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Examining Biden's Evolving Indo-Pacific Policy

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Executive Summary

This document discusses the evolution of the US' Indo-Pacific policy following Joe Biden's victory in November 2020. We argue that Biden has built on his predecessor's policies, while making substantive and stylistic adjustments. The US' approach has expanded beyond military partnerships to focus on issues of trade, technology, development and governance. Biden's policy is premised on the following four approaches:

- Focussing on domestic economic renewal and building networks of trust for critical goods.
- Revitalising America's network of alliances and building new economic and technological partnerships.
- Crafting a new framework for ties with China, which includes elements of competition and cooperation.
- Re-structuring US military engagement in the Indo-Pacific under the Pacific Deterrence Initiative.

We conclude that administration's approach creates opportunities for India to attract investments, boost manufacturing, expand its role in global supply chains, and pursue defence modernisation. However, Biden's focus on domestic challenges, his administration's distrust of Russia, and openness to accommodation with China, could create new challenges for India.

I. Introduction

Joe Biden's victory in the US Presidential election in November 2020 led to much debate about the future of American engagement in the Indo-Pacific. The first 100 days of his administration indicate strategic continuity in US policy, albeit with some key adjustments. This brief provides an overview of the evolution of the US' Indo-Pacific policy, before discussing the opportunities and challenges that emerge from an Indian perspective.

II. Background

Within his first year in power, Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, had begun reorienting the US' Asia-Pacific policy within the larger framework of the Indo-Pacific. In late 2017, Trump outlined the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific."[1] That December, the US National Security Strategy identified China and North Korea as the primary challenges to US interests and values in the region. It also promised to "redouble our (American) commitment to established alliances and partnerships."[2]

A few months later, the US Pacific Command was formally renamed the US Indo-Pacific Command. This was followed by the Department of Defense issuing an Indo-Pacific strategy report in June 2019.[3] The document described the Indo-Pacific as a "priority theater," with preserving "a rules-based international order" premised on shared interests and values being a key objective. On the other hand, "revisionist" China, "revitalized" Russia, and North Korea were identified as primary challenges to US interests. The strategy proposed a three-pronged approach of "preparedness," "partnerships," and "promotion of a networked region" to further American interests.

Contradictions between this stated desire to work with partners and Trump's America First policy stymied progress. For instance, negotiations with allies on burden-sharing were often fractious. The emphasis on reciprocal trade, with a trigger-happy approach to tariffs, created new sources of friction with partners. In addition, the US' withdrawal from multilateral institutions and agreements damaged America's diplomatic credibility. Furthermore, Trump's unpredictability and transactional approach undermined Washington's values-based proposition, whether in the context of human rights or free trade.

The Trump administration's approach to the region appeared to be largely premised on countering China rather than developing congruence with the broader strategic interests of regional actors. This hindered partnership building, as many East and South Asian states were clear that they did not want to be forced to choose between the US and China.[4]

Nevertheless, there were key areas of progress, too. For instance, there was a significant deepening of the US-India defence partnership. The re-establishment of the Quadrilateral

Security Dialogue (in late 2017) and subsequent steady engagement laid a strong foundation for the Biden administration to follow through [5]. Finally, there was a gradual shift towards recognising the need to deepen economic engagement across the Indo-Pacific to address the region's developmental needs [6].

III. Early Directions

One of the key commitments of the Biden campaign, leading into the presidential election, was to renew America's commitment to allies and friends, while emphasising shared democratic values.[7] Biden was categorical that he planned to "reimagine" America's historic partnerships, and was prepared to lead in order to deal with modern-day challenges, including the rise of China.[8] However, what was uncertain was how the Indo-Pacific construct would fit within Biden's broader strategy. None of the debates between Biden and Trump mentioned the Indo-Pacific. The Democratic Party Platform did not mention the phrase at all.[9]

Statements from the campaign and individuals who would eventually assume key administration positions indicated that while Sino-US competition would continue, there would be some adjustments in American policy. For instance, writing in late 2019, Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan argued that the US and China "will need to be prepared to live with the other as a major power."[10] They argued against a Cold War analogy, which "exaggerates the existential threat posed by China." And they called for pursuing a strategy of "sustainable deterrence" in the Indo-Pacific, arguing that "coexistence in the Indo-Pacific by both militaries should not be dismissed as impossible."

