

Analysis of India's Multi-dimensional Relations with Biden Administration

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Legacy of colonialism

The nascent Republic of India was unwillingly sucked into the vortex of fiercely rivaling power blocs of the cold war era. Nearly 190 years of the British rule with its colonial mindset and vague racist predisposition, were strong reasons for the independent India's leadership to go with the Soviet bloc. For this, the Anglo-American entity was much annoyed with India. However, the Soviet Union extended support to India in complex global strategies.

The old axiom goes that in politics, there are no permanent friends or foes. Relations among big nations have to be multi-faceted but one does not lose the sight of the trees while passing through a dense forest. America's PL-480 story is a good example of agreeing to differ and differing to agree among matured nations.

US' anguish

India's procurement of military hardware from Russia; her initial support to Chairman Mao's ideology; her resolute defence of Kashmir's accession purported to neutralize the residual sting of Lord Curzon's "Great Game in Central Asia; India pioneering the Non-Aligned movement, and finally India successfully making atom bomb test in 1976, all gave cause to the US not to treat India as an ally despite India accepting secular democracy as her state policy. Throughout the cold war era, the two countries worked as vitiating factors leading to implicit estrangement between New Delhi and Washington. The tail end of this nondescript relationship was the separation of Bangladesh from the Pakistan mainland with India's direct military intervention.

India's distrust

India's partial distrust of the US sprang mainly from the US unexpectedly playing an unfriendly role in Kashmir dispute hearings at the Security Council where India had gone with her plea to throw out the aggressors from Kashmir. India considered the admission of Pakistan to CENTO in 1954, a provocative act of the US with the potential of harming peace in the region. India's

grouse was that the Pentagon regularly provided upgraded weapons to Pakistan with the tacit objective to cow down India. The Pentagon would even provide financial facility for Pakistan army for waging wars against India. The tail end of India's complaint was that Washington overlooked Pakistan raising terrorists and jihadist (religious fighters) outfits on its soil as her army's frontline soldiers to wrest Kashmir from India. These outfits are involved in internal subversion and destabilizing of the elected government.

Amidst all this political and strategic melodramatics, trade between the two countries did not suffer suspension or interruption, but even grew dimensionally year after year.

Democrats and power structure

India-US relations are rather a complex issue, especially when Democrats are in power in Washington.

There are three major powers of center in defining the foreign policy of the US. One is the White House (WH), meaning the President and his advisors – in this case, Biden's personal role/involvement in policy making is negligible to non-existent.

The second is the Political Party in power, which has its own manifesto and uses the time in power to spread out its messages and firm up agenda that reflects member (public) priorities and wishes mostly of citizens who support the party. Finally, the most important factor in framing the foreign policy of the nation is the "Deep State", an amalgam of defense experts (both active in service or selected retired personnel), national security (both active in service or selected retired personnel), intelligence (both active in service or selected retired personnel), and the group of the CEOs of mega multinational companies.

So where is India?

The ruling structure being tri-polar as indicated, Indian policy-planners have had the compulsion of streamlining connectivity and confidence building exercise with all the three

power centers in the United States. What is the feedback we can summarize after have gone through the entire gamut of relationship during Biden administration.

1. The White House is ambivalent about India. It has its main India champion as the White House National Security Advisor with the Secretary of State close behind. Both of them are old India hands, though not as well known to BJP/Modi.
2. The Democratic Party loves Gandhi's India but hates Modi's India perhaps without properly understanding either. The question of inducting pragmatism and functional expertise in intensifying relations became tricky owing to the party leadership under Obama and Pelosi pandering to pro-Muslim tendency. The Democratic Party believes that inclination towards pro-Muslim posture would be taken by the voters as a sign of progressive views and open tolerance to minorities. In reality, under vote bank syndrome, the religious minority considers making substantial monetary donations to the party a means of consolidating the bond of friendly relationship.
3. The Party welcomes Muslim refugees. It supports the notion that BJP is committing genocide of Muslims in India.
4. The Deep State is solidly behind India primarily as a bulwark against China and a possible supplier of manpower in case a Sino-US conflict occurs which would place heavy demand on additional resource meaning manpower. It also supports opening a back up to the Chinese manufacturing base but it is rather discouraged because of India's restrictive policies regarding investment, intellectual property protection, and a very difficult bureaucracy to deal with.

