



# Assessing Arguments Against Closer India-US Ties

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This paper looks at the various arguments against closer ties with the US that are frequently seen in Indian commentaries in the media, social media, and offline and online discourse. Some of the arguments or fears are understandable, yet not insurmountable. Some are unfounded, while others fail to give due weightage to India's stature in the world, its growing strength, and its agency in doing what is in its best interests, even if it is against US foreign policy objectives.

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## Executive Summary

Although India's relations with the US have grown substantially over the last four decades, suspicions remain within certain quarters of the Indian public and intelligentsia, who feel the US is fundamentally an unreliable partner.

To make this case, they point to the history of India-US relations, ideological divergences, and the power the US wields. At the extreme end of these apprehensions are conspiracy theories and unfounded fears, which, if allowed to influence policies, will have a negative impact on critical ties for India's security and economic development.

Evidently, India has adopted a more astute approach in its foreign policy. Its primary foreign policy objective is to leverage foreign relations for economic development and develop strategic partnerships with countries that help achieve that.

The United States and Europe are India's most important sources of technology, direct investments, capital, and export markets. India pursues these relations as a rising economic and military power that defends its vital interests and aspires to play a significant role on the international stage.

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The paper analyses various arguments against closer ties with the US that are frequently seen in Indian commentaries across various platforms from military and political perspectives. Some arguments or fears are understandable, while others are unfounded or fail to give due weightage to India's growing strength and agency in doing what is in its best interests, even if it is sometimes against US foreign policy objectives.

India is sought as a partner not by the US alone; it is today an economic and security partner of Europe, Russia, Japan and Australia, among others. India is central to the Indo-Pacific strategy or calculations of major countries that have an interest in the region. NATO, for instance, wants to have closer engagement with India.

Admittedly, India still has a long way to go in terms of economic development, which is its primary goal and the driving force behind its foreign policy. In that context, India's partnership with the US is critical. This paper argues that, because geopolitical factors favour India, there is a strategic opportunity.

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# I. Introduction

India-US relations have grown rapidly in the last twenty years. The partnership is described as “Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership”<sup>1</sup>. Many adjectives have been used to describe the ties – “the most consequential”<sup>2</sup>, “indispensable”<sup>3</sup>, natural allies<sup>4</sup>, the defining partnership of 21st century<sup>5</sup>, a “force for good” for global peace and stability<sup>6</sup>, and more. The two countries share very close defence ties, and the US is India’s largest trading partner and foreign direct investor. Shared democratic values, the convergence of interests on various issues, and vibrant people-to-people contacts drive the relationship.

The Cold War-era suspicions and divergences between the US and India which lasted till the end of the last century, have been overcome. Back then, India was the target of US sanctions over its nuclear programme. In addition, US support for India’s western neighbour and adversary, Pakistan, and a lack of sensitivity to India’s concerns about terrorism emanating from there, hindered bilateral ties.

On the other hand, India pursued a non-aligned policy but leaned toward the Soviet Union, which became its primary source of military equipment. This dependency, with Russia being the USSR’s successor state, continues to persist.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union forced India to reconsider its policy toward the United States. Despite tensions in the 1990s, both countries recognised the importance and potential of good

In the 1990s, influenced by the assistant secretary for South Asia Robin Raphel, the US leaned towards Pakistan on the Kashmir issue and even questioned the Instrument of Accession which soured [Indo-US ties to its lowest](#). This was at a time when Pakistan backed terrorism was at its peak in Kashmir.

relations. The seeds were sown during Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's administration, which reached out to the US, leading to the historic Jaswant-Talbott talks.

In 2004, India-US announced Next Steps in Strategic Partnership<sup>7</sup>, to expand cooperation in civilian nuclear activities, civilian space programmes, and high-technology trade. This was followed by the 10-year New Framework for the US-India Defence Relations<sup>8</sup> in 2005, which was renewed in 2015. The two countries agreed to strengthen defence relations and sign defence deals to increase security, strengthen strategic ties, and build interoperability. The proclamation of an "Indo-US global partnership"<sup>9</sup> leading to the acceptance of India as a "responsible state with advanced nuclear technology," alluding to India's nuclear weapons, despite it not being a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, was a game-changer in the ties – or as PM Modi said in his address to the US Congress, changed the very colours of leaves of our relationship<sup>10</sup>.

This period was also marked by the US's relationship with China and Pakistan deteriorating. This, in turn, strengthened India-US ties. The growing strategic competition between the United States and China, particularly since the 2008 global financial crisis, as well as between the United States and Pakistan on the issue of terrorism and the Afghan war, resulted in greater understanding and cooperation in the United States on countering Pakistan's terrorism affecting India.

As India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar articulated<sup>11</sup>, "If you were to ask me, in these years, what has been the really remarkable change in how India

views the world, in terms of relationships, I think there's no question, it's our relationship with the United States.”

India's primary foreign policy objective is to leverage its foreign relations for economic development, and develop strategic partnerships with countries that can help achieve that. The US and Europe, are the most important sources of technology, direct investments, capital, and export markets. India pursues these relations as a rising economic and military power that defends its vital interests and aspires to play a significant role on the international stage.

Although India's relations with the US have grown substantially, suspicions remain within certain quarters of the Indian public and intelligentsia. They tend to argue that the US is fundamentally an unreliable partner. To make this case, they point to the history of India-US relations, ideological divergences, and the power the US wields. Oft quoted is former US national security advisor Henry Kissinger: “To be an enemy of America can be dangerous, but to be a friend is fatal.” At the extreme end of these apprehensions are conspiracy theories and unfounded fears, which, if allowed to influence policies, will have a negative impact on critical ties for India's security and economic development.

This paper investigates various arguments against closer ties with the US that are frequently seen in Indian commentaries in the media, social media, and offline and online discourse. The arguments or fears are understandable in some cases yet not insurmountable, which the two countries can't address for mutual benefit. Some are unfounded, while others fail to give due weightage to India's stature in the world, its growing strength, and its



agency in doing what is in its best interests, even if it's against US foreign policy objectives.

The paper has three sections.

The first section discusses common arguments against closer military ties with the United States.

The second section discusses common political arguments about the burdens of increased proximity to the US.

The third section makes the economic case for closer India-US ties.

The paper concludes by arguing that one must evaluate India's foreign policy decisions and partnerships free from ideology and emotions in the pursuit of its strategic and economic goals, giving due weight to its current and growing stature and not with a sense of inferiority complex or as a country that lacked heft in the previous century.

While there are several arguments for closer ties with the US in India, there are also several arguments against closer ties with India in the US. These, however, are not within the scope of this paper.

