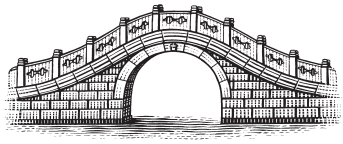
ASIA POLICY, VOLUME 14, NUMBER 1 (JANUARY 2019), 119–44
HTTP://ASIAPOLICY.NBR.ORG

SPECIAL ISSUE

Realizing the Potential: Mature Defense Cooperation and the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership

Cara Abercrombie



CARA ABERCROMBIE *is a career member of the U.S. government Senior Executive Service and former deputy assistant secretary of defense for South and Southeast Asia. She wrote this article while a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She can be reached at <abercrombiecara@gmail.com>.*

NOTE *The author would like to thank Christopher Clary, Walter Ladwig, Tanvi Madan, Anit Mukherjee, Ashley Tellis, Milan Vaishnav, and Joshua White for their helpful feedback, as well as the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies for hosting the workshop "A Global Partnership or a Relationship Oversold? Taking Stock of the India-U.S. Strategic Relationship." The views herein are the author's own and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. government.*

KEYWORDS: INDIA; UNITED STATES; STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP; COOPERATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article argues that the defense and security dimension of the U.S.-India strategic partnership, despite demonstrating significant growth and progress in recent years, still lacks the maturity critical to enabling the cooperation envisioned.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The U.S.-India global strategic partnership, now well into its second decade, has continued to be a priority for successive governments in both countries because of its tremendous economic and security potential. Washington and New Delhi have demonstrated the political will to propel robust cooperation and have begun to put into place the architecture of a mature relationship. Yet the overall output resulting from numerous dialogues, military exercises, and engagements and the tangible impact on Indian and U.S. security objectives are less than one would expect given the level of input and the number of years spent working toward these goals. Additional effort is required to habituate the type of cooperation the U.S. typically enjoys with its closest allies and partners and realize the relationship's full potential.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Until and unless the U.S. and India routinely engage one another at all levels within government—from the strategic to the tactical—and build habits of cooperation, the relationship will not mature.
- Dissimilar perceptions of how to implement the strategic partnership can cause the U.S. and India to have unrealistic expectations of one another, which in turn can frustrate practical cooperation.
- Different foreign policy approaches to relations with Russia, Iran, and Pakistan could complicate future cooperation if not managed carefully.
- Bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of resources dedicated to the bilateral relationship can inhibit the development of informal relationships and habits of cooperation.

The U.S.-India global strategic partnership, now well into its second decade, has continued to be a priority for successive governments in both countries because of its tremendous economic and security potential. Since President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee outlined a vision for a new bilateral relationship in 2000, U.S. Democratic and Republican administrations and Indian governments led by the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alike have committed significant time, energy, and resources to building the foundation for close cooperation. Both sides are motivated by the shared belief that a strong India is in the United States' interest and that continued U.S. global leadership, as well as a sustained forward U.S. military presence in the Indo-Pacific, benefits India.[1] At its core, the relationship is rooted in the two countries' shared democratic values and increasingly convergent interests. Prominent among them is the desire to ensure that no single power dominates Asia, to counter international terrorism, and to uphold the liberal international rules-based order.[2] As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said before a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 2016, "A strong India-U.S. partnership can anchor peace, prosperity and stability from Asia to Africa and from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific."[3]

Today, motivated in part by China's assertive actions in the region, Washington and New Delhi have amplified the importance of the relationship and have accelerated efforts to improve cooperation. The Trump administration has placed India firmly at the center of its Indo-Pacific strategy, which gives more prominence to India than did the Obama administration's rebalance policy, in which its role was ambiguous. In the 2017 National Security Strategy, the United States prominently welcomed "India's emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense power," in marked contrast with China, which the document refers to as a strategic competitor—a first in a public U.S. strategy document.[4] Former secretary of state Rex Tillerson further underscored the importance of India, making it the focus of his first major foreign policy speech. He said, "We need to collaborate with India to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is increasingly a place of peace, stability, and

1 "Joint Statement on United States–India Relations: A Vision for the 21st Century," March 21, 2000, available at https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/WCPD-2000-03-27/pdf/WCPD-2000-03-27-Pg594.pdf.

2 Shyam Saran, *How India Sees the World: From Kautilya to the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2017), 201–2.

3 Narendra Modi (remarks before a joint session of the U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C., June 8, 2016).

4 White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., December 2017), 46.

growing prosperity so that it does not become a region of disorder, conflict, and predatory economics."[5]

Under Prime Minister Modi, India has overcome its traditional reluctance to tilt toward the United States, signaling through its actions and public statements a greater comfort in deepening bilateral cooperation.[6] In issuing the "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region" in 2015, India aligned itself with the key principles and norms most closely associated with U.S. leadership in the region.[7] Hosting the 2+2 dialogue with the United States in 2018—India's first such ministerial-level dialogue with any country—was a further demonstration of India's commitment to deepening its strategic partnership. These efforts underscore a fundamental calculation that the United States will remain a critical partner for advancing India's core interests.

This article assesses the maturity of the defense and security dimension of the U.S.-India strategic partnership by gauging its success at meeting the expectations set by both sides. Analysis is limited to defense and security cooperation, as these have been the primary drivers of the relationship to date, though other factors, notably trade, economic cooperation, and diplomacy, are also vital to its success. Overall, this article finds that, while defense and security cooperation have demonstrated significant progress in recent years, the strategic partnership nevertheless lacks elements of a mature relationship that are critical to enabling the cooperation envisioned. This is not entirely surprising, given that the types of cooperation India is pursuing with the United States present a departure from its traditional security relationships, most notably with Russia. The United States, which has considerable experience working closely with international partners, is for its part still learning how to adapt its established patterns of cooperation to an Indian model, one in which India is neither a formal ally nor a junior partner. Despite these constraints, the United States and India have both demonstrated the political will to propel robust cooperation and have begun to put into place the architecture of a mature partnership. With additional effort, they can habituate regular cooperation and realize the full potential of this endeavor.

---

5 Rex Tillerson, "Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century" (speech presented at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., October 18, 2017).

6 Ashley J. Tellis, "The Whirlwind in Washington," *India Today*, June 16, 2016 ~ http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/19/whirlwind-in-washington-pub-63842.

7 "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region," White House, Office of the Press Secretary, January 25 2015 ~ https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region.

