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (NSSP)

Indo-US relations entered a new era with the NSSP launched by President Bush and former Prime Minister Vajpayee in January 2004. The United States and India agreed to expand cooperation in three specific areas: civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programmes, and high-technology trade. In addition, the two countries agreed to expand dialogue on missile defence. These areas of cooperation were designed to progress through a series of reciprocal steps that build on each other.[39]

On September 17, 2004, the United States and India, in a joint statement, announced important progress towards the implementation of the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) initiative, which will expand US-Indian trade and cooperation in civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programmes and high-technology industries. It said that implementation of the NSSP would lead to significant economic benefits for both countries and improve regional and global security. [40]

Talks on Phase II of the NSSP were held on October 21, 2004, when the US assistant secretary of state for South Asian Affairs visited India. India reported substantial progress in four areas: biotechnology, nano technology, advanced information technology, and defence technology.[41] In November 2004, a meeting of the India-US Cyber Security Forum was held in Washington DC, where the two sides agreed to collaborate in combating cyber crime, enhancing cyber security research and development, improving information assurance and defence cooperation, standards and software assurance, and cyber incident management and response.[42]

The progress made through the NSSP[43] enabled India to put in place a regulatory framework for promoting strategic trade and high-technology commerce by addressing concerns of liberal and predictable licensing, on the one hand, and technology security and export controls, on the other. Among the various results of the NSSP were the removal of many Indian organisations such as the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Headquarters from the Department of Commerce Entity List, delicensing of certain categories of dual-use items, institution of a presumption of approval policy in other categories and direct cooperation in developing, producing, marketing and operating commercial satellites. These policy changes were facilitated through the upgradation of India's export controls, reflected in the passage of legislation on that subject in May 2005 that underlined India's credentials as a secure and responsible destination. India and the United States have improved preventive enforcement capabilities, conducted outreach programmes and embarked on technical exchanges in support of their export control goals.[44]

Irrespective of all bilateral upheavals, the NSSP did not include any such provisions that might ask India to give up its nuclear weapons capability or to sign any non-proliferation agreement, and it was signed even when India refused to send troops for Iraq to aid the Americans. It opened further the way of Indo-US defence cooperation.

TSUNAMI COOPERATION

Although the Pentagon was disappointed at the Indian decision not to send troops to Iraq, the Bush Administration and, especially Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, was looking at India with the long-term goal of balance of power in Asia and the Middle East. The unprecedented human disaster in the form of the tsunami provided a mission for a combined military operation between India and the US that was much appreciated in Washington. India participated in the tsunami relief coalition that included, apart from the US, Japan and Australia.

The cooperation in the tsunami relief operations had significant strategic implications for disaster management efforts in the tsunami–affected areas.

— India's refusal of aid from abroad reflected its self–confidence and power. Its swift response showed that India was a strong, independent global player. Its offers of help to its neighbours improved its standing with them, and also reestablished its image as a regional leader.

— It helped to reaffirm India's "Look East" policy and strengthen its ties with Southeast Asia.

— It was for the first time that Indian and US forces coordinated humanitarian work in the Indian Ocean region. Growing military-to-military contacts between the two countries over the past several years — a centrepiece of the new Indo-US relationship — made it possible for the two states to play a leading and coordinated role in relief.

— Indo-US cooperation during the tsunami relief operations also showed that the latent doubts and suspicions of US initiatives in the region that had until recently preoccupied India's foreign policy, were declining rapidly. About 40,000 military personnel from more than a dozen nations participated in aid operations around the Indian Ocean. Close working relationships among the armed forces of a number of countries during the relief work opened further possibilities of cooperative security in the region.

— This disaster management and relief cooperation raised hopes in the

United States of wider security cooperation with India, outside the UN framework. This has also given an idea of four nations — the US, Australia, Japan and India — forming an alliance in the context of Asian security and a rising China.

NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THE INDIA-US DEFENCE RELATIONSHIP

In June 2005, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee signed a ten-year defence partnership agreement known as the "New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship" outlining planned collaboration in multilateral operations, expanded two-way defence trade, increasing opportunities for technology transfers and co-production, expanded collaboration related to missile defence, and establishment of a bilateral Defence Procurement and Production Group.[45]

The Defence Policy Group continues to serve as the primary mechanism to guide the US-India strategic relationship. The agreement unveiled mechanisms to promote long-term bilateral defence industrial ties and the possible outsourcing of research and production to India.