## II. Military Arguments

### Argument M.1 The US is an unreliable supplier

As India continues to increase its defence purchases from the US, doubts persist among security pundits about American reliability<sup>12</sup>, given Washington's penchant for using sanctions to shape desired foreign policy outcomes. Their fears are not unfounded. There are historical precedents from around the world that attest to this. Proponents of such arguments receive a shot in the arm following comments by American Deputy National Security Adviser for International Economics Daleep Singh during his visit to India in March 2022. Singh had then threatened India with consequences if it undermined US sanctions imposed on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

Following the US arms embargo on India during the 1965 war with Pakistan, India became heavily dependent on Russia for weapons. It did not buy any weapons from the US until the relationship changed at the turn of the century. In fact, the first significant purchase was made in 2008 for the C-130 transport aircraft. The current reality of the ties is described as a partnership of trust<sup>13</sup> by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the geopolitical situation is very different from the Cold War era. As India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar noted<sup>14</sup>, India shouldn't limit its possibilities

According to SIPRI, between 1962 and 2008 India purchased \$59 billion worth of arms from Soviet Union/Russia. The corresponding value from the US was \$318 million. Between 2009 and 2022, India has imported \$28 billion worth from Russia and \$4.8 billion from the US. (These are [Trend Indicator Value](#) as measured by SIPRI for arms transfer and not actual value of sales)

in the fast-changing field of emerging technology solely because of the country's "difficult experiences" of the past due to sanctions imposed by the US. The US is now the "most forceful advocate" for India.

The US, on its part, is actively wooing India and wants to be seen as a reliable partner, as the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said<sup>15</sup> while acknowledging that Washington had not partnered with India over several decades when the Russians did – "Times have changed. Today we are able and willing to be a partner of choice with India across virtually every realm – commerce, technology, education, and security."

Defence relations are a key pillar<sup>16</sup> of Indo-US relations today. Noting that the US-India defence relationship can be an anchor of stability, and given the strengthening defence cooperation, in 2016, President Barack Obama signed<sup>17</sup> into law the United States' recognition of India as a Major Defense Partner<sup>18</sup>, a unique distinction for New Delhi, which would allow it to access technologies that US's closest allies have. India was promoted to Tier-1 of the Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) system, which India described<sup>19</sup> as the "natural conclusion" of India's classification as a Major Defense Partner. The STA-1 designation placed India alongside treaty allies Japan and South Korea.

India's military strength and ability to counter China and act as a security provider in the Indo-Pacific region are crucial for the US, which is increasingly stretched.

Any sanctions on India will affect its ability and doom Indo-US ties that have been built painstakingly. The US waived<sup>20</sup> The Countering America's

Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) sanctions on India for buying the S-400 air defence system from Russia, something it had not done even for its NATO ally Turkey when it imposed sanctions<sup>21</sup> for buying the same S-400 air defence system from Russia.

Weapons ordered from the US have been delivered on time<sup>22</sup> without any cost overruns, as against delays and price hikes India has faced from supplies from Russia.

Arms supplies are a geopolitical tool, and their exports are critical in advancing national interests. Arms deals are relentlessly pursued, and even Western nations compete against one another. As a significant importer of weapons, India is an important market for US and Russian weapon manufacturers, who cannot afford to sanction India. India has assumed a critical role in the region's stability with the current world order strained and increasingly insecure. The balance of power is shifting to the east; and India, as a counterweight to China, is crucial for America's Indo-Pacific strategy. It serves their interests to see a well-armed India that can defend itself and play a prominent role in maintaining the rules-based order in the region.

## Argument M.2 The US will not supply critical technologies

This is a legitimate argument. No country provides critical technologies to preserve its monopoly, security and economic interests. Even Russia, which

CAATSA became a law in 2017 with the aim to sanction Russia, Iran and North Korea. A significant aspect of the law was to sanction any person or country that did business with Russian defence sector.

has a stranglehold on Indian weapons purchases, does not share<sup>23</sup> crucial technologies vital to India's self-sufficiency. Although India has been assembling jet engines, fighter jets, submarines, tanks and other weapons systems, it has not led to India gaining complete know-how to make these critical weapons systems and their sub-assemblies. India imports jet, marine, and tank engines even for its indigenously manufactured platforms due to the non-transfer of comprehensive technologies and the failure or lack of capacity on the Indian side to absorb technologies.

Sharing of highly sensitive defence technologies is closely tied to political relations. Nations that hold the technologies try to shape the political choices of the recipient, which impacts strategic autonomy. Countries seeking technologies either make trade-offs or fully align with the dominant power. However, the transfer of technologies that the supplier country thinks serves their interests has taken place and continues. Russia, and countries like France and Germany have also transferred technologies to India. India bought the Bofors gun from Sweden with technology transfer and has developed an updated version indigenously.

So far, a significant tech transfer deal has eluded India-US defence cooperation, despite India being a "major defense partner" and elevated to Strategic Trade Authorization-1 given to America's close allies. But the US does share technologies with its close allies. It has signalled its willingness to share highly sensitive technology under the AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) agreement to provide nuclear submarines to Australia, its close ally. Under the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative launched in 2012, India and the US looked for projects to co-

The Defence Trade and Technology Initiative was signed by India and the US in 2012, with the goal of removing bureaucratic hurdles, expediting timelines, encouraging cooperative exchange of technology, enhancing joint research, and facilitating co-production/co-development of defence systems to maintain and modernize their respective military forces.

develop and co-produce. But this has not borne fruit. Both sides will have to work to achieve substantial results.

## Argument M.3 Communications will not be secure

This argument<sup>24</sup> was made when India deliberated the Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement. India took considerable time in making up its mind to sign the deal after due deliberations within the security establishment, especially the armed forces, on matters of security and sovereignty.

However, following the signing of the agreement in September 2018, rapid progress has been made in its implementation, enabling valuable cooperation<sup>25</sup>. A secure communication link<sup>26</sup> has been established between the Indian Naval Headquarters and the United States Central and Indo-Pacific Naval Commands. Secure communication equipment has also been activated<sup>27</sup> on Indian P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft and the Selective Availability Anti-Spoofing Module GPS system<sup>28</sup> in some Indian C-130 and C-17 transport aircraft. With the US-installed secure communications, India and the US are able to share<sup>29</sup> information on Chinese maritime movements in real-time, enhancing India's maritime security. This has helped improve India's security, especially through real-time intelligence sharing. Amidst the ongoing conflict between India and China, India and US are sharing<sup>30</sup> high-end satellite images, telephone intercepts, and data of Chinese troops and weapons deployment along the entire stretch of the Line

It was feared that the COMCASA agreement will lead to compromising Indian communications with the ability of the US to listen in. It was also feared that it would be incompatible with India's Russian origin equipment. More importantly, there was fear of unilateral end user monitoring of the equipment by the US

of Actual Control (LAC). With the help of equipment from the US, the capability of the Indian armed forces is growing.

## Argument M.4 US weapons are expensive

One of the arguments against US and Western weapons systems is that they are expensive compared to the Russian systems, which is true (an illustration follows). As the US tries to wean India from its dependence on Russia for weapons, New Delhi has told Washington that the alternatives to Russian weapons are too expensive<sup>31</sup>.