In July 2020, Antony Blinken argued that a Biden administration would likely place "more emphasis on the Indo-Pacific."[11] But at the same time, he would add that US policy needed to focus on investing in its own competitiveness, rallying allies and partners, and standing up for its own values. This process, Blinken argued, would ensure the establishment of "relative strength in the relationship" with China, which would then allow it to "engage China and work with China, in areas where our interests clearly overlap."

The possibility of a likely reset between Beijing and Washington after the turbulence of the Trump era led some to question US commitment to the Indo-Pacific[12]. In fact, for many, the series of executive actions that the Trump administration adopted in its final two months, such as targeting Chinese officials and companies, along with lifting restrictions on US officials' engagement with Taiwan, were an attempt to limit Biden's room to manoeuvre towards a reset with Beijing.[13] Yet, soon after his election victory, Biden would speak to the leaders of Australia, Japan, and South Korea, committing America to maintaining a "secure and prosperous" Indo-Pacific. Analysts would read much into the terms "secure and prosperous" replacing "free and open," but the larger point was that the new administration was indicating a desire for continuity.[14]

This was further underscored in two essays authored by Kurt Campbell and Rush Doshi. Both of them would go on to assume key positions guiding the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific and China policies. In the first, they called for "a constructive China policy that strengthens the United States at home and makes it more competitive abroad."[15] Competition with China, they argued, "need not require confrontation or a second cold war." The second essay clarified the approach to the Indo-Pacific.[16] They argued that America's Indo-Pacific strategy must focus on establishing a "balance of power," an "order that the region's states recognize as legitimate", and "an allied and partner coalition to address China's challenge to both." How the Biden administration has gone about this task since its inauguration is the subject of the subsequent section.

IV. Policy in Action

Examining the actions and statements of the Biden administration since inauguration, we identify four distinct elements of the US' evolving Indo-Pacific policy.

1. Domestic Revival

Biden campaigned on the agenda to "Build Back Better." Upon assuming the presidency, he promised to act with "boldness" in order to "repair," "restore," "heal" and "build" the United States after a period of social, political and economic tumult.[17] In keeping with this agenda, the administration's early focus appeared to be on containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, improving the efficiency of the vaccination drive, providing immediate economic relief to the vulnerable, and charting a long-term plan for economic revival, with an eye on competition from China.[18] In terms of outcomes, the administration has managed to hit the goal of over 200 million vaccinations in its first 100 days.[19]

Within his first week in office, Biden also signed executive orders to strengthen the federal government's support for American manufacturing, and to tackle the climate crisis while creating clean energy jobs.[20] Speaking at the State Department, he outlined the linkage between his domestic and foreign policies.[21] "Advancing a foreign policy for the middle class demands urgent focus on our domestic economic renewal," he said, promising to soon place the American Rescue Plan before Congress. The $1.9 trillion plan, providing unemployment benefits, direct transfers, and vaccine, education and health support, was cleared by Congress on March 11.[22]

Later in the month, the administration unveiled a nearly $2 trillion American Jobs Plan, which it argued "will create millions of good jobs, rebuild our country's infrastructure, and position the United States to out-compete China."[23] The plan promises a complete overhaul of America's transportation, power, water and digital infrastructure, along with investments in research and development to advance American leadership in critical technologies.

The import of these measures was evident in the lead up to the meeting between senior American and Chinese officials in Anchorage, Alaska, in March 2021. In a briefing prior to the meeting, State Department officials explained that one of the keys to the administration's evolving China strategy "is strengthening ourselves at home."[24] This, they argued, would provide the US with the "sources of strength" that it needs "to compete with China and to have an affirmative approach to the Indo-Pacific region."

2. Revitalising Partnerships

As promised on the campaign trail, Biden began his tenure by reaching out to allies and partners. The essential message that the administration sought to send out was that "America is back."[25] This implied pursuing a "core strategic proposition," which entails ensuring economic revival, returning to international institutions, defending American values at home and abroad, modernising military capabilities, and revitalising America's network of alliances and partnerships.

Within his first few weeks in office, Biden, along with senior officials (Blinken and Sullivan), spoke to officials and leaders from Britain, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, and ASEAN states. It is noteworthy that the Biden-Xi Jinping call, which is discussed later, came after the new US president had spoken to leaders from each of the above-mentioned states.