The discussion that follows is divided into four parts:

- pp. 123–25 offer a definition of a mature strategic partnership.
- pp. 125–35 assess the overall maturity of the defense and security dimension of the U.S.-India relationship.
- pp. 136–41 explore factors that have constrained cooperation.
- pp. 141–44 offer policy recommendations to help the strategic partnership achieve its full potential.

DEFINING A MATURE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Whereas obligations incurred by states in a formal alliance are well defined in signed treaties, responsibilities in a strategic partnership are inherently less clear. There is no universally accepted definition of a strategic partnership between two countries.[8] Some, such as the U.S.-Israel strategic partnership, function one step below a formal treaty alliance. For others, such as India's recently upgraded relationship with Rwanda, the establishment of a strategic partnership indicates a desire to increase bilateral cooperation in discrete areas. Because there is no common definition of a strategic partner, each relationship is likely to be unique. Drawing from the business world, one definition that seems applicable to the spectrum of strategic partnerships describes them as arrangements "to help each other or work together, to make it easier for each of them to achieve the things they want to achieve."[9] A mature strategic relationship, therefore, is one where the two parties have succeeded in making it easier to achieve their respective and shared goals. This is not to say that the two have necessarily achieved their goals, but that they have taken the necessary steps to ease the process.

For India, a country that has deliberately eschewed formal alliances, strategic partnerships are a politically acceptable framework to advance targeted areas of cooperation with multiple countries.[10] In the post–Cold War era, India has formed numerous strategic partnerships—by

8 Thomas Wilkins provides a useful summary of the international relations theory discourse on strategic partnerships, noting the lack of an agreed definition. See Thomas S. Wilkins, "'Alignment,' Not 'Alliance'—The Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012): 53–76.

9 This definition of strategic partnership in taken from the online edition of the *Cambridge Business English Dictionary* ~ https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/strategic-partnership.

10 Ankit Panda, "Why Does India Have So Many 'Strategic Partners' and No Allies?" *Diplomat*, November 23, 2013 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/why-does-india-have-so-many-strategic-partners-and-no-allies.

some counts more than 30 since 1998.[11] Yet they are by no means equal but vary in significance depending on the relative impact of the partnership on India's strategic objectives. For the United States, which has also forged multiple strategic partnerships in the post–Cold War era, the arrangement offers an appealing means to enhance cooperation without the burden of alliance entanglements.

By almost any measure, the United States is India's most important strategic partner. The only country stronger than China—in terms of military might, economic influence, and ability to spur multilateral cooperation on a global scale—the United States alone has the capacity and heft to bolster India's standing in global economic and political institutions and enhance its defense and security capabilities.[12] Certainly India has other relationships it considers significant for achieving national security objectives. Some in India would argue that Russia, with which India has a "special and privileged strategic partnership," is the most important.[13] Russia does indeed continue to play a key strategic role insofar as it is a source of military hardware and energy resources, but it increasingly has less to offer India in terms of bilateral trade. India also no longer needs Russia's support in the UN Security Council, and its growing alignment with China and recent uptick in military engagement with Pakistan have unnerved New Delhi.[14] Japan is another important partner for India. Their close and deepening ties reflect a growing convergence of the two countries' geostrategic interests, and Japanese financing and investment underwrite several Indian development and regional connectivity projects in Asia. Yet Japan alone does not have the convening power to promote or enable Indian security leadership in the Indo-Pacific region.[15]

---

11 Suhasini Haidar, "'Strategic Partners' Are Now a Dime a Dozen," *Hindu*, January 11, 2017 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/%E2%80%98Strategic-partners%E2%80%99-are-now-dime-a-dozen/article17024245.ece.

12 Rajesh Rajagopalan, "India's Strategic Choices: China and the Balance of Power in Asia," Carnegie India, September 2017, 27–31 ~ http://carnegieindia.org/2017/09/14/india-s-strategic-choices-china-and-balance-of-power-in-asia-pub-73108.

13 Satish Kumar et al., "India's Strategic Partners: A Comparative Assessment," Foundation for National Security Research, New Delhi, November 2011 ~ http://fnsr.org/files/Indias_Strategic.pdf.

14 India's concerns regarding Russian-Pakistan military cooperation are described in P.S. Raghavan, "India-Russia Strategic Partnership—A Mutual Commitment," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 11, no. 4 (2016): 302–7; and Vinay Kaura, "Russia Signs Naval Cooperation Deal with Pakistan: Recent Warmth in Moscow-Islamabad Ties May Worry New Delhi," Firstpost, August 3, 2018 ~ https://www.firstpost.com/world/russia-warming-up-to-pakistan-is-the-elephant-in-the-room-in-moscow-new-delhi-ties-india-must-safeguard-long-standing-relations-4888711.html.

15 Rajesh Basrur and Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, "A Time of Strategic Partnerships," *Hindu*, September 21, 2017 ~ http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-time-of-strategic-partnerships/article19722970.ece.

Only the United States could lead the international nonproliferation community in accepting India as a de facto nuclear weapons state, as it did with the 2008 civil nuclear initiative. No other country, certainly not Russia, had the global standing to persuade the dozens of nuclear supplier countries to rewrite rules to advance India's interest. The United States could and did in the most visible demonstration of Washington's commitment "to help India become a major world power in the twenty-first century."[16] The United States further stands out among India's strategic partners in that it brings to bear not just its own power and resources but its close defense and strategic ties with a majority of India's other regional strategic partners, including Afghanistan, Australia, France, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam, to name just a few. To be sure, the potential presented by this network of allies and partners has not been a driver of the U.S.-India strategic partnership to date. Indeed, its value likely is still underappreciated in Indian policy circles. But as opportunities for new areas of collaboration among these partners present themselves, they will reinforce to India the importance of its strategic partnership with the United States.

ASSESSING THE MATURITY OF DEFENSE AND SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

If the goal of a strategic partnership is to make it easier for countries to achieve their respective goals, the overall maturity of the U.S.-India strategic partnership can be assessed by gauging how well the United States and India have progressed in achieving the goals they have set for themselves. Defense and security objectives have remained largely consistent since President George W. Bush's first meeting with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2001. With little variation, joint statements from 2001 to the present have pledged that the United States and India will work together to deepen defense cooperation, advance defense technology cooperation, enhance maritime security, combat terrorism, and promote stability in Afghanistan.[17] This section will examine the progress made in achieving these objectives, and in instances where little progress has been made, identify potential reasons why.