However, in general, US and western weapons are technologically far more advanced, especially in the aerospace sector. The initial cost of a western system may be high, but the lifecycle cost is cheaper, and more importantly, their operational availability is higher. This is why the Indian Air Force (IAF) shifted its procurement based on lifecycle costs for acquiring fixed-wing and rotorcraft, and bought several aircraft from the US. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on the capital acquisition by the Indian Air Force in 2019 for India's heavy lift helicopter is a case in point.

The two vendors competing were the American CH-47 Chinook and the Russian Mi-26. Although the two crafts were mismatched in size and loads they could carry, with the CH-47 able to handle only half the load of the Mi-26, the CAG report on lifecycle cost findings is very interesting. The CH-47 was a fraction of the cost of the Mi-26 on some parameters and less than the benchmark price, so much so that the total acquisition cost

Item	Component	Benchmark Price	Boeing	ROE
Direct Acquisition Cost	M1	4119.72	6474	7422
Cost of TTL based reserve	M2	3862.70	293	9364
Cost of schedule I level servicing	M3	11.08	2	19
Cost of D Level overhaul	M4	1029.93	333	8117
Operating cost	M5	1901.90	1743	3152
<b>Total cost of acquisition</b>		<b>10925.33</b>	<b>8845</b>	<b>28074</b>

(Price in Rupees in Crore at the applicable exchange rate)

From CAG report No 3 of 2019  
Capital Acquisition in Indian Air Force

considering operating cost, cost of servicing, and cost of the overhaul, was a third of the Mi-26.

Besides, the Mi-26 in the service of the IAF has not been used optimally owing to its lower availability rate, as noted in another CAG report<sup>32</sup> on the helicopter fleet. As against the requirement of 75 per cent serviceability, the Mi-26 was reported to be between 30 and 40 per cent.

The MiG-29K, in service with the Indian Navy, procured at about \$45 million each, has been beset with problems. The serviceability of the aircraft has been dismal, ranging<sup>33</sup> from 15.93 per cent to 37.63 per cent owing to defects in engines, airframe and fly-by-wire system. The Indian Navy has decided to go with western options for its future acquisition, with the American F/A-18 competing with the French Rafale. The F/A-18, operated by US Navy, currently costs \$66 million<sup>34</sup> (will be higher for India's acquisition), has an operational availability of 51 per cent<sup>35</sup> and its latest Block III upgrade has extended<sup>36</sup> the service life of the aircraft from 6000 hours to 10,000 hours, compared to the MiG-29's 6000 hours<sup>37</sup>. Dassault, the maker of Rafale, has a contractual obligation to maintain 75 per cent availability for the IAF, which has acquired 36 jets.

The time between overhaul for western jet engines and the overall service life is twice<sup>38</sup> that of Russian engines, leading to lower lifecycle costs and greater mission availability for the aircraft. The Russian-made aircraft carrier from which the MiG-29K operates – the Admiral Gorshkov, commissioned into the Indian Navy as INS Vikramaditya – has been beset with problems, spending more time in the docks than in the sea. The saga of

India signed a \$974 million deal with Russia for Admiral Gorshkov in 2003. Russia demanded another \$1.2 billion in 2008 and then another \$700 million in 2009. India finally negotiated to \$2.35 billion in all. The carrier was slated to be delivered by 2008. But it was finally delivered in 2013.



the Russians increasing the price<sup>39</sup> of the carrier and the delay in delivery<sup>40</sup> is well known.

While India pursues developing an indigenous military-industrial complex and produces the weapons it needs, it will buy a mix of expensive high-tech weapons as it sees fit operationally and considering the overall cost of ownership over its lifecycle from the US and other western countries along with lower cost weapons from Russia.

## **Argument M.5 US weapons will not fit in with our existing systems**

This is again a legitimate argument. Weapons and sub-assemblies from one country are incompatible with platforms from another, as the manufacturers guard their source code for security and economic reasons. For instance, France did not provide the source code<sup>41</sup> to integrate the Russian R-73 missile on the Mirage 2000 fighter aircraft.

This is true for both not only *for* Western and Russian systems, but also *between* Western systems. Multi-nation European firm MBDA has refused<sup>42</sup> to integrate its Meteor missile on India's Tejas fighter, which will carry an Israeli radar.

However, India's indigenous weapons successfully incorporate systems from various countries apart from indigenous ones. Indian Navy warships built indigenously have engines from the US or Ukraine, radar from Israel, and

Indo-Israel developed air defence system, the Indo-Russian Brahmos as its anti-ship and land attack missile, among others. Similarly, the Tejas light combat aircraft has engines from the US, radar from Israel, avionics are a mix of Indian and Israeli systems, and is capable of firing various missiles from Israel, France, Russia and the UK, apart from indigenously developed ones.

### III. Political Arguments

#### Argument P.1 The US will oppose India's rise

Despite close defence and political ties, and people-to-people contacts, there is apprehension<sup>43</sup> in some quarters in India about the US, which sees it as a threat. The fears are misplaced.

The United States considers India an indispensable<sup>44</sup> partner and its relationship as one of the most consequential<sup>45</sup>. From the George W. Bush administration onwards, it has repeatedly said that it supports<sup>46</sup> India's rise<sup>47</sup> and emergence as a leading global power. Based on a convergence of strategic interests, the United States and India continue to use their deepening relationship to build new partnerships within and beyond the Indo-Pacific<sup>48</sup>. India has been the linchpin for the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, cutting across administrations. This view enjoys bipartisan support in Washington. The US's Indo-Pacific Strategy<sup>49</sup> released by the Joe Biden Administration states - "We support a strong India as a partner" and strive to "steadily advance our Major Defense Partnership with India and support

its role as a net security provider”. One of the US’s Indo-Pacific strategy’s core lines of action is to support India’s continued rise and leadership role. It considers India a “driving force of the Quad and other regional fora, and an engine for regional growth and development.” India figures prominently in the US National Security Strategy<sup>50</sup> both in bilateral terms and working together multilaterally.

In its last days, the Trump administration declassified the US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific<sup>51</sup>. One of the desired end-states for the US was for India to remain preeminent in South Asia and take a leading role in maintaining Indian Ocean security. Part of the overall objective hinted at in the document was to accelerate India’s rise and capacity to serve as a net security provider and major defence partner and to solidify an enduring security partnership with India.

India too has reciprocated this shift in American attitude over the past two decades. As far back as 2001, then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee described the US as a “natural ally<sup>52</sup>“. Addressing the US Congress in 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the US an indispensable partner and said that the relations had overcome the “hesitations of history<sup>53</sup>.”