The American readouts of calls with Boris Johnson (Britain), Emmanuel Macron (France) and Angela Merkel (Germany) referred to China among "shared foreign policy priorities" that needed coordination.[26] In contrast, in conversations with Yoshihide Suga (Japan), Scott Morrison (Australia) and Narendra Modi (India), while China was mentioned and discussed, the White House's statements primarily prioritised the Indo-Pacific construct.[27]

The primary aim of these conversations appeared to be to reassure them of a return to normalcy in American diplomacy after the unpredictability of the Trump era. This, however, is likely to be a long-term challenge for the Biden administration. Despite Trump's electoral defeat, socio-political polarisation continues to run deep in the US. Trump received more than 74 million votes during the presidential election, indicating that a sizable number of Americans remain supportive of his policies. In addition, while the Democratic Party enjoys a narrow majority in Congress today, this could change during the mid-term elections in 2022. Allies and partners, therefore, are likely to remain cautious.

Nevertheless, there has been a gradual effort from the Biden administration to build greater coordination with regard to key areas. For instance, in mid-February, Blinken held talks with his counterparts from France, Germany and the UK. Among other things, the joint statement issued after the talks said that they "agreed to closely coordinate to address the global challenges posed by China, as well as the need for cooperation across a range of issues,

including climate change."[28] On the same day, Blinken also spoke to his Quad counterparts from India, Japan and Australia.[29]

A week after the calls, Biden signed an executive order aimed at ensuring "resilient, diverse, and secure supply chains."[30] While part of the agenda is to generate domestic capacity and jobs with regard to critical goods, Biden was categorical that ensuring supply chain security will "mean working more closely with our trusted friends and partners, nations that share our values." In operationalizing this approach, he ordered a 100-day review of supply chains for semiconductors, key minerals and materials, like rare earths, as well as pharmaceuticals and their ingredients, and advanced batteries.

This signalled a pragmatic shift away from the Trump administration's America First approach. A key, tangible development in this direction came on March 12, during the first-ever Quad leaders meeting. The joint statement issued after the meeting reiterated the commitment to a "free and open" Indo-Pacific that is "anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion."[31] More importantly, the meeting outlined a solution-oriented agenda in three critical areas, i.e., COVID-19 vaccine development and distribution, climate change, and critical and emerging technologies.[32] These three themes were reiterated at the key pillars of the new Competitiveness and Resilience (CoRe) Partnership that Biden and Suga announced at a summit meeting in April.[33]

Similarly, conversations are underway exploring the establishment of a proposed EU-US Trade and Technology Council.[34] The EU and the US have also re-launched a bilateral dialogue building "a shared understanding that relations with China," which they described as "multifaceted, comprising elements of cooperation, competition, and systemic rivalry."[35] At the same time, they emphasised that "credible multi-party democracy, the protection of human rights and adherence to international law support the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific." While operationalising these commitments will encounter specific challenges, the imposition of coordinated sanctions by the US, EU, Canada and the UK on Chinese officials over Beijing's policies in Xinjiang in late March indicates the existence of a political motivation to do so.[36]

3. New Framework for China

Under Trump, the Indo-Pacific policy seemed to largely revolve around evolving a response to China's rise. However, Biden's State Department has been categorical in saying that the approach to China would be part of the broader Indo-Pacific strategy.[37] In other words, the US government would be looking at Beijing from the Indo-Pacific prism, rather than the other way around. In essence, the Biden administration has signalled that it would be undertaking a comprehensive review of the US' China policy before making any policy decisions.

For instance, despite much talk of a possible reset in US-China ties under Biden, the incoming president made it clear fairly early that he wasn't going to "make any immediate moves" that

would prejudice his options with regard to China.[38] While there was no direct official contact in public between Chinese officials and Biden's team immediately after his election victory in November, reports suggested that using backchannels and intermediaries, Beijing had proposed dispatching Yang Jiechi, China's top diplomat, to the US.[39] The Chinese embassy in the US dismissed such reporting as being "not true to facts."[40] However, in his public remarks Ambassador Cui Tiankai was calling for "candid and equal-footed dialogue on the basis of mutual respect" to resume.[41] At the same time, in their confirmation hearings, senior Biden administration officials were echoing the hard-line views of the previous administration.[42]

Another early signal of a potentially tough approach to China was the decision to have Taiwan's de facto ambassador to the US, Bi-khim Hsiao, attend the inauguration. In fact, very early on, the State Department pushed back against what it said were the PRC's "attempts to intimidate its neighbours, including Taiwan," and committed to support Taiwan "in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability."[43] In addition, true to the commitment to make no sudden changes, Biden also retained the tariffs on Chinese imports and technology trade restrictions that Trump had imposed.