---

16 "Background Briefing by Administration Officials on U.S.–South Asia Relations," U.S. Department of State, March 25, 2005 ~ https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/43853.htm.

17 Each of these areas of cooperation has been referenced in nearly every presidential and prime ministerial joint statement since November 2001. Joint statements were issued on November 9, 2001; July 18, 2005; March 2, 2006; November 24, 2009; November 8, 2010; September 27, 2013; September 30, 2014; January 25, 2015; June 7, 2016; and June 26, 2017.

The Framework of the Strategic Partnership

Defense and security cooperation function within the architecture of the broader strategic partnership. Over the past decade and a half, the United States and India have put in place a framework to steer the relationship. They have institutionalized more than 40 dialogues, based in large part on comparable dialogue structures that the United States has with its closest partners and allies.[18] This architecture is larger and substantively more comprehensive than that of any of India's other partnerships. Only the partnership with Russia comes close, with an annual summit and annual meetings between the external and defense ministers and their respective counterparts. But India's bilateral cooperation with Russia is far more limited in scope.[19] Through these dialogues, the U.S. and Indian governments underscore their political support for the relationship, set objectives, identify and overcome obstacles to cooperation, and monitor progress and sustain momentum.

At the highest level, the U.S. president and Indian prime minister, with rare exception, meet at least once annually, if not as part of a counterpart visit, then on the margins of a multilateral meeting such as the G-20 summit, East Asia Summit, or UN General Assembly.[20] The two countries also have multiple cabinet-level dialogues. The most important of these is a new 2+2 meeting between the U.S. secretaries of state and defense and Indian ministers for external affairs and defence, which was held for the first time on September 6, 2018, and supplants the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue that was inaugurated in 2015. Additionally, key U.S. and Indian cabinet officials frequently engage one another through reciprocal visits. Below the cabinet level, dozens of dialogues covering a broad range of issues—including strategic cooperation, energy, climate change, education, development, economics, trade and agriculture, science and technology, health, and innovation—drive day-to-day cooperation.[21]

The defense relationship has its own subset of structured working groups, spanning from high-level policy dialogues to talks on trade,

---

18 U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, "Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India," Joint Report to Congress, July 2017, 2.

19 Ministry of External Affairs (India), "India-Russia Relations," Brief, May 2017 ~ http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_Russia_May.pdf.

20 With the exception of 2007, the president and prime minister have met at least once annually since 2000. In 2007, the two had planned to meet on the margins of the September UN General Assembly, but Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was forced to cancel travel for health reasons. Since 2013 the president and prime minister have held annual counterpart visits in Washington, D.C., or New Delhi in addition to meeting on the sidelines of multilateral summits.

21 Ministry of External Affairs (India), "Brief on India-U.S. Relations," Brief, June 2017 ~ https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_US_brief.pdf.

technology cooperation, armaments cooperation, technology security, and military cooperation (to include service-specific working groups), as well as a new maritime security dialogue (see **Table 1**). Additionally, the United States and India have an annual trilateral dialogue with Japan that includes defense officials.

TABLE 1

U.S.-India Defense Dialogues

Title	Focus	Level (United States / India)
Defense Policy Group	Policy	Undersecretary of defense for policy / Defence secretary
Defense Procurement and Production Group	Trade	Director, Defense Security Cooperation Agency / Director general (acquisition)
Joint Technical Group	Armaments cooperation	Principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for research / Director general (production coordination and services integration), Defence Research and Development Organization
Senior Technology Security Group	Technology security	Director, Defense Technology Security Agency / Additional secretary (defense production)
Military Cooperation Group	Military cooperation	Deputy commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command / Chief of integrated defence staff
U.S.-India Maritime Security Dialogue	Maritime security	Assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs, assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs / Joint secretary, disarmament and international security affairs; joint secretary, Americas
Defense Technology and Trade Initiative	Technology codevelopment and coproduction	Undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment / Secretary (defense production)

The Deepening of Defense Cooperation

The United States and India identified specific focus areas for defense cooperation in bilateral framework agreements signed in 2005 and 2015.[22] The agreements list more than a dozen potential areas where the two militaries would work together. Though they stop short of identifying interoperability as a goal, the documents direct the respective military establishments to engage in activities that would support that larger objective, such as conducting regular military exercises, enhancing military education and training, increasing intelligence exchange, and collaborating in multinational operations when doing so is in their interest.

The U.S. and Indian defense establishments have unquestionably achieved progress over the past decade and a half, resulting in greater comfort and familiarity between the two armed forces, improved information sharing, increased frequency of dialogues, and tangible cooperation. Bilateral military ties are further enhanced through educational exchanges. Indian officers regularly attend U.S. military schools, while officers from both sides engage in reciprocal training and exchanges and participate in combined efforts to share lessons learned with third countries. In 2016 and 2017, for example, U.S. and Indian instructors conducted a combined training for African peacekeepers.[23] The Indian military exercises with the United States more than with any other country, and the two have regular exercises with their armies, air forces, and navies as well as with special operations forces. These exercises have grown in size and sophistication over the years, providing quality training and preparing the militaries to work together in potential combined operations. The annual Malabar naval exercise, which started as a mere passing exercise in 1992, has included Japan as an annual partner since 2015.[24] The 2017 exercise boasted aircraft carriers from the United States and India and a Japanese helicopter destroyer. India also now regularly participates in the biennial U.S.-led multilateral Rim of the Pacific exercise. The Indian and U.S. armies

---

22 U.S. Department of Defense and Indian Ministry of Defence, "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship," June 28, 2005 ~ http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/3211/2005-06-28%20New%20Framework%20for%20the%20US-India%20Defense%20Relationship.pdf; and U.S. Department of Defense and Indian Ministry of Defence, "Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship," June 3, 2015 ~ http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2015-Defense-Framework.pdf.

23 U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, "Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India," 4.