Some in India, however, do not believe in this sense of natural congruence between the two sides. This line of argument is that US-India proximity is a product of US-China frictions, which is a product of America’s desire to contain China’s rise as it challenges US hegemony. From this, it follows that the US will sooner or later adopt a similar containment strategy vis-a-vis India as the country’s power and influence grow. This is essentially an ideological argument that isn’t rooted in present-day pragmatism. The fact

is that for the foreseeable future, the US and China will compete for global supremacy, and India can leverage this competition to further its development. Even for those who think India will be next in America's crosshairs in the decades to come, the advice will be to bide the time and develop India by working with the United States and the West, just like China did.

## Argument P.2 The US helped Pakistan in the 1971 war

This is an oft cited argument by those against closer India-US relations. They argue that the US helped Pakistan during the war that led to the creation of Bangladesh by sending the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise. Of course, this is a historical fact. The US's show of force was of little consequence as the war was over by then, and India had won. Moreover, as pointed out earlier, India-US relations have come a long way from the Cold War days. Security cooperation is a major pillar<sup>54</sup> of the India-US strategic partnership in an increasingly insecure region and world.

The two countries now conduct more bilateral exercises with each other than they do with any other country<sup>55</sup>. These include the tri-services exercise Tiber Triumph, Yudh Abhyas (Army), Vajra Prahar (Special Forces), RIMPAC (Navy), Red Flag (Air Force), and several Passing Exercise (PASSEX). The United States has also assigned a liaison officer<sup>56</sup> to the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region.

As part of Task Force 74, US sent its aircraft carrier USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal under the guise to evacuate its citizens. But the motive was to prevent India expanding the war to West Pakistan after the fall of East Pakistan. The carrier arrived on December 16, the day Pakistan surrendered. The deployment remains as one of the lowest points in Indo-US ties.

The two countries have signed all of the foundational security agreements. This was done after years of domestic deliberations in India, with the concerns raised by the military and strategic community being thought through. India now regards these agreements as critical<sup>57</sup> in contributing to Indo-US defence ties and seeks to expand the scope of cooperation under them. So much so that India started seeing immediate benefits from the logistics<sup>58</sup> and communications agreement<sup>59</sup>.

India and the United States have established the first secure communication link<sup>60</sup> between Indian naval headquarters and the United States Central and Indo-Pacific Naval Commands. The Indian Navy's P-8 maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft can effectively communicate in real-time with the US Navy, thereby allowing the two countries to share information on Chinese maritime movement. This is due to the secure American communications system.

The US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific<sup>61</sup>, declassified under the Trump administration, clearly stated that providing support to India through diplomatic, military and intelligence channels to help address continental challenges, such as the border dispute with China, was a key action. That India maintains the capacity to counter Chinese border provocations was one of the key desired end states, along with cooperation to preserve maritime security and counter Chinese influence.

The two countries have extensive consultations on a wide range of issues. Between the two governments, there are over fifty bilateral dialogue mechanisms<sup>62</sup>. Establishing the 2+2 ministerial dialogue between the two

countries' foreign and defence ministries indicates a close relationship between their foreign and defence policies.

Foreign policy cannot be hung up on or litigating historical grievances, it is about addressing current and future challenges. So, while we must learn from history, it is foolhardy to let it shackle our present and future.

## **Argument P.3 You can partner with the West, but not necessarily have to be closer to the US**

The United States is the heavyweight of the West. It is the largest economy, a technological powerhouse, and possesses the most powerful military, with the largest defence budget equal to the budgets of the next nine<sup>63</sup> largest defence spenders.

The US is India's largest goods and services trading partner and the largest source of foreign direct investment. India is looking to attract American companies who want to diversify away from China. The US is a major arms supplier, and its defence companies investing in and developing supply chains in India are crucial for developing the military-industrial complex in India. Thirty-five per cent<sup>64</sup> of India's defence exports are to the US. Major US defence companies like Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon have a presence in India. The US has done the heavy lifting for India in the last few years, starting with the nuclear deal and helping India get into major arms control groups.

As the game heats up in the Indo-Pacific with the rise of China and considering India's structural rivalry with China and the economic and military disparity between the two countries, support from the US will be critical if hostilities break out between India and China. Other western countries neither have the will nor the resources that the US has to provide immediate and large-scale support. The Ukraine war has shown that European powers not only heavily depend on the US for their own security but also dither on measures that threaten their economies. India cannot expect European countries to take any serious action in case of a conflict with China.

When China transgressed across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the Indo-Tibet border in 2020, the United States offered its full support. It provided<sup>65</sup> information, cold-weather clothing and some other equipment to India. Admiral Phillips Davidson, the then Commander of the US's Indo-Pacific Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the activities along the Line of Actual Control with China had opened their eyes to what cooperative effort with others might mean for their own defensive needs. The current Commander of the Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral John Aquilino, testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee, said<sup>66</sup> that the US will continue to provide India with information and the equipment it needs to counter China on the LAC and continue to partner and operate together throughout the region.

After the clashes in Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh between Indian and Chinese troops in December 2022, when the PLA tried to change the status quo, the Pentagon said<sup>67</sup>, "We will continue to remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring the security of our partners."

The US has been vocal in its criticism of China since the Galwan clash between Indian and Chinese troops.

The US has also introduced a resolution backing Indian sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh.

Recently, a report in a US think tank by Lisa Curtis recommended deterring China's aggression against India and to "be prepared to extend full support to India, in the event of another border crisis or conflict." It also recommended preventing Pakistan from opening a two-front situation for India in the event of Chinese attack on India.

Recently, Indian Air Force (IAF) Chief VR Chaudhari said<sup>68</sup>, the “neighbourhood continues to remain volatile and uncertain. Amidst this volatility, we must enhance our collective strengths by partnering with the nations which share common beliefs and values”. This indicates a shift in India’s approach to collaborating with other countries for defence. The US features most prominently among these countries.

## **Argument P.4 Apprehension over a possible US-China grand bargain**

Given the multifaceted nature of the US–China relationship, featuring competition and cooperation, there is often a debate in India, expressing apprehension<sup>69</sup> over a possible G2–style grand bargain between the two countries.

The idea of a G2 was floated by foreign policy experts during the first term of the Barack Obama administration when the US thought it would be possible to coexist with China peacefully and set global rules. China rejected<sup>70</sup> it. Today, the relations between the two countries are at their worst, with the potential for an armed conflict over Taiwan growing.

Under the Trump administration, the US declared China its strategic competitor<sup>71</sup>. This competition has intensified under the Biden administration, which has sanctioned Chinese semiconductor chip manufacturers and seeks to actively deny them access to next–generation technologies. It has also banned<sup>72</sup> several Chinese telecoms and electronic



goods manufacturers. At best, the US wants to manage relations with China so that it doesn't lead to an armed confrontation and cooperate on issues such as climate change. A new cold war has started, and the US believes that the next few years will set the terms<sup>73</sup> of the geopolitical contest.