The first official contact between the two sides came in early February, with Blinken speaking to Yang Jiechi. Both the Chinese and American readouts from the call suggested that frictions over values and interests would endure.[44] A few days later, Biden and Xi Jinping spoke, in what the US president said was a two-hour-long call. Following the call, the State Department spokesperson explained that even though the Biden administration views Beijing through the lens of competition and its broad posture is to work the US into a position to compete with and outcompete China across a number of realms, it will seek engagement in areas where it is consistent with US interests and values.[45] Around the same time, the US Department of Defense established a new China Task Force with the aim "to provide a baseline assessment of department policies, programs and processes in regard to the challenge China poses." The task force's report is expected by the middle of the year.[46]

Officials from the two sides finally met on March 18-19 in Anchorage, Alaska. As discussed earlier, the Biden administration had carried out significant discussions with allies and partners prior to these talks. Apart from the Quad summit, these included 2+2 dialogues with Japan and South Korea (these are meetings in which the foreign and defence ministers or secretaries of each state participate). While the statement following the talks in Tokyo specifically criticised China, the one following talks in Seoul didn't mention China but emphasised a commitment to "work together to create a free and open Indo-Pacific region."[47] The State Department was keen to highlight that this sequencing of dialogues, beginning with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific first, was deliberate.[48] It argued that this flowed from a policy of dealing with China from a position of strength.

In addition to engaging with partners, the US government announced two specific decisions that irked Beijing. First, the Federal Communications Commission blacklisted five Chinese technology firms, including Huawei and Hikvision, on national security grounds.[49] This

indicated that, along with developing positive coordination and collaboration with allies and partners on emerging technologies, the administration also desired to pursue a policy of kneecapping Chinese technological development. Second, in response to the Chinese government's decision to alter Hong Kong's electoral system to strengthen Beijing's control, the State Department imposed sanctions on 24 PRC and Hong Kong officials.[50] The list included 14 vice chairs of the National People's Congress Standing Committee.

Despite the angry public exchanges in Anchorage, both sides ended the meeting terming the talks as constructive, highlighting points of deep friction but also areas of common interest.[51/52] Since the talks, tensions over fundamental values and human rights, China's coercion of US partners, and maritime security issues have been prominent; and these are likely to continue to remain salient, as evident in new legislation being debated in Congress, such as the Strategic Competition Act of 2021 or the Endless Frontier Act.

However, this does not imply hostility across the board. This was evident in Biden's climate envoy John Kerry's April visit to Shanghai, which resulted in a joint statement pledging closer cooperation. Importantly, as per the joint statement, the US acknowledged China's "leadership and collaboration" with regard to bringing the Paris climate accord into force. It is, therefore, likely that there will be adjustments and accommodation in American policy in specific domains once the ongoing policy reviews are completed.[53] Blinken's framework of the relationship being "competitive where it should be, collaborative where it can be, adversarial where it must be" is also indicative of this, as are remarks by the new US Trade Representative on Trump-era tariffs providing negotiation leverage.[54]

4. The Pacific Deterrence Initiative

The Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) is a proposed response to China's rising ability to project force into the Western Pacific, in particular, its so-called anti-access/area denial or A2AD capabilities. US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) has presented the case for the PDI to Congressional armed services committees, and the initiative appears to have strong backing from the Biden administration. The publicly available summary of the President's funding request, bluntly calls for prioritization of the PDI "to counter the threat from China".[55]

The PDI has its antecedents in a funding package first proposed in 2017 by the late US senator John McCain. As chairman of the Senate's Armed Services Committee, McCain proposed a five-year funding programme for US forces in the Pacific worth $7.5 billion called the Indo-Pacific Stability Initiative[56]. The funds were to go into increasing stocks of munitions, improving and expanding infrastructure, and assisting allied and partner states. While McCain's initiative went nowhere, the idea of a PDI gained traction among lawmakers over the years that followed[57]. The PDI made prominent appearances in both the 2020 and most recent 2021 versions of the US National Defense Authorization Act[58]. On 9 March 2021, Admiral Philip Davidson, the head of Indo-Pacific Command appeared before the Senate