Under this defence agreement, a programme such as the supply of 126 fighters to the IAF has several attributes that make it attractive to both the United States and India. The IAF has an urgent need for the programme, and it gives US entrants cost and scalability advantages that none of the competing platforms can offer. Co-production of the F-16 currently occurs in several key countries allied with the United States: Turkey, Belgium, the Netherlands, and South Korea. Because the United States has not offered the F-18E/F for overseas co-production to date, this defence cooperation exemplifies America's seriousness about developing a long-overdue security relationship. This is going to help India to serve larger strategic goals. Regardless of the US platform chosen, a successful aircraft deal would mean that India has accepted the basic realist tenets of balance-of-power politics that it had considered anathema during the Nehruvian years. As an opportunity to transcend past concerns

about regional rivalries, export control, and disagreements over India's nuclear policy, it would fit squarely in the continuum of US-India security relations as testimony to the commitment of both countries to find common ground and make up for past missed opportunities. For the United States, challenges to the programme are not trivial. India's defence procurement process does not easily allow for the strategic leverage that the government seems to want in its defence purchases. The package offered and accepted must be attractive enough to give the Indian government ammunition to overcome domestic political and institutional opposition to the US-India relationship.

Many analysts see increased US-India security ties as providing an alleged "counter-balance" to growing Chinese influence in Asia. In India, it received mixed reactions as it was welcomed as well as criticised for exposing the country's military strength to a superpower, and was seen with suspicion. However, this agreement provides opportunities for the Indian defence industry to place itself better in a world where defence industries of the advanced countries are globalising. It would enhance India's bargaining power in technology transfers and co-production from the three main sources of armaments in the world—the US, Europe and Russia. Moreover, it recognises the need in Washington and New Delhi to add more depth to the Indo-US defence engagement for a stable balance of power in Asia.

Indo-US Nuclear Deal

The Indo-US nuclear deal signed on July 18, 2005, now known as the Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Cooperation Act 2006,[46] aimed at meeting India's energy requirements, has almost put an end to the nuclear confrontation between India and the US. This would lead to dismantling of the technology denial regimes that constrained Indo-US cooperation and commerce in defence technology. The deal would strengthen Indo-US defence ties as it expands the scope of the NSSP and High Technology Cooperation Group

(HTCG) and opens up avenues for India in regard to dual use technology with the United States.

Probably, such an agreement would not have been possible without steady progress in building a strategic partnership over the past decade and a half. It is difficult to say whether the defence cooperation agreement helped the nuclear cooperation agreement to materialise or the other way round. But it is evident that without the nuclear roadblock being bypassed, the defence industry relationship would have remained still-born since the US laws and non-proliferation policy do not permit cooperation with a non-NPT nuclear weapon state that has been under sanctions for three decades. Changes in legislation as a consequence of the nuclear agreement would open the road to build "two-way defence trade" visualised in the June 2005 agreement and increase the powerful US defence industry's stake in strengthening US-India relations across the board.[47]

CONCLUSION

The advancement in Indo-US defence cooperation signifies the changed international scenario in the post Cold War era in general and the post 9/11 world in particular. This advancement is based on present geo-political realities and convergence of key strategic interests between New Delhi and Washington.

In fact, Indo-US defence cooperation is based on mutual interests. India's growing geo-political significance, the economic foothold it provides in the region, the role it can play in counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation activities, its potential strategic utility, and its importance for global energy stability and environmental protection is increasingly acknowledged by the United States. India needs the US for political, economic, counter-terrorism, technology, energy security and strategic objectives necessary for attaining global power status.

A rising China is an important factor for the US' enhanced defence cooperation with India which can be seen in the context of counter-balancing China.

China, with its enduring military build-up and modernisation of defence capabilities is perceived to be a threatening power in Asia by the United States. The February 2006 Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) states that since 1996, China has increased its defence spending by more than 10 per cent in real terms in every year, except 2003. The 2006 QDR also mentions China as a "major and emerging power" whose choices are bound to "affect the future strategic position and freedom of action of the US, its allies and partners."

India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean, across the sea lanes of communication (SLOC) linking West Asia and East Asia, makes India attractive to the US military. The US needs India as it needs to explore alternative options in Asia. The US has been relying heavily on its traditional allies like Japan, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia in Asia. India would be a viable option for the United States in case its dealings with traditional allies become estranged or they are politically at odds.

Access to Indian bases and military infrastructure for the US Air Force (USAF) is important from the strategic point of view. It is noteworthy that, during the 1991 Gulf War, India had allowed refuelling of US warplanes, and during Operation Enduring Freedom provided Indian port facilities to US warships for rest and recuperation.