In addition, the Quad grouping of India, Australia, Japan and the United States, which was revived in 2017 in the wake of growing Chinese assertiveness, has grown in scope. China, which dismissed the Quad as sea foam<sup>74</sup> that will dissipate, now calls it a "small clique<sup>75</sup>" and an effort to build an Asian NATO<sup>76</sup> with a significant underlying security risk. The inclusion<sup>77</sup> of Australia in the Malabar exercise in 2020 completed the Quad of their respective naval forces. The move came just months after China intruded into the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control, initiating a standoff that is still ongoing with over 50,000 troops deployed by both sides and a major clash that resulted in the first loss of lives in 50 years in the Galwan Valley in June 2020.

The US and UK deal to provide Australia with nuclear submarines under AUKUS is another measure that Washington has taken to check China. China hit out<sup>78</sup> against this saying it would "severely damage regional peace and stability and intensify the arms race". Japan, a treaty ally of the United States, is set to double<sup>79</sup> its defence expenditure to 2 percent of its GDP by 2027. It has also decided to induct long-range missiles for "counterstrike<sup>80</sup>" capabilities, citing the China threat.

On more than one occasion, President Joe Biden has stated that the United States will come to the defence of Taiwan, an absolute red line for China,

and committed<sup>81</sup> to providing \$10 billion in military aid over the next five years to the island nation.

The US has repeatedly called out all the disputes arising from China's expansionism and has committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific, upholding rules-based order and freedom of navigation and overflight. It renamed its Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command. China rejects<sup>82</sup> the nomenclature of the Indo-Pacific, saying there is no such concept as Indo-Pacific and the United States created it to bring in partners such as India to contain China.

The competition between the two countries is not only strategic in nature but also ideological. China wishes to further its authoritarian model globally, citing its rapid economic development. It also used the havoc caused by the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide, especially in the US and Europe, even as it followed a zero-covid policy, to argue that its authoritarian model was a superior system of governance.

According to The Pentagon, China is developing advanced military capabilities. This includes the rapid expansion of its nuclear arsenal, which is expected to triple by 2035<sup>83</sup>. It is expanding its missile forces, constructing new silos, and testing advanced hypersonic weapons. Beijing is looking to undermine American influence worldwide while increasing its own through its Belt and Road Initiative and security pacts<sup>84</sup> like it has with the Solomon Islands, which is 2000 km away from Australia, one of the US's closest allies.

In August 2021, China conducted a [hypersonic missile test](#) that caught US intelligence off guard. The missile, which has the capability of carrying nuclear warheads, circled the globe before accelerating towards its target, showcasing China's advanced space capabilities.

China is unlikely to back down as it is convinced the US is on a decline while it is destined for glory. China has even linked<sup>85</sup> cooperation on climate change which is of global importance to American policy on Taiwan. The gulf between the US and China is as enormous as the Pacific Ocean that separates them. Managing their relationship to prevent a conflict will be a significant task, let alone come together as G2.

## **Argument P.5 The US is more critical of India's domestic policies of a particular kind than Russia/China**

This is a well-founded argument. The State Department report has flagged<sup>86</sup> “significant human rights issues”, stating a lack of accountability for official misconduct persisted at all levels of government, contributing to widespread impunity. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated<sup>87</sup> that the US is monitoring rights abuses in India. Members of the US Congress have expressed<sup>88</sup> concerns. The US media regularly publishes critical articles<sup>89</sup> and editorials<sup>90</sup> on India's democracy<sup>91</sup>, its human rights<sup>92</sup> record, and the treatment of minorities<sup>93</sup>.

India rejects<sup>94</sup> such inferences about its domestic affairs based on “motivated inputs and biased views”. The US government has not taken any antagonist actions and says<sup>95</sup> that owing to the depth and quality of the dialogue, both countries discuss all issues as also being a pragmatic choice, given the relevance of India in the US's strategic calculus.

Democracy and human rights are the most important shared values that bring the two countries together. These values are part of India's ethos, which reflects in the Indian constitution. It is the basis for domestic peace, stability, unity and integrity of the country. While India may adopt a hypocritical stance on democracy and human rights in its dealings with countries worldwide, it is in India's interests to further democracy, human rights, and the rule of law at home.

Upholding these values is vital for India's economic growth and getting the support of its friends and partners for its development and rise. Any internal disaffection arising from moving away from this will impact its economic growth, which is one of the key attractions for the US and the wider world in investing in India. It will also divert India's attention from playing a vital role in countering regional and global security challenges that make it an indispensable partner for the US. If India is not able to do that owing to any possible domestic strife, it will make it a less attractive partner, which could actually make it vulnerable to adverse international positions on its domestic policies.

Close India-US relations with an eye on the larger strategic canvas will help draw support for domestic issues of India's concerns and help in free and frank discussions on various issues and create better understanding as well as address concerns and misconceptions. For example, The Trump administration supported<sup>96</sup> India revoking Article 370 related to Jammu and Kashmir, calling it strictly an internal matter<sup>97</sup>. This is a far cry from their position till the better part of the 1990s when the US sided<sup>98</sup> with Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. Along with France, the US prevented<sup>99</sup> China from

bringing Kashmir to the agenda of the UN Security Council after India revoked Article 370 in August 2019.

President Biden, while praising India's handling of Covid, said<sup>100</sup> PM Modi's success has shown the world that democracies can deliver. The point is, as friends, both nations can freely raise and discuss all issues. The rules-based order that the two countries champion begins at home.

## **Argument P.6 India will not be able to carve out independent political positions if it gets closer to the US**

An argument<sup>101</sup> is made that increasing reliance on the US will inevitably constrain India's foreign policy choices.

Again, this discounts India's agency and historical record of taking independent positions and smacks of an inferiority complex. India maintained an independent position on various issues in the last century when it was a much weaker and smaller economy, let alone now when it is on the rise and set to become the third-largest economy in the world by the end of this decade. India is on its side, as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar famously quipped in response to a question on whose side India was on. This shows India's confidence in guarding its interests and not submitting to pressure.

India demonstrates its independent stance when it buys weapons from Russia and how it votes at the United Nations, sometimes despite pressure from the West. India is continuing to buy oil from Russia amidst the war on Ukraine and despite pressure on it not to do so. Early during the Ukraine war, a US official warned<sup>102</sup> of consequences for any country, including India, that conducts local currency transactions through Russia's central bank or constructs a payment mechanism that subverts or circumvents the United States' sanctions against Russia.

But as the war dragged on, there was a change in the US's position on India's dealings with Russia. In fact, the US treasury secretary stated<sup>103</sup> that the United States is happy for India to continue buying as much Russian oil as it wants, including at prices above a G7-imposed price cap mechanism. The US perhaps realises it's not worth ruining the India-US relationship over Ukraine, keeping in mind the larger convergences on other issues, especially in the Indo-Pacific region.

Any country's choices in international relations are based on its national interests and relative power. Any trade-off, owing to a power differential, is made keeping national interests in mind. For example, India stopped buying oil from Iran under pressure from the US, keeping its larger interests in mind. Even India's stance on Russia, while showing an independent stance, can be considered a choice of constraint, owing to India's dependence on Moscow for weapons and spares.