Armed Services Committee, warning that the "greatest danger" for US forces in the Pacific was "the erosion of conventional deterrence."[59]

Chinese strategy in the Western Pacific is widely believed to be predicated on the ability to hold at risk US naval and ground-based assets within the First and Second Island Chains.[60] To achieve this, China relies on an ever-growing arsenal of conventional, precision-guided ballistic and cruise missiles. The ballistic missiles include an estimated 600 missiles with ranges of 300-1,000 kilometres, 150 missiles that can hit targets out to 3,000 kilometres (putting the First Island Chain within its reach), and 200 missiles with ranges of up to 5,500 kilometres, covering the Second Island Chain.[61]

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has run these missiles through extensive tests. Indeed, the US Department of Defense estimated the PLA tested more ballistic missiles in 2019 than all other states combined.[62] In December 2020, Davidson confirmed that Chinese anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) had successfully hit moving targets at sea during tests.[63] The tests were reportedly conducted in August 2020 and involved the DF-26B and DF-21D missiles.[64]

During a crisis or conflict in the First or Second Island Chain, these missiles would pose a tough dilemma for the US. Should its naval forces rush in to support allies and thus make themselves vulnerable to Chinese land-based missiles? Or should they stay away, seeking to project force less effectively from a distance? For China, this so-far hypothetical dilemma has the added benefit of eroding the confidence of key US allies like Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea about America's ability to come to their aid.

In addition to its long-range precision strike weapons, China is also expanding its naval fleet, bolstering its defences, and developing important supporting capabilities in space. The PLA Navy is currently the world's largest navy by numbers, with more than 350 vessels.[65] China is also developing an integrated air defence system that features both locally-built systems and important Russian ones like the S-400. Finally, China has increased its use of space-based assets for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR), positioning and navigation, and for enabling the dispersion of its own forces.[66]

The sustained rise of Chinese military power and increasing friction with Beijing have strengthened the hand of those advocating for the PDI. In early 2020, former Pentagon officials Randy Schriver and Eric Sayers identified the key purposes that PDI would serve.[67] One, it would improve the budgetary process, allowing lawmakers to review progress made and calibrate funding for specific purposes as needed. Two, it would take a more holistic approach to deterrence in the Pacific, focusing on "mission-oriented" funding rather than just focusing on specific platforms. Three, it would serve to reassure allies and partners, and four, it would serve to shore up deterrence against China.

In his 9 March statement, Davidson laid out the four areas of focus needed to achieve these objectives: increasing lethality, optimising force postures, strengthening allies and partners, and modernisation and innovation programmes.[68]

- *Lethality* would be increased by deploying accurate, long-range ground, air and naval missiles capable of hitting targets on the Chinese mainland from more than 500 kilometres away. Ground-based missile batteries and airfields would also be protected by integrated air and missile defence systems.[69]
- *Force postures* would be changed to address both military and strategic goals. The military goal would be to enhance survivability through dispersion of assets to various ground-based facilities in both US territories like Guam and in the territory of allies. This dispersion will, in turn, require investments in logistics, infrastructure, and command and control. The broader strategic goal is to signal US commitment to its allies through the persistent presence of American troops through "forward-based and rotational joint forces".[70]
- *Allies and partners would be strengthened* through "resilient and redundant joint/multinational command and control" as well as fusion centres for information sharing.
- *Modernisation and innovation* are to be enhanced through missile testing facilities and joint training.

The US territory of Guam in the Western Pacific will gain strategic significance over the coming years as a potential springboard and logistics hub for US forces. To harden the island's defences, Davidson has advocated the creation of a Guam Defense System (GDS) that can detect and intercept current and emerging threats from Chinese forces. These potential threats include fixed wing aircraft and cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and future capabilities such as hypersonic boost-glide weapons.[71] To make the GDS a reality, Davidson advocated the use of established platforms, including the Aegis Baseline combat system and the Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defence system.[72]

Other important components of the PDI will be the Homeland Defense Radar-Hawaii and the Tactical Multi-Mission Over-the-Horizon Radar (TACMOR), based in the republic of Palau, both of which are meant to enable a multi-layered air and missile defence system for American forces in the Western Pacific.

Despite some of the impressive capabilities that PDI could bring to bear, it has military limitations. Established platforms by themselves are unlikely to address the challenge posed by China's missiles. Current missile defence capabilities are expensive and only partially effective. In 2014, the Pentagon publicly unveiled its Third Offset strategy, a plan to pursue breakthrough technologies including in missile defence. The plan has since failed to deliver and is all but defunct. As of now, there are no promising candidate technologies that could reliably and inexpensively intercept ballistic missiles with ranges in excess of 500 kilometres[73].