The bottom line is that the U.S. considers Indo-US relations as important, but there are elements within the Democratic Party that feel India is better off under the Congress Party, and the relationship between the two countries will be even better.

However, this narrative does not get a pushback from the White House, but the Deep State is not convinced. But the White House and the Deep State, including Canada, did work together in removing Modi as a Nobel Prize contender. Some of the Democratic Party's key contributors (like Soros) are also funding NGO's in various countries to topple populist governments who are

seen as harsh on their minorities. They have succeeded everywhere, except in Turkey, and now in Netherlands.

Modi–Biden relationship (2021 onwards)

Notwithstanding the multi-pronged outreach of US foreign policy, US-India relations took a positive turn after January 20, 2021, when Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States.

Covid vaccine issue

After overcoming initial hiccups in allowing supply of raw materials needed for producing vaccines, in late April, right after a phone call with Ajit Doval, the National Security Advisor of India, the Biden administration stated it would make raw materials necessary for production of the Oxford–AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine available to India, and began to send more than ₹714 crore (equivalent to ₹801 crore or US\$ 100 million in 2023) worth of drug treatments, rapid diagnostic tests, ventilators, personal protective equipment, and mechanical parts needed to manufacture vaccines to India, along with a team of public health experts from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The US also stated that it planned to finance the expansion of Biological E. Limited, an Indian-based COVID-19 vaccine production company.¹ India entered negotiations with the US after it declared that it would share 60 million Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines with the world.²

Naval intrusion

On April 7, 2021, The United States Navy guided missile destroyer USS John Paul Jones sailed through India's Exclusive Economic Zone, without New Delhi's prior consent. It caused diplomatic spat between the two countries. At a time when the United States and India had been deepening relations, such a move had raised eyebrows among the general public in both

India and the United States. On April 7, 2021, USS John Paul Jones (DDG 53) asserted navigational rights and freedoms approximately 130 nautical miles west of the Lakshadweep Islands, inside India's exclusive economic zone, without requesting India's prior consent, consistent with international law. Former Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy, Admiral Arun Prakash, commented on the event by tweeting "There is irony here. While India ratified [the] UN Law of the Seas in 1995, the US has failed to do it so far. For the 7th Fleet to carry out FoN missions in Indian EEZ in violation of our domestic law is bad enough. The Pentagon defended the 7th Fleet's statement by claiming that the event was consistent with international law.

Cooperation in various fields

United States and India have strengthened cooperation in defense, semiconductors, critical minerals, space, climate, education, healthcare and other fields during the Joe Biden presidency.³ Biden also called the ties with India is "one of the defining relationships of the 21st Century".⁴ Modi and Biden reiterated the call for concerted action against all groups identified by the United Nations as terrorist organizations, including Al-Qaeda, ISIS (Daesh), Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM). Also mentioned the Afghan Taliban authorities and Pakistan should to stop terrorism,⁵ the joint Statement declared.

Military cooperation

Military cooperation did exist between the two countries in the past. But it received a boost during Biden – Modi period.

Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met with US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, at The Pentagon in Arlington County, Virginia in September 2022

The U.S. has four "foundational" agreements that it signs with its defence partners. The Pentagon describes the agreements as "routine instruments that the U.S. uses to promote military cooperation with partner-nations". American officials have stated that the agreements are not prerequisites for bilateral defence co-operation, but would make it simpler and more

cost-effective to carry out activities such as refueling aircraft or ships in each other's countries and providing disaster relief.⁶ The first of the four agreements, the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), was signed by India and the U.S. in 2002. The second agreement, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), was signed on 29 August 2016. The LEMOA permits the military of either country to use the others' bases for re-supplying or carrying out repairs. The agreement does not make the provision of logistical support binding on either country, and requires individual clearance for each request. The third agreement, Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) was signed during the inaugural 2+2 dialogue in September 2018. It is an India-specific variant of Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) that enables the two countries to share secure communication and exchange information on approved equipment during bilateral and multinational training exercises and operations. The fourth agreement, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), signed in 2020, permits the exchange of unclassified and controlled unclassified geospatial products, topographical, nautical, and aeronautical data, products and services between India and the US National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA).[224]