24 Vivek Raghuvanshi, "Japan to Join Malabar as Permanent Participant," *Defense News*, October 13, 2015 ~ https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2015/10/13/japan-to-join-malabar-as-permanent-participant; and Gurpreet S. Khurana, "MALABAR Naval Exercises: Trends and Tribulations," National Maritime Foundation, August 5, 2014, 1 ~ http://www.academia.edu/7879273/India-US_MALABAR_Naval_Exercises_Trends_and_Tribulations.

engage annually in the brigade-level field exercise Yudh Abhyas, and U.S. special operations forces train with their Indian counterparts twice annually in the Vajra Prahar and Tarkash exercises.[25] Bilateral air force exercises occur less frequently—a reflection of the fact that the Indian Air Force has far fewer international engagements due to limitations posed by distance, fuel costs, and aircraft compatibility.[26] Nevertheless, though the bilateral air exercise Cope India occurs infrequently (it was held in December 2018 for the first time since 2009), India did participate in the multilateral Red Flag–Alaska as recently as 2016. At the September 2+2 dialogue, the two countries agreed to introduce a tri-service exercise in 2019.

Despite their deepening defense cooperation, it is notable that in the intervening fourteen years since the United States and India coordinated efforts to respond to the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami they have not conducted a combined military-relief operation. Although both the Indian and U.S. armed forces deployed in large numbers to Nepal in 2015 to assist with relief efforts after the massive earthquake, they did so unilaterally, with no prior coordination. The two militaries did engage in some coordination on the ground in Nepal but not to a degree that would be expected considering that they had inked a disaster-relief initiative a decade earlier vowing to train together to enable an integrated response in precisely this type of situation.[27]

Even if the two countries were to choose to engage in some form of combined operation, as envisioned in the 2005 and 2015 defense framework documents, they would find it challenging. The U.S. and Indian armed forces are still far from being interoperable. The concept of interoperability is much more than simply having common platforms and equipment. Militaries are interoperable when they can "act together coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve…objectives."[28] Shared hardware enhances operational effectiveness for a number of reasons, but true interoperability relies on much more than hardware. More than anything, it requires habits of cooperation that develop through training, exercises, and joint planning to establish shared doctrines and procedures.[29]

---

25 U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, "Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India," 5.

26 Kishore Kumar Khera, "International Military Exercises: An Indian Perspective," *Journal of Defence Studies* 11, no. 3 (2017): 27–28.

27 U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-India Disaster Relief Initiative," Fact Sheet, July 18, 2005 ~ https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/fs/2005/49730.htm.

28 NATO, "Interoperability: Connecting NATO Forces," June 6, 2017 ~ https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_84112.htm.

29 Ibid.

Thus, although India exercises more with the United States than with any other country, the frequency of the exercise program is insufficient to achieve interoperability. As a point of comparison, whereas the U.S. Navy conducted only one exercise with India in 2017, it engaged in 28 major exercises with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force that same year.[30] Even a non-ally like Singapore, whose active duty forces are around 5% the size of India's, conducts more bilateral military exercises with the United States than does India.[31] The Indian Defence Ministry's stated objective for international defense cooperation and exercises is to enhance "mutual trust and understanding with counterparts in foreign countries."[32] Exercises are planned in support of political and foreign policy goals; the operational benefits are secondary. For this reason, when allocating resources for foreign military exercises, India has sought to increase the number of partners with which it engages (23 total partners since 2012), as opposed to increasing the frequency of exercises with key, capable partners like the United States.[33] This has the effect of increasing familiarity with numerous militaries, but it does not improve interoperability. Similarly, India's failure to regularly fill all the slots offered in U.S. professional military education programs is a missed opportunity for the rising stars in the Indian armed forces to build relationships with future U.S. military leaders.

Interoperability has been further hampered by India's reluctance, until very recently, to sign enabling agreements. These include the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), signed in 2016, which streamlines accounting practices to permit unanticipated reciprocal military logistics support, and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), signed in September 2018, which allows release of sophisticated communications systems for sale to India and will enable the two militaries to communicate securely. India has yet to agree to initiate negotiations on the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for Geospatial Intelligence, which would provide India with access to sophisticated mapping data.[34] These agreements, heatedly debated among Indian strategists

30 Author's interview with the Japanese naval attaché to the United States, Washington, D.C., July 3, 2018.

31 Singapore conducted eight bilateral military exercises with the United States in 2017 and averages around seven bilateral exercises annually. In 2018, Singapore also participated in an additional eight multilateral exercises with the United States. Author's email communication with the Singapore defense attaché to the United States, August 14, 2018, and January 4, 2019.

32 Ministry of Defence (India), *Annual Report 2016–2017* (New Delhi, 2017), 168.

33 Khera, "International Military Exercises," 17–40.

34 For additional information on these agreements, see Mark Rosen and Douglas Jackson, "The U.S.-India Defense Relationship: Putting the Foundational Agreements in Perspective," CNA, February 2017 ~ https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DRM-2016-U-013926-Final2.pdf.

as potential threats to India's sovereignty, are considered in the United States to be banal, box-checking exercises that facilitate basic cooperation. For example, the United States has signed a LEMOA or similar agreement with 88 countries, NATO, and the United Nations and a BECA-like agreement with more than 57 countries. The number of COMCASA-like agreements that the United States has signed is not publicly available, but it is most certainly greater than one dozen.[35] Forward progress on these agreements will provide a basis for improved operational cooperation.

Defense Technology Cooperation

India seeks access to quality U.S. technology to improve its military capability, bolster its domestic defense industry, and diversify its sources of defense equipment. The United States is interested in expanding defense trade with India to improve interoperability with the Indian armed forces, in addition to making sales. Importantly for India, the two countries have agreed to move beyond a buyer-seller arrangement to pursue coproduction and codevelopment and facilitate the transfer of defense technologies to India. The United States and India have made great strides thus far as a result of efforts by both sides to educate one another on their respective acquisition processes—in Washington's case, to relax export controls for India, and for New Delhi, to be willing to adopt new end-use monitoring and security procedures. U.S. defense sales to India have reached approximately $18 billion since 2001, with the promise of billions of dollars in additional U.S. sales on the horizon. Although the two countries continue to encounter bureaucratic challenges to foreign military sales, they have demonstrated an ability to innovate and adapt in order to facilitate sales and greater technology collaboration.[36]

In 2012 the United States and India established the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) with the goal of accelerating coproduction and codevelopment efforts. The DTTI was designed to identify specific technology projects for collaboration and, in the process, streamline bureaucratic obstacles, enabling more routine collaboration in the future. In creating the initiative, the United States and India sought to bypass ossified bureaucratic structures in both countries. The DTTI has expanded from

35 Rosen and Jackson, "The U.S.-India Defense Relationship."

36 Cara Abercrombie, "Removing Barriers to U.S.-India Defense Trade," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 10, 2018 ~ http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/01/10/removing-barriers-to-u.s.-india-defense-trade-pub-75206.