As close partners, India will be able to negotiate better on matters that impact its strategic interests. It can also help India extract concessions for taking a conciliatory stance on relevant issues.

## **Argument P.7 Closer partnership with the US will lead to India antagonising Russia and lose its leverage over China**

An argument is made that India should not antagonise Russia as it will lead to a closer Russia–China axis<sup>104</sup> and that India can use Russia to exercise a moderating influence over China or shape<sup>105</sup> the Russia–China relationship in a manner that is not against Indian interests. This is why India remains in the multilateral grouping like RIC, BRICS and SCO, despite China’s overbearing presence and the adversarial relations between India and China.

Firstly, does India have leverage over Russia to influence its policies? In fact, India depends on Russian weapons, which gives Moscow leverage over New Delhi’s choices.

Secondly, Russia is not interested in containing China. On the contrary, the two countries declared a “no–limits” partnership in February 2022. On more than one occasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia–China relations are at their best in history<sup>106</sup> and declared Russia as China’s number one<sup>107</sup> partner and called China its highly reliable<sup>108</sup> partner.

In December 2020, just months after the deadly Galwan clash between India and China, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, during his visit to New Delhi, blamed<sup>109</sup> the West for having adopted an “aggressive and devious” policy to engage India “in anti–China games by promoting Indo–

Pacific strategies” – absolving China of its aggression instead of making even a neutral statement, let alone coming out in support of India – its “privileged strategic partner”.

Russia and China are increasingly cooperating in the military domain<sup>110</sup> with joint naval, air and land warfare exercises. The two are conducting strategic bomber patrols<sup>111</sup>, and intelligence cooperation<sup>112</sup>, and for the first time in history, Russian and Chinese bombers landed on each other’s airfields<sup>113</sup> during an exercise. Russian President Putin also vowed to help China develop advanced weapons, including ballistic missile defence<sup>114</sup>. Incidentally, India’s nuclear deterrence against China is based entirely on ballistic missiles. There are fears that Russia and China are developing joint operational capabilities<sup>115</sup> and are in an alliance<sup>116</sup>.

The ongoing war in Ukraine has weakened Russia and increased its dependency on China, practically reducing it to a junior<sup>117</sup> partner of China. With economic sanctions on Russia, China’s leverage over Russia has increased. China is Russia’s largest trading partner, with bilateral trade crossing \$150 billion<sup>118</sup>. China is the biggest<sup>119</sup> buyer of Russian oil, and Russian natural gas exports to China have increased by 60 per cent<sup>120</sup> amidst the Ukraine war. In contrast, India’s trade with Russia<sup>121</sup> was \$13 billion in 2021-22 and jumped to \$27 billion in 2022-23 due to surge in oil imports by India.

Russia will increasingly depend on China for semiconductors and electronics for defence equipment. Chinese exports to Russia of microchips doubled<sup>122</sup> in 2022, and other electronic components and raw materials, some with military applications, have increased. India will run the risk of



China having backdoors in the weapons it buys from Russia, severely impacting its security. New Delhi has to worry about the leverage Beijing has over Moscow and how it can influence Russia's policy towards India, especially military supplies if war breaks out. India also has to worry about how Beijing can influence Moscow to get access to Indian weapons supplied by Russia to gain an advantage in a war, or worse, disable them with cyberattacks.

As argued earlier, Russia is already in a strategic embrace with China, over which India has no influence, nor is India the reason for it. India does not seek an antagonistic relationship with Russia. Even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi advised Russian President Vladimir Putin that today's era is not for war, India has not condemned Russia's war in Ukraine and abstained from the resolutions against Russia at the UN.

However, Russia's actions have been detrimental to India over the last few years. Russia's growing strategic ties with China, its policy on Afghanistan<sup>123</sup>, where it excluded India as a dialogue partner while including Pakistan, deepening defence cooperation with Pakistan<sup>124</sup>, and even its positions<sup>125</sup> at the UN, including on the Kashmir issue<sup>126</sup>. It is unlikely to be a slip of the tongue when India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in the presence of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, said Indo-US ties are cordial and time tested. India intended to deliver a message.

More than anything else, any degradation of Indo-Russia relations will be collateral damage due to the China factor as a weak Russia plays second fiddle to the Middle Kingdom and India's ties with Beijing continue to

deteriorate. At the same time, India seeks to develop other partnerships to protect its interests.

However, Russia's embrace of China may not last forever. Both countries have come together to counter the common enemy, the US. Even though China and Russia have settled<sup>127</sup> their boundary disputes, both are expansionist powers and China lays claims to all its "historical lands", which includes parts of Russia. Russia has concerns over China's presence in its far-east and also growing influence in Central Asia, what it considers to be its sphere of influence.

As India defied Western pressure to buy oil from Russia amidst its war in Ukraine and its seemingly neutral position, it has increased New Delhi's value for Russia. In its recently issued foreign policy update, it states - "Russia will continue to build up a particularly privileged strategic partnership with the Republic of India with a view to enhance and expand cooperation in all areas on a mutually beneficial basis". As India's national power increases, it will automatically increase its leverage over Russia in the future.

## **Argument P.8 The US will drag India into its wars**

India is not a small power that can be pushed or coerced into joining another country's war. India does not even vote with the West at the UN on various issues and takes independent positions, as seen most recently in

the Ukraine conflict. Not all of the United States' allies have fought alongside it in its wars. France and Japan stayed away from the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. On the other hand, countries like Australia join in for security reasons because they regard their alliance with the US as critical. The AUKUS nuclear-powered submarine deal for Australia is essentially a reward for being a steadfast partner of the US, fighting every war with it, beginning with World War I.

One of the reasons the India-US partnership is growing, particularly in the military domain, is that India is an independent actor capable of taking care of itself<sup>128</sup> rather than relying on alliance partners. India has the third-highest military budget after the US and China. This is unlike some of the wealthier allies of the US, who have not been spending enough on defence and have been relying mainly on the US for security. This was upended by Donald Trump during his presidency when he scolded<sup>129</sup> NATO allies for not spending enough on defence. The US doesn't have the appetite for wars after its costly wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, ultimately leading it to retreat. There are concerns among US allies over its commitment to fight for them, which means a reduced likelihood of pressure on India to join any wars. In any case, the decision will be for India to make in its best interests and deal with eventualities arising from it.

## Argument P.9 Collaboration with the US will force us to implement arms control and denuclearisation

This line of thought is held by those who have historical baggage and are out of touch with current reality. Yes, until the late 1990s, the US and the West wanted India to abandon its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes. However, relations began to deepen around the turn of the century as both countries' security interests converged. The US worked to include India in arms control regimes like Missile Technology Control Regime, Australia Group and The Wassenaar Arrangement.