Harsh V. Pant, professor of International relations at King's College London, highlighted the importance of India to US strategic planning by saying: "India is a key to the US' ability to create a stable balance of power in the larger Indo-Pacific and IOR." The Indian Army and US Army conducts an annual training practice called Yudh Abhyas since 2002. In 2022, this exercise was conducted in Uttarakhand.

On August 16, 2022, US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall said that Indian defence attaché now has unescorted access to The Pentagon and he also added that this is commencement with our close relationship with India's status as a major defense partner," and future added that "And if you don't think unescorted access to the Pentagon is a big deal, I can't get into The Pentagon without an escort."⁷

During Modi's visit in 2023, the US and India agreed that Hindustan Aeronautics would jointly produce GE F-414 jet engines.⁸ The two sides also reached an agreement to purchase MQ-9B drones.⁹

Reforms in the UN

India has been pushing for reforms in the United Nations and in the World Trade Organization with mixed results. India's candidature for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council is currently backed by several countries including Russia, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Brazil, African Union nations and United States. In 2005, the United States signed a nuclear co-operation agreement with India even though the latter is not a part of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The United States agreed that India's strong nuclear non-proliferation record made it an exception and persuaded other Nuclear Suppliers Group members to sign similar deals with India.

Economic relations

India's largest outgoing investments are in the manufacturing sector, which accounts for 54.8 percent of the country's foreign investments. The second largest are in non-financial services (software development), accounting for 35.4 percent of investments. The United States is one of India's largest direct investors.

According to the data of the commerce ministry, in 2021–22, bilateral trade in goods between the two countries crossed \$119.42 billion. Exports to the US increased to \$76.11 billion in 2021–22 from \$51.62 billion in previous fiscal year, while imports rose to \$43.31 billion as compared to about \$29 billion in 2020–21.¹⁰

On February 15, 2023, Air India announced an order of 470 jets, out of which 220 jets would be bought from Boeing and the other 250 from Airbus. This is one of the biggest aircraft orders in the commercial jet industry. The deal was acknowledged by both the POTUS and the PMO of India.¹¹

Conclusion

This overview of India-US relations presented in this summation pertains to Biden-Narendra Modi administration period, which began in January 2021. Thus, till date we have covered almost two years less by one month. In terms of bilateral relations, it is a short period to look for tangible results. But whatever has been enumerated above is an indication that the two nations have overcome the mistrust of cold war period and entered into a new era of cooperation and collaboration in various areas. Thus, the history has ushered new and unique environs for the world's strongest and largest democracies to shape the new destiny and destination for the human kind. Marching together along the path of development and facing the common challenges with determination bring new hope to the entire globe.

Notes

¹ "The Latest: Biden; Sending help to India during virus surge" *The Associated Press*, April 26, 2021

² Jain, Rupam, April 27, 2021, "Vital medical supplies reach India as Covid....." Reuters

³ World view with Suhasini Haidar", *The Hindu*, June 23, 2023.

⁴ *BBC News* June 23, 2023

⁵ Deccan Herald, June 23, 2023

⁶ Lakshman Narayan, *The Hindu*, retrieved July 24, 2017

⁷ Indian defence attaché now has unescorted access to Pentagon", *Hindustan Times*, August 16, 2022

⁸ Sahu Ambuj in *The National Interest*, June 23, 2023

⁹ See note 3 supra

¹⁰ *NDTV*, May 29, 2022

¹¹ *The Indian Express*, Feb 17, 2023