four simple coproduction pathfinder projects to include seven working groups on sophisticated programs such as aircraft carrier, jet engine, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance technologies. At the same time, the United States has dramatically increased the level of technology it is willing to transfer to India. The decision to designate India a "major defense partner" in 2016—a status unique to India—reflects policy and regulatory changes to treat the country on par with the United States' closest allies and "facilitate the export of goods and technologies for projects, programs, and joint ventures in support of official U.S.-India defense cooperation."[37] This was followed by the announcement in July 2018 that the U.S. Department of Commerce granted India Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 status, which further reduces the number of controlled items requiring export licenses for India.[38]

Although these measures have benefited the relationship tremendously in many ways, the DTTI has nevertheless not yet accomplished its primary objective of jointly producing or developing defense articles. This is due in part to the challenge of identifying projects that are required by both defense establishments and make good business sense for potential private-sector partners. The initiative's halting progress also reflects a disjuncture of goals, with the United States aiming to build institutional partnerships across the bureaucracies, while India continues to subject DTTI projects to its competitive procurement process.[39]

Maritime Security

Goals for bilateral maritime security cooperation have evolved over the past decade. Following their shared experiences as partners in the 2004 Tsunami Core Group, which also included Australia and Japan, and facing the threat of Somali pirates, the United States and India announced a maritime cooperation framework in 2006 to address nontraditional security threats such

---

37 U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, "Enhancing Defense and Security Cooperation with India," 5.

38 U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Public Affairs, "U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross Announces Programs to Increase U.S. Commercial Engagement in the Indo-Pacific Region," July 30, 2018 ~ https://www.commerce.gov/news/press-releases/2018/07/us-secretary-commerce-wilbur-ross-announces-programs-increase-us.

39 Ashley J. Tellis, "Beyond Buyer-Seller," *Force*, August 2015 ~ http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Tellis_Beyond_Buyer-Seller.pdf.

as disaster response, counterpiracy, and transnational crime.[40] The initiative never picked up steam, however, because there was no political imperative for cooperation in the intervening years, and operational cooperation was inhibited by the interoperability limitations discussed previously. To date, operational U.S.-India maritime security cooperation has consisted primarily of Indian Navy vessels coordinating with the multinational counterpiracy task force operations off the coast of Somalia.

Over the past four years, however, maritime security cooperation has been energized against the backdrop of rising tensions over territorial disputes and Chinese land-reclamation activities in the South China Sea. With the release of the "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region" in 2015, President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Modi provided a framework and impetus for maritime security cooperation.[41] A new maritime security dialogue, launched in 2016, with participation by diplomats, naval officers, and civilian defense officials has deepened the discussion on the types of cooperation the two countries can address together in the maritime domain. India and the United States signed a white shipping agreement in 2016 to improve maritime domain awareness by sharing open-source information on the movement of commercial vessels. The two countries signed the LEMOA that same year, more than ten years after it was first discussed, which will enhance the ability of the militaries to support one another's logistics requirements in the course of operations, including at sea. Indeed, the first use of the agreement was replenishment to an Indian Navy vessel in the Sea of Japan in 2017.[42] Starting in 2018, India agreed to send a military liaison to the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain to coordinate maritime activities in the Indian Ocean. The arrangement for the first time bridges the division of U.S. geographic combatant command lines and opens up opportunities for future bilateral cooperation throughout the Indian Ocean region.[43]

---

40 "Indo-U.S. Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation," Ministry of External Affairs (India), March 2, 2006 ~ http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6030/IndoUS+Framework+for+Maritime+Security+Cooperation.

41 "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region."

42 Sushant Singh, "LEMOA in Place, U.S. Tanker Refuels Indian Navy Ship in Sea of Japan," *Indian Express*, November 11, 2017 ~ https://indianexpress.com/article/india/lemoa-in-place-us-tanker-refuels-indian-navy-ship-in-sea-of-japan-4932082.

43 Shishir Gupta, "Soon, India Defense Attaché at U.S. Navy Bahrain Command," *Hindustan Times*, March 21, 2018 ~ https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/soon-india-defence-attache-at-us-navy-bahrain-command/story-iTGPB5sLbOlod11MlprWjI.html.

Counterterrorism

The United States and India have a shared imperative to defeat terrorist groups that would threaten their citizens and interests in South Asia. Interest in counterterrorism cooperation preceded the September 11 attacks, but that event put counterterrorism at the forefront of the bilateral agenda. The two countries established a joint counterterrorism working group in 2000, which has met fifteen times. Additionally, they have conducted numerous professional and educational exchanges among law enforcement, military, and civilian experts, sharing best practices and lessons learned, and have pursued cybersecurity cooperation against terrorist threats.[44] Yet, while the two have worked together to address a number of counterterrorism objectives, practical cooperation to address specific threats lagged initially, due in large part to what Lisa Curtis has referred to as "a lingering trust deficit" owing to the United States' ongoing operational cooperation with Pakistan.[45] The 2008 Mumbai attacks helped break down some of the barriers to cooperation, with reported improvements in intelligence sharing and law-enforcement cooperation after the attack.[46] A homeland security dialogue, established in 2011, brought together experts from key bureaucratic stakeholders on both sides to address multiple aspects of counterterrorism cooperation, including law enforcement, critical infrastructure protection, and cybersecurity.[47] After Mumbai, a changed U.S. approach to Pakistani-based groups that target India and the region has helped overcome some of India's distrust.[48] Today, counterterrorism cooperation has improved dramatically, moving beyond regular dialogues to improved coordination, intelligence and information sharing, technology and equipment sharing, and efforts to counter improvised explosive devices.[49] In 2017, the two countries launched a dialogue to increase bilateral cooperation on pursuing designations against individuals and terrorist groups, moving closer to the tangible counterterrorism cooperation

---

44 K. Alan Kronstadt and Sonia Pinto, "India-U.S. Security Relations: Current Engagement," Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, R42823, November 13, 2012, 14 ~ https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42823.pdf.

45 Lisa Curtis, "U.S.-India Counterterrorism Cooperation: Deepening the Partnership," testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, Washington, D.C., September 14, 2011 ~ https://www.heritage.org/testimony/us-india-counterterrorism-cooperation-deepening-the-partnership.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Kronstadt and Pinto, "India-U.S. Security Relations," 12.