The immediate future of Indo-US defence cooperation is in the area of naval cooperation. Indian naval ships escorted merchant vessels from the north Arabian Sea to the Straits of Malacca, representing the most active element of its cooperation with the US Navy during Operation Enduring Freedom. Also, the US Navy is in need of a moderately neutral territory on the other side of the world to provide ports and support for operations in West Asia.

The US military is also eyeing India's training facilities. India has a variety of terrain, from ice-clad mountains to desert, and this would help the US as its military training facilities are shrinking and becoming increasingly controversial in the US.

Interoperability has become an important aspect of the US-India defence relationship. The US objective in advancing defence ties is to develop joint capabilities and confidence, jointly tackle multilateral security issues like protection of energy supplies and sea lanes, conduct peace-keeping exercises and combat terrorism.

India is one of the biggest arms buyers in the Asia-Pacific region and Russia is the largest supplier of arms to India. However, given the size of India's arms market, the US has not been able to penetrate it substantially, except for a handful of modest sales such as artillery-locating radar and possibly P-3C ASW aircraft. The US is eyeing India's profitable defence market. India, on its part, is also not averse to the idea of getting US arms, given its new obligations and pursuits in the region. The US would be approached for the deal of 126 combat aircraft which India wants to include in its air force. While the main reason for Washington's arms export during the heyday of the Cold War years was military-strategic—in order to bolster allies and strengthen alliance relationships—it is also economic considerations that are driving the US to explore new markets in the present world.

In recent years, China has repositioned its strategic moves and strengthening its foothold in South Asia. After taking Pakistan and Myanmar into confidence, China is using its financial and military strength to draw Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives into its orbit. The Chinese moves in South Asia may enable it to go ahead of India in South Asia and further squeeze its conventional strategic advantages in the region. As a result, India's threats perceptions in Asia make it imperative for India to enhance cooperation with the United States in the strategic and defence areas. Apart from the Chinese threat which may emanate from economic tension, competition in energy exploration in different countries, the Indo-China disputed border area, China's transfer of missile technology to Pakistan, and Pakistan as a perpetual irritant which has been involved in giving support to terrorism in India,

a proxy war and a conventional or nuclear strike against India cannot be ruled out. India's stakes are large in protecting and securing the sea lanes extending from the Straits of Hormuz to the Straits of Malacca and India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as increasingly important priorities. India is worried about growing piracy and terrorist threat to energy and merchant traffic along the SLOCs. India wants to prevent the Indian Ocean becoming an area of turbulence and competition among regional and extra-regional navies, with the prospect of future Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean being particularly worrisome. Trans-national threats such as narco-trafficking, terrorism, and Islamic fundamentalism that are being used by state or non-state actors, either separately or in combination to threaten India or destabilise the region, cannot be ignored. Although no direct role for the United States can be identified in countering the threats, Indo-US defence cooperation would certainly help in an indirect way and as a long-term goal.

Defence cooperation, which was of a token nature during the five decades of the Cold War, has now moved to the centre of the relationship; especially after the conclusion of the ten-year framework for the Indo-US defence relationship that was concluded in 2005. After more than 30 joint exercises in the past four years, the armed forces on both sides have acquired a sense of confidence in their interoperability. It is also significant that India is now being offered almost the entire range of advanced US military technology: from F-16 and F-18 aircraft to the futuristic PAC-3 anti-missile system, the F/A-22 and F-35 fighters and the P-8A multi-mission maritime aircraft. From the Indian point of view, this has provided a new and positive perspective to the Indian defence forces. Indo-US defence ties must fulfill India's long-term goal of acquiring the capacity to design, manufacture and develop arms, including the economic viability of transfer of technology and its applicability to India's requirements. In fact, increased US investment in the Indian defence sector, dual use technology transfer and a partnership of equals is going to be the

touchstone of military cooperation between these two democracies.

However, Indo-US defence cooperation would depend on the wider perspectives of political and economic relations between the two countries. To conclude, the Indo-US defence cooperation, which was totally negligible in the Cold War period, has assumed a new magnitude in the post-Cold War period. The Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Cooperation Act, 2006, the Indo-US defence framework and the HTCG talks would strengthen further Indo-US defence cooperation . It reflects Washington's changed notion of India in the present world order, and signals that the two countries are no longer grounded in an obsolete intrinsic conflict of interest; the recent "strategic coordination" being carved out suits both Washington's and New Delhi's goals in Asia and will impact the power balance in the Asian region, enhancing India's status in the international arena.

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