A clean waiver preceded this in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, whose membership for India was vetoed by China. The US supports India's intercontinental ballistic missiles<sup>130</sup>, missile defence, and anti-satellite weapons<sup>131</sup> and has long since stopped calling for a rollback of nuclear weapons. It acknowledged India's possession of nuclear weapons with a clean waiver at the NSG, calling India a country possessing "advanced nuclear technology". Indian defence and space-related entities were removed<sup>132</sup> from the US's entities list to expand cooperation in space and defence technologies.

India will likely be part of any future arms control mechanism on anti-satellite weapons or hypersonic vehicles rather than being kept out and denied technologies.

India was ready to test nuclear weapons after deciding to weaponise in the 1980s. The US pressured the then Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao to not conduct nuclear tests when its satellites detected preparations for it. India started the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP) in 1983 and started testing ballistic missiles with the short range Prithvi and then the longer range Agni. Throughout the 1990s, the US asked India to roll back its nuclear and missile program and sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Finally, India conducted five tests in May 1998 and announced a moratorium on further testing.

## **Argument P.10 India can have a transactional relationship with the US**

All partnerships are based on the convergence of interests and maximising gains. International relations are devoid of altruism. Since the 1990s, India has recognised the importance of strengthening ties with the United States. With China's rise, the West seeks a counterweight, and India requires the West not only for development but also to take on China, with whom it is locked in a border conflict and strategic competition. This does not imply that India must form an alliance with the West or abandon its engagement with other countries with whom the US and the West may have antagonistic relations but with whom India has or wishes to develop closer ties. It won't limit India's flexibility in light of its expanding influence and significance on the world stage.

As EAM S Jaishankar said<sup>133</sup>, "India's choices in matters of its foreign relations will not be cynical and transactional but based on a balance of its values and interests." India's partnership with the US has been carefully thought out in its enlightened interests and developed over three decades. Close partnership based on trust rather than cynical transactional helps maintain predictable long-term relations, which will help maximise the gains from the partnership.

## **Argument P.11 The US is hypocritical - toppled democracies and worked with dictators while promoting democracy and human rights**

Yes, this is true; even the US media<sup>134</sup> is critical<sup>135</sup> of it. The US has toppled democracies and worked or allied with dictators and authoritarians. However, geopolitics is rife with hypocrisy. At the heart of it all, is achieving strategic goals. Shared values can bring relevant countries together to serve common interests. Alternatively, such ideals can be used as a pretext to impose policy or actions against countries that are not friendly to achieve specific goals—while, in other cases, not allowing values to get in the way of working with friendly dictators.

While India does not believe in promoting democracy and human rights as a foreign policy objective, at its core, India wants countries worldwide to be democratic and value human rights. It supports<sup>136</sup> various such initiatives without appearing to intervene in domestic affairs. However, India does not let this prevent it from cooperating with dictators where its national security objectives require it.

One example is India's relations with Myanmar and the military Junta. India took a strong stance against the Junta's suppression of the pro-democracy uprising in the late 1980s. As China made significant inroads into

Myanmar through the supply of weapons, India began a rapprochement in the late 1990s. India supported the democratic government following the election in 2015. However, following the coup in 2021, India maintained contact with the military Junta while expressing concern<sup>137</sup> about the brutal suppression and condemning the execution of pro-democracy activists. India has developed close strategic ties with Gulf monarchies, which do not have a stellar human rights record.

On the other hand, India sent in its forces to prevent a coup in Maldives when its interests demanded, counted amongst the finest operations in India's post-independence military history. India has also helped in preventing coups in Mauritius and Seychelles.

As a major and rising power, India will almost certainly make contrasting decisions in similar situations to protect its interests. India has its own agency and should not be concerned about the West's hypocrisy in other parts of the world. India should only be concerned with collaborating with the West for its development.

## **Argument P.12 The US will not allow India to take back Pakistan-occupied Kashmir**

Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) is an integral part of India, and as declared by the parliament resolution of 1994, India seeks to have physical jurisdiction of the territory one day<sup>138</sup>. However, it is not a piece of cake that India can take and eat at a time of its choosing. If that were the case, it

In 1988, India prevented a coup against the pro-India President Mamoon Abdul Gayoom in Maldives by air dropping troops in an operation code-named Cactus.

In 1983, India almost intervened militarily in Mauritius to prevent a coup against Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth. The plan was aborted in favour of an intelligence led operation.

In June 1986, India under "Operation Flowers are Blooming" deployed INS Vindhyagiri at the Seychelles Port of Victoria to abort a coup attempt against President Rene.

would have done so already. Whether India takes back PoK militarily or not will be determined by sound political calculations as well as the ability of the Indian military and economy to carry out the mission successfully. While the US will promote peace, it is unlikely that it will be able to stop India if it decides to launch such an operation, especially if it is provoked by a terror attack on India or aggression by Pakistan as it has done several times in the past. India will do what is necessary to protect its interests and territorial integrity.

However, as declared by India's PM, today is not an era for war. Despite comments from ministers and members of India's ruling party about military measures to retake PoK, it is unlikely that India will try to resolve the Kashmir issue militarily in the near or medium term because it would divert attention away from its primary goal of fully developing the country.

## IV. The Economic, Technological Case for Close India-US Ties

Prime Minister Modi: *“In every sector<sup>139</sup> of India's forward march, I see the US as an indispensable partner.”*

India's close strategic partnership with the US in the military and political domains is ultimately linked to its primary goal – economic development. As a close partner, India is now leveraging the polarised world to position



itself as a reliable alternative to China for global supply chains, particularly for the United States.

In 2021, India-US bilateral trade in goods and services reached a record \$157 billion<sup>140</sup>, making the US India's largest trading partner and export market. Similarly, trade with the EU stood at over \$116 billion<sup>141</sup> in 2021-22, making it India's second-largest trading partner after the US and the second-largest destination for Indian exports. India has a trade surplus with both the US and the EU. The figure stands at \$35 billion<sup>142</sup> for the UK and \$34.3 billion<sup>143</sup> for Australia. Collectively, the West accounts for a third of India's merchandise exports<sup>144</sup>. The US, UK and EU are the major markets<sup>145</sup> for India's IT software and services exports of \$178 billion<sup>146</sup>, accounting for 62%, 17% and 11% of the total IT-ITeS exports, respectively.

The world has entered a new Cold War. With the rise of an assertive China, Great Power competition has returned. Trade has been politicised, securitised and weaponised. To maintain its dominance over current and future technologies, the US has banned Chinese telecom and electronics companies on security grounds, imposed tariffs on Chinese imports, and sanctioned the sale of chips, its technology, and machines used to manufacture them.

The EU imposed sanctions<sup>147</sup> on China and has frozen<sup>148</sup> its trade deal over Beijing's treatment of the Uighurs. The EU has also enacted rules to curb the takeover<sup>149</sup> of its companies by state-backed foreign companies, with China as the intended target. Decoupling is well and truly underway.