49 "Brief on India-United States Relations," Ministry of External Affairs (India), 2017.

envisioned by U.S. and Indian leaders in 2001.[50] These recent gains were highlighted in the September 2018 2+2 dialogue joint statement, with the two countries pledging to further increase cooperation.[51]

Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been a recurring focus of the strategic partnership since 2001, but U.S. and Indian leaders have been clear-eyed about the limits of practical bilateral cooperation, given regional political sensitivities. Rather than identify specific areas for direct cooperation, the United States and India have supported their respective efforts to achieve stability in Afghanistan. India has endorsed the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan, and the United States has welcomed India's development assistance. The two countries communicate regularly about Afghanistan, a practice that has improved in recent years after India expressed frustration in 2011 about the U.S. government's lack of transparency about a major policy announcement that year.[52] Since 2014, they have worked to coordinate military assistance to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. Former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, made a point of visiting India early in his command in 2016 to share perspectives—the first time a U.S. commanding general had done so. The United States coordinated with India as New Delhi provided lethal military equipment to Afghanistan for the first time by transferring seven attack helicopters to the Afghan Air Force in 2015–16.[53] The United States' 2017 South Asia Strategy, the first such document to explicitly recognize an Indian role in shaping Afghanistan's future, presents an opportunity for greater coordination and cooperation going forward.[54]

---

50 "India-U.S. Counter-Terrorism Designations Dialogue," Ministry of External Affairs (India), December 19, 2017 ~ http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29183/IndiaUS+CounterTerrorism+Designations+Dialogue.

51 "Joint Statement on the Inaugural U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Press Spokesperson, September 6, 2018 ~ https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/09/285729.htm.

52 K. Alan Kronstadt and Sonia Pinto, "India-U.S. Security Relations: Strategic Issues," Congressional Research Service, CRS Reports for Congress, January 24, 2013, 41 ~ https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42948.pdf.

53 Franz-Stefan Gady, "India's Plans to Buy Helicopter Gunships for Afghanistan," *Diplomat*, January 2, 2018 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/indias-plans-to-buy-helicopter-gunships-for-afghanistan.

54 "Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia," White House, August 21, 2017 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia.

BARRIERS TO MATURITY

As the preceding section demonstrates, the frequency and number of engagements and breadth of overall activity between the two governments, in particular between the Indian and U.S. militaries, have grown dramatically over the past decade and a half, demonstrating a considerable level of effort by both sides to strengthen the strategic partnership. The two have successfully taken unilateral actions, making changes to legislation, policies, and procedures to facilitate strategic partnership objectives. Yet the overall output resulting from these dialogues, exercises, and engagements and the tangible impact on Indian and U.S. security objectives are less than one would expect given the level of input and the number of years the two countries have worked toward these goals.

Although the U.S.-India strategic partnership has a strong institutional architecture in place, it lacks the practical cooperation needed to achieve its objectives. There simply is not the natural, connective tissue between officials—informal as well as formal—that one would expect of a relationship this broad and ambitious. The United States knows from experience that maturity in a relationship results when two partners engage routinely at all levels—from the strategic to the tactical. Critically, through formal and informal connections, partners build the habits of cooperation that help government officials identify opportunities and clear obstacles. Alyssa Ayres underscores this point in her assessment of bilateral diplomatic ties, noting "the habits of cooperation between both countries do not resemble those the United States has with other major powers."[55] U.S. and Indian officials—diplomats as well as military officers—do not naturally engage outside of formal structures or dialogues. They do not routinely coordinate with one another in advance of major policy announcements or multilateral events on issues that do not directly affect the bilateral relationship, as the United States does with many of its allies and other key partners. For example, U.S. officials typically will coordinate with close partners in advance of making major foreign and security policy decisions to avoid surprise, promote cooperation where possible, and minimize friction where differences exist. The United States and India do this more today than they have in the past, but not routinely—as the United States does, for example, with Japan or Australia.

[55] Alyssa Ayres, *Our Time Has Come: How India Is Making Its Place in the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 231–32.

This lack of connectivity, or shared habits of cooperation, represents a breakdown in the United States and India's ability to translate vision into action. There are several possible reasons that the two countries have found it so difficult to build these connections. It likely is not deliberate but the result of a combination of factors, key among them being different expectations of the partnership and foreign policy differences. These in turn are compounded by bureaucratic obstacles in both countries.

Differing Expectations for the Strategic Partnership

At a fundamental level, it seems that, despite sharing a common vision for the strategic partnership, the two countries have different ideas of what the partnership means in practice and how to implement that vision. These differences in perception can lead to divergent, and possibly unrealistic, expectations for one another, which in turn can frustrate practical cooperation. The United States typically works in concert with its partners to achieve shared security objectives. It has modeled its approach to India on other mature security relationships. While it recognizes that India is unlikely to enter into a formal alliance, Washington nevertheless expects that over time India will grow more comfortable working alongside the United States militarily and diplomatically. In terms of military cooperation, the United States envisions cooperation on noncombat operations, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief missions, or combined maritime security patrols. The United States also expects that positive momentum in the defense and security dimension of the relationship will spur greater cooperation in areas that have traditionally faced more obstacles, like trade and investment.

India, unaccustomed to working in an alliance-type relationship, tends to view the strategic partnership very differently. It expects to coordinate defense and security perspectives, approaches, and efforts but fundamentally to go it alone, functioning in parallel with the United States as opposed to working together. India's policy of strategic autonomy, a deliberate decision not to align with any one country, places limits on how closely it will work with the United States. In this context, India seeks U.S. assistance with building up its military capabilities—by transferring technology and know-how and building skills through exercises—as well as in promoting its standing in global multilateral organizations so that India can grow into a leadership role. This approach allows the country to benefit from cooperation with the United States without compromising its strategic autonomy. Though the United States may be its most important security

partner, India will deliberately circumscribe certain types of cooperation to ensure that it keeps the door open to other partners in the future. However, in doing so, it may inadvertently be closing off opportunities to work with the United States in the future by not engaging in the type of ground work—those habits of cooperation and enabling efforts—that would be required, for example, to launch close military cooperation quickly.