While the US could compensate for its limited defensive capabilities by expanding its offensive capabilities, this would bring with it escalation risks. These risks would arise not just from the fact that the US would be attacking the Chinese mainland with long-range missiles, but also because of the dual-use nature of some of the PLA's own missiles and their supporting

facilities[74]. In particular, China's DF-26 missile, a weapon "tailor-made for payload delivery to the U.S. territory of Guam," has a so-called "hot-swappable" feature that allows the PLA Rocket Forces to rapidly switch between conventional and nuclear warheads[75]. This means US forces could inadvertently target a portion of China's nuclear arsenal.

These limitations notwithstanding, the PDI will be a crucial component of any Indo-Pacific strategy. The Biden administration has already indicated its support for the programme. If the administration had chosen not to support PDI, US allies in the region would have likely interpreted it as a sign that the Pacific was of much lower importance to the US than Europe, where an equivalent of the PDI, the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) has already been in place for years[76].

Biden's $715 billion request for the annual defence budget dissolves the overseas contingency operations fund, which has provided an ad hoc funding route for the EDI and was similarly planned to be used for the PDI[77]. Instead, the Pentagon might soon be able to fund both programmes through its regular budget. This will potentially provide greater oversight over how the funds are used and also create a sustainable basis for funding these programmes for years to come.

VI. Conclusion: An Indian Prism

Based on the developments discussed above, it is clear that the Biden administration's approach is characterised by broad continuity combined with key changes in specific areas. However, implementing the new approach will also bring new challenges. Furthermore, India's own perception of the administration will evolve based on the choices it makes.

1. Biden's Challenge

While the Indo-Pacific will remain a priority region for the Biden administration, it is still early days in the evolution of its Indo-Pacific policy. There are four key challenges it will encounter.

- First, the US will need to ensure policy predictability and sustained engagement to play a role in addressing the developmental and connectivity needs of the region. This will be challenging considering the partisan divide[78] and political fissures at home, along with the continued appeal of protectionist tendencies.[79]
- Second, US policy will have to adapt to the requirements of a diverse set of partners, many of whom do not wish to be forced into binary competition with China.

- Third, the US will need to work with allies and partners on developing a common understanding of interests and standards across a range of areas, from trade to technology. This will entail difficult negotiations, requiring changes in domestic laws and regulations, which will impinge on national security and business interests.
- Finally, while competition with China is likely to continue, adjustments made following the ongoing reviews of the US' China policy will impact the calculations of allies and partners. In order to mitigate the challenges that emerge following this, the Biden administration will have to be mindful not to let the Indo-Pacific policy become a subset of its China policy.

2. The Implications for India

From an Indian perspective, continuity in US policy with regard to engagement in the Indo-Pacific, especially the commitment to enhance the capabilities of allies and competition with China, even with tempered rhetoric, largely serves India's interests.

On the positive side of the ledger, the Biden administration's fresh focus on issues of technology and building supply chain resilience with like-minded partners provides India with a unique opportunity to attract investments, boost manufacturing, and expand its role in global supply chains. Likewise, the deepening view of long-term competition with China across different branches of government in Washington sustains the imperative for deeper US-India defence cooperation. This creates opportunities to pursue deeper engagement on intelligence sharing, surveillance and domain awareness, maritime capacity development, cyber security, and asymmetric warfare. Meanwhile, US-China engagement on issues like climate change, terrorism and the Iranian nuclear programme is not necessarily antithetical to Indian interests.

On the flip side, however, the deepening of the Russia-China relationship, along with enduring tensions between Washington and Moscow, could result in New Delhi having to navigate choppy waters. In addition, it remains to be seen how the Biden administration will want India to align with its assertive approach to values and human rights. On the campaign trail, Biden promised to host a global Summit for Democracy in the first year of his presidency. There are no details about whether this is going to take place, but the agenda Biden outlined was broad enough to create challenges for India.

Finally, as discussed earlier, the Biden administration is currently carrying out a comprehensive review of its China policy. Once these are completed, one can expect adjustments to the current posture. While competition will sustain, there will be elements of cooperation and potentially even accommodation. This will likely impact Indian calculations.

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