As a large economy with 1.4 billion people and shared values of democracy and the rule of law, India figures prominently in the Indo-Pacific strategies of the United States, United Kingdom, and the European Union. The United States is promoting the idea of “friendshoring<sup>150</sup>” with “trusted partners” to diversify its supply chains away from China. Trade and strategic ties will almost certainly be linked in the coming years as the superpower rivalry heats up to deny China technological and economic gains while minimising supply chain risks.

India, which has a large young population, is hoping to benefit from the decoupling by attracting investments. Its close strategic ties with the US and the EU give it an advantage over the competition.

India cannot do everything indigenously. Even the mighty West can't in an interlinked world due to costs, lack of manpower, natural resources, processing and production facilities. Consider the semiconductor industry, which is projected to be a trillion-dollar industry by 2030<sup>151</sup> and one over which strategic competition is underway between the US and China, and both are vying for supremacy and self-sufficiency. The US accounts for only 10% of global semiconductor manufacturing<sup>152</sup> and none of the most advanced chips. While the US leads in designing chips, the production is largely in Taiwan, with equipment made in the Netherlands. To meet the capacity needs for critical semiconductor applications, the US needs to add<sup>153</sup> about 5.5 per cent of the global production. This equates to about 18 to 20 fabs and about 70-90,000 total fabs jobs. Every country, including India, wants a pie of this huge and vital industry.

India lacks relevant technologies, know-how, and know-why, as well as inadequate research and development and capital. The pitch behind Make in India and Make for the World is to attract foreign manufacturers. India has implemented production-linked incentives<sup>154</sup> (PLIs) to create an ecosystem for current and future semiconductor and electronics technologies. India can develop its industrial base by integrating into the West's supply chain, which is why India has been vocal in driving the Quad's resilient supply chain agenda and launched the Supply Chain Resilience initiative with Japan and Australia. It is a strategy for positioning India as a manufacturing hub for western countries, leveraging its cheap, abundant, and skilled labour.

Not only does India want investments to provide jobs for its large population, it also seeks employment opportunities in the West, especially for its highly skilled professionals, which is why the movement of people is one of the key clauses in the free trade agreement with Australia<sup>155</sup> which considers the Indian diaspora there as a national economic asset<sup>156</sup>. The movement of people is also a key issue for India in its negotiations for trade agreements with the US<sup>157</sup>, EU<sup>158</sup>, and UK<sup>159</sup>. Western countries have become the largest source of foreign remittances to India, which has surpassed \$100 billion<sup>160</sup> in a year for the first time for any country in the world, with remittances from the US leading the way with 23.4%<sup>161</sup> of all remittances, surpassing the UAE, which had previously been the top source for India. According to the World Bank<sup>162</sup>, remittances have benefitted from a gradual structural shift in Indian migrants' key destinations from largely low-skilled, informal employment in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to a dominant share of high-skilled jobs in high-income

countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and East Asia (Singapore, Japan, Australia, New Zealand).

The large Indian diaspora in the US, UK, Canada, and Australia is among the most prosperous<sup>163</sup> and politically influential<sup>164</sup>. The US Vice President is a person of Indian origin (PIO), as well as several top officials<sup>165</sup> in the US administration. The Prime Minister of the UK is a PIO, and so is the home minister. The MEA considers<sup>166</sup> that India has a constituency in the US with real influence and status. The Indian community in the US is an “invaluable asset” in “strengthening India’s relationship with the world’s only superpower.”

## V. Conclusion

India is a major power with confidence in itself and its future. It is expected to surpass Japan as the world’s third-largest economy before the end of this decade. India is assertively expressing its position on various issues on the international stage. Its opinions are valued and sought after. It is a voice for the Global South and its issues. Major global objectives, such as climate change mitigation, cannot be achieved without India’s leadership. India has responded by taking the lead in forming organisations such as the International Solar Alliance. The positive and balancing role that India can play is widely recognised around the world.

India is today sought as an economic and security partner by the US, Europe, Russia, Japan and Australia, among others. India is central to the Indo-Pacific strategy or calculations of major countries that have an interest

[International Solar Alliance \(ISA\)](#) was conceived as a joint effort by India and France to mobilize efforts against climate change through deployment of solar energy solutions. It was conceptualised on the sidelines of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Paris in 2015

in the region. NATO wants to have closer engagement<sup>167</sup> with India. As the great power rivalry intensifying, the US wants to build alliances and partnerships and willing to listen to its partners<sup>168</sup> suggestions and even live with differences<sup>169</sup>, as long as overall interests converge.

India is central to building resilient supply chains with countries like the US proposing “friendshoring” while Europe considers its China+1 strategy. This puts India in a geopolitical sweet spot. As India’s relative power continues to rise and that of the US and West relatively decline, it increases its options to negotiate favourable foreign policy outcomes.

However, India still has a long way to go in terms of economic development, which is its primary goal and the driving force behind its foreign policy. India used its friendship with the Soviet Union to get investments in building steel factories, hydro-electric dams, cooperation in space and atomic energy apart from defence technologies and cooperation. Today, India’s partnership with the US is critical to achieving this. As geopolitical factors favour India, there is a strategic opportunity.

Some Indians are influenced by emotions about the US and Russia rather than national interests. They argue India will lose strategic autonomy if it gets too close to the US. Strategic autonomy is a means of achieving development and security objectives. It is not something to flash, which becomes a millstone around the neck that hampers India’s development and security goals. It also cannot be held hostage by sentiments from the past. When such people discuss strategic autonomy, it is almost always in the context of relations with Russia. And Russia’s strategic autonomy is

arguably constrained when it comes to China, India's primary adversary, against whom it is looking to secure itself.

Relations are a means of pursuing national interests. They are not the end in themselves. In the wisdom of the time, India decided to go with the USSR in pursuit of its national interests. For those stuck in the past and influenced by nostalgia and emotions, post-Cold War relations with Russia became the end, not the means. Similarly, close relations with the US and the West at large, are a means to pursue national interests rather than an end in themselves. India may well reassess the importance of its ties with the US if it does not serve it to its benefit.

India's goal is to become a developed country with a capable military and a great power. It requires partners who are willing to assist in this endeavour. India's relations with the US are on an upward trajectory. However, there will inevitably be disagreements on some issues because India is a large and proud country that pursues its own interests. But both countries will likely address the divergences pragmatically, keeping their overall interests in mind. The US remains the world's premier power with global interests. When it intersects with India's interests, New Delhi will cooperate. Where they do not, India will take a position based on its national interests. The United States is becoming accustomed to this, especially as its power is contested and stretched.

Those who oppose the US get carried away by what it does or does not do in other parts of the world and use it as an example or precedent to apply to India without taking into account the realities of India's growing power and the strength of its bilateral ties. One cannot think and act like the India of

the previous century, which was impoverished and lacking in capacity, but rather think like a \$3.5 trillion and growing economy. India sits at the table as an equal. Foreign policy must be driven by the cold pursuit of national interests, not emotions and ideology.

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