Some of the differences in expectations likely stem from the simple fact that India has never before had a multidimensional security partner. Its decades-long defense relationship with the Soviet Union and subsequently Russia never involved operational cooperation but was focused on defense sales and technology transfer. Indeed, the first military exercise between the two countries did not occur until 2003.[56] With the exception of India's procurement and production cadre, who have decades of experience working closely with the Russian defense establishment, Indian defense officials and military officers have no real experience building habits of cooperation with another country. There is a risk that requirements for meaningful cooperation will be obscured by the sheer number of dialogues, which generate a sense of momentum in the relationship but do not guarantee outputs. Staff may perceive that there is progress based on the number of meetings and prioritize process over outcomes, even when greater effort might be required to achieve a tangible impact.

Foreign Policy Differences

While a growing convergence of interests and strategic outlooks has propelled the U.S.-India strategic partnership forward, the two countries continue to maintain very different stances on a number of key foreign policy issues. Their different approaches to relations with Pakistan, Russia, and Iran have stymied aspects of defense cooperation in the past, and any one of these could complicate cooperation in the future. U.S. military cooperation with Pakistan is a perennial irritant to India that has directly impeded cooperation in some areas. As noted earlier, Indian concerns about U.S.-Pakistan ties, most notably the United States' history of arms transfers to that country, have inhibited some bilateral counterterrorism cooperation. The United States has deliberately concentrated its military engagement with India in its Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility, avoiding military engagement

56 "Joint Indo-Russia Tri-Services Exercise Indra-2017 Successfully Conducted," Ministry of Defence (India), Press Information Bureau, November 1, 2017 ~ http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=173145.

with U.S. forces operating to India's west—the country's priority maritime theater—where the U.S. Central Command engages Pakistan.[57] The United States' deliberate attempt to firewall its military engagements with India and Pakistan from their bilateral disputes has, as a result, inhibited some cooperation with India. Concerns over Pakistani sensitivities also limited the scope and extent of U.S. and Indian cooperation regarding Afghanistan in the first decade of the conflict, particularly in terms of coordinating security assistance. It remains to be seen whether recent changes in U.S. policy toward Pakistan will remove some of these barriers to cooperation.

India's close military ties to Russia have likewise complicated some aspects of cooperation with the United States, particularly in the area of defense technology transfer and coproduction. The United States seeks to ensure that its technology will not be shared with other countries. India's scorecard in this regard has been excellent, but it resents U.S. end-use monitoring and export-control policies, which are designed to ensure that sensitive technology does not fall into the hands of competitors or adversaries like Russia. Although the United States has successfully worked with India to overcome its sensitivities to export-control requirements and mitigate against potential risks related to defense sales to Russia, India's continued defense relationship with Russia presents an ongoing challenge to defense cooperation with the United States. Indian incorporation of sophisticated Russian technologies into its command-and-control networks will at best cause the United States to consider withholding sensitive technologies it otherwise would have been willing to share with India.[58] At worst, new defense acquisitions, such as the S-400 air defense system that India recently agreed to purchase from Russia, could trigger U.S. sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, with significant repercussions for future U.S.-India defense cooperation.[59]

To date, the United States and India have successfully navigated differences on Iran policy, but U.S. threats of secondary sanctions on India

---

57 Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (India), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (New Delhi, October 2015), 32.

58 Vishnu Som, "U.S. May Block Sale of Armed Drones as India Is Buying Arms from Russia," NDTV, May 29, 2018 ~ https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/s-400-missile-deal-us-may-block-sale-of-predator-drones-as-india-is-buying-arms-from-russia-1858958.

59 Ashley J. Tellis, "How Can U.S.-India Relations Survive the S-400 Deal?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 29, 2018 ~ https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/08/29/how-can-u.s.-india-relations-survive-s-400-deal-pub-77131.

because of trade with Iran present a potential new irritant in bilateral ties.[60] Collectively, these differences have the effect of casting doubt among senior foreign policy elite in New Delhi and Washington on the reliability of the other as a partner. This in turn may affect individual government officials' willingness to build habits of cooperation with their counterparts.

Bureaucratic Obstacles

The challenges to the strategic partnership posed by differences in expectations and foreign policy are exacerbated by bureaucratic obstacles in both capitals. Frequent turnover in both countries' bureaucracies makes it difficult to build personal relationships with counterparts. In India, an inexpert civil service that rotates frequently through positions is often reluctant to make the decisions required to facilitate cooperation. In the United States, approval for new initiatives with India, particularly for some export-control decisions, can languish because of lengthy review processes, which can delay bilateral cooperation and reinforce Indian impressions that Americans can be difficult partners.

Some of India's standard bureaucratic practices prevent, complicate, and undermine cooperative behavior. For example, the process for approving military officer engagements with foreign counterparts severely limits opportunities to build relationships and habits of cooperation among military personnel. All foreign engagements by the Indian military, from exercises, to meetings, to travel by individual officers—including the service chiefs of staff—must be approved by senior civilian officials in the Ministry of Defence. This applies as well to ministry meetings with foreign defense attachés in New Delhi, severely limiting the ability for officers posted to India to build relationships with their counterparts in the country. This practice is in place for multiple reasons, notably to preserve civilian oversight of the military and of foreign affairs. Yet the process is slow and inevitably fails to approve some engagements in time.[61] Other actions considered mundane in the U.S. system can require prime minister–level approval in India, greatly delaying efforts to advance bilateral cooperation. For example, logistics agreements like the LEMOA are typically approved at the one-star level in the U.S. system,

60 Suhasini Haidar, "India Braces for More U.S. Pressure on Iran Sanctions," *Hindu*, July 4, 2018 ~ https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/iran-sanctions-india-braces-for-more-us-pressure/article24331678.ece.

61 Author's interview with U.S. Department of Defense officials, January 3, 2018.

whereas this agreement required national-level approval in India and was signed by the defense minister.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Defence are not staffed to take on the full spectrum of cooperation required in a robust security relationship with the United States, let alone invest in relationships and habits of cooperation with U.S. counterparts. This challenge is not specific to relations with the United States. Dan Markey has discussed the need for India to invest in its foreign policy "software," meaning its diplomatic corps as well as its nongovernmental institutions—academia, the media, think tanks, and businesses—that play an important role in policymaking to support the country's global ambitions.[62] Despite modest increases in the number of diplomats in recent years, India still does not have enough qualified and trained personnel in government to manage its engagements, build habits of cooperation, and support its global ambitions. The Ministry of Defence Office of Planning and International Cooperation is headed by a single joint secretary—a diplomat seconded from the Ministry of External Affairs. According to an organizational chart, this position is authorized to have a staff of fifteen and is responsible for managing India's defense cooperation and engagements with the entire world. U.S. defense officials only ever interact with the joint secretary.[63] By comparison, the Australian Department of Defence International Policy Division has a staff of approximately 150 personnel to manage global defense policy and engagements, and staff assigned to work on the U.S. alliance relationship routinely meet with their U.S. counterparts at all levels.[64]

REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

Recommendations

Any of the challenges described above could slow progress in the U.S.-India strategic partnership, and some combination of them likely explains the missing habits of cooperation. Taken together, they reveal a general lack of maturity in the relationship. None, however, negates the logic underpinning the strategic partnership or its potential to advance U.S. and Indian interests. The challenges faced in defense and security are replicated

62 Daniel Markey, "Developing India's Foreign Policy 'Software,'" *Asia Policy*, no. 8 (2009): 73–96.

63 Author's email exchange with a U.S. Department of Defense official, August 8–9, 2018.

64 Author's email exchange with an Australian Department of Defence official, August 10, 2018.

across other dimensions of the relationship as well. It is in the interest of both countries to make even more of an effort to increase their practical cooperation. To fully achieve the potential of this partnership, the two should make several adjustments to how they engage one another and endeavor to normalize cooperation through more frequent and targeted engagements.

First, it is important that the United States and India strive toward developing a common understanding of what the strategic partnership means in practice and clarify their respective roles. They would be well advised to establish a joint set of priorities for achieving the desired end state, and a roadmap of near-, mid-, and long-term goals. The roadmap should specify what they intend to work on separately, and what they will work on together, being clear-eyed about what will be required of each. There is no need to create a new mechanism to achieve this understanding; the two can rely on the existing dialogue structure, provided discussion is focused and on target.

Second, India and the United States would benefit from regular, candid exchanges with one another regarding potential areas of foreign policy disagreements and their impact on trust in the bilateral relationship. Relationship managers—the mid-level and junior staff in Washington and New Delhi—do engage in these types of discussions; yet the issues are sufficiently significant as to require senior officials on both sides to address them properly. These conversations could occur on an ad hoc basis but should also be included on the agenda for high-level dialogues, such as the 2+2 and summit meetings. Senior leaders should find ways to narrow differences where possible, minimize potential stumbling blocks to existing cooperation, and avoid at all costs working at cross purposes from one another.

Third, and most importantly, both countries should prioritize this relationship and resource it appropriately. Top-down attention in India and the United States has been key to spurring successful cooperation to date. Until and unless some of these other differences are overcome and habits of cooperation are developed at the working level, senior leadership cannot be complacent. India will not be able to build a surfeit of personnel "software" overnight, but it can prioritize resources to the U.S. relationship and increase opportunities for ad hoc engagement, in addition to ensuring that the institutional framework is meeting relationship priorities. India should consider adding personnel to the Ministry of External Affairs Joint Secretary (Americas) desk, ensuring that an adequate number of staff are working the account to drive the agenda of the numerous dialogues and maintain informal contact with U.S. counterparts between formal meetings. It should also consider increasing staffing within the Ministry of Defence Office of the Joint Secretary for Planning and

International Cooperation to work specifically on cooperation with the United States. India might also increase the size of its defense attaché office at its embassy in Washington, D.C., to facilitate engagement. In this regard, it could draw from its Russia model. India has ten uniformed officers in its Moscow embassy's defense representative office (compared with only three in Washington), as well as civilian representatives from several of its public-sector defense undertakings who help manage joint production efforts with Russia. Finally, India would be well served by sending a liaison officer to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii, as it is doing with the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, and initiating periodic visits to the headquarters of U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command to share perspectives. It also should consider easing restrictions on military personnel interactions with foreign counterparts, in particular with New Delhi–based defense attaché offices.

For the United States, a few modest bureaucratic adjustments to prioritize India would have considerable impact. It should designate senior officials at the undersecretary level or higher in both the Departments of State and Defense as the India leads for their departments. Officials at the assistant secretary level would retain day-to-day oversight of the relationship, while these higher-level designees would be responsible for ensuring that India is prioritized within the bureaucracy. They would also maintain routine contact with senior Indian counterparts to sustain momentum in the bilateral relationship as well as build the habit of routinely consulting senior Indian officials on matters of global policy import. The United States could also increase the number of slots available to Indian officers in its military schools, provided India fills them.

New Delhi and Washington should direct resources to ensure that the two sides can accomplish what they have said they will do. For example, both countries should invest more in bilateral and multilateral military exercises and exchanges to improve interoperability. The United States and India should both dedicate personnel to ensuring the DTTI's success. In this way, they can build relationships and habits of cooperation between their governments beyond just those individuals responsible for managing the bilateral relationship so as to improve mutual understanding of policies and perspectives and coordinate positions.

Conclusion

The considerable potential of a mature U.S.-India strategic partnership to advance the countries' respective interests and contribute to regional and

global security is worthy of the expectations placed on it by Washington and New Delhi. The United States and India have already made significant investments of time, attention, and resources to propel the relationship forward with notable progress. They have demonstrated through the conclusion of their civil nuclear initiative their ability to affect change on a global scale. And they have built the foundation for a successful partnership through a robust dialogue framework.

Yet, as the preceding analysis of the defense and security dimension of the relationship has shown, the architecture that the countries have put in place is by itself insufficient to help them achieve their goals. The U.S.-India strategic partnership is still immature, not because the two countries have not accomplished all they set out to do together, but because it is not clear they will be able to do so without first addressing key challenges. These include their differing expectations, potentially problematic foreign policy differences, and bureaucratic obstacles. Defense ties have been the foundation of a strong strategic partnership. As U.S.-India trade relations enter choppy waters, it is all the more imperative that the two countries fortify defense ties by building habits of cooperation to provide ballast to the overall relationship.

Continued progress in the strategic partnership is not assured. To realize its full potential, the United States and India must acknowledge the challenges that have prevented greater progress to date and take action to address them. This will require significant and continued effort at the highest levels of government to address existing obstacles and develop the habits of cooperation that are the mark of a mature relationship. This "defining partnership for the 21st century" holds too much promise for the two countries to allow inertia or complacency to undermine its success.[65] ◈

[65] Narendra Modi and Barack Obama, "A Renewed U.S.-India Partnership for the 21st Century," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2014.