



A Study on the Bilateral Relations between India and USA in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

India and United States of America can be seen to share a cordial relationship from the beginning only with the exception of a few areas of tension relations among them. India achieved independence during the midst of Cold War rivalry fought between the two superpowers USA and USSR. As a newly independent nation, India decided to stay away from the power blocs and pursue a policy of non-alignment and maintain friendly ties with both of them. United States of America was very critical of India's Foreign Policy. On varied regional issues both India and USA have differed and irritants also existed on their relations. However, despite the disagreements on several issues, there have been witnessed a growing collaboration, high level exchanges, and a broad global partnership among them on diverse sectors. India and U.S.A are cooperating in the field of defence, cyber security, trade, energy, culture, counter terrorism, health, space etc and are exchanging dialogues, conducting high level meetings, making visits etc. In the 21st century the relationship between India and U.S.A has much deepened with strategic meetings, signing of treaties, entering into dialogue on various areas. In this paper an attempt has been made to describe the discord and analyze the growing relations between India and U.S.A in the 21st century and the pathway ahead

Keywords: India, USA, Cooperation, Bilateral relation,

Introduction

India and United States of America share a wide range of similarities such as federalism, democratic form of government, follow rule of law, incorporate the principles of liberty, justice etc. The two countries are enjoying and maintaining a very close relationship. Some tensions emerged in the past relationship with regard to regional issues and on the context of Cold war. Irritants also persist in contemporary times impacting their close ties. Despite the differences which aroused and created bitterness in their relationship, the two countries share great level of co-operation and are co-partners in various fields. There have been frequent visits by the Prime

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Minister of India to U.S and the President of America to India to promote bilateral ties and develop mutual cooperation among them alongside various sectors. Various agreements are also signed between them to boost collaboration and build strategic partnership. Both the countries are cooperating in the areas like defence and security, trade, investment, energy, education, technology, agriculture, health etc. They are also engaged in exchanging dialogue and are working together to solve the regional and global issues which are at occurrence all over the world. In the 21st century, their relationship has been founded on strong association and broad partnership.

The research article aims to examine the relationship and highlight on some of the areas where both India and USA are collaborating and building partnership in the 21st century. Moreover, the article will also shed light on some of the irritants in their relationship and analyses the road ahead for close India-US ties.

Methodology:

The study is based on secondary sources of data collected from books, journal article, and internet.

India and United States of America- Bilateral Relations

India's relationship with the United States of America since its independence has been very closely knitted despite some differences aroused at the wake of Cold war era and India's nuclear policy. India and USA can be seen to enhance cooperation and built a global partnership on diverse sectors. The administrative officials of both the countries are in constant contact both politically, officially are having wide deliberation on several regional and global issues. The leaders and representatives of both the countries have been visiting each other and are also concluding agreement forwarding joint cooperation thereby building a strong relationship. In the 21st century the relationship between India and USA has widened with common concerns and deep collaboration with a thrust on several aspects of their bilateral relations.



Defence Co-operation between India and US

There is a high level of co-operation between India and USA with regard to defence sector. Several chief shared activities, frequent visits, concluding of agreements have led to the development of engagement for defence purpose in the 21st century. Some areas of defence cooperation between India and US are-

1. In 2001 talks were organized between India and USA to increase collaboration between the two military establishments for fighting terrorism. . The two countries in a joint statement stated their defence and security cooperation can build world peace, freedom, economic progress and security.
2. In the year 2005, India and United States has signed the New Framework for the India-U.S Defence Relationship resulting into joint exercises, defence trade, collaboration regarding maritime security, exchanges between army, navy and air force among them. This framework was renewed for 10 years till 2015.
3. India and U.S signed the Joint Declaration on Defence Cooperation in the year 2013. Both India and U.S considered certain principles for enhancing defence cooperation such as- both the countries share similar security concerns and regard both as close partners, both of them will carry on their efforts to solve process-associated impediments in defence, trade, technology transfer etc.
4. The renewal of the 2005 Agreement in 2015 created a roadway for collaboration through shared partnerships, exchanging dialogue and military exchanges. The objective of the 2015 agreement was to enhance defence trade, maritime security, increasing capacity building for peace missions, collaboration in missile protection etc.
5. In the year 2016, the relationship between India and US regarding defence came to be known as Major Defence Partnership.

Many developments have been taking place in the 21st century with regard to the co-operation between India and U.S in the defence sector.

India- US defence trade has grown to over 20 billion USD in 2020. India has also signed several defence agreements with USA. Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) is a major agreement signed between India and U.S on 29 August 2016 which



set up basic terms, conditions and procedures for reciprocal provision of logistic support, supplies and services between the armed forces of India and the United States. India-US Defence Industrial Cooperation 2023 attempts to fast track technology collaboration and co-production in areas having common concern.

Health Co-operation between India-U. S

India and U.S.A also share a very close co-operation in terms of promoting the health care of people. Since the past decades till the present time both the nations together have undertaken efforts for disease control, taking care of children, maternal health and have entered into dialogue pertaining to health issues. Health co-operation between India and U.S also can be witnessed during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both US and India have collaborated to build COVID-19 vaccines to prevent the deadly disease.

A mention of some of the fewer areas of shared collaboration between India and U.S.A for ensuring health protection are –

1. The fourth health dialogue between India and U.S.A was held at New Delhi in the year 2021. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed to enhance co-operation in the field of health and biomedical sciences.
2. The United States of America has been a part of the Global Action Plan committed to secure healthy lives and well-being of all. India took part in the US led Global Action Plan in 2022 dealing to put an end to Covid crisis.
3. To put an end to cancer, United States of America, Australia, India and Japan have started the Quad Cancer Moonshot initiative during the Quad Leaders' Summit held in September 2024.
4. On 3rd October, 2024, Gina Raimondo, U.S Secretary of Commerce and Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry in India organized the 6th ministerial level meeting of U.S- India Commercial Dialogue in Washington, D.C. In the meet, both the ministers acknowledged the two sides regarding the achievements made across various sectors as well as they discussed on various priorities such as travel and tourism, INDUS Innovation, health care etc. to enhance future bilateral partnership.



Energy Co-operation between India – U.S

India and USA are also building a long strategic bilateral partnership and exchanging dialogue in terms of energy sector. India and U.S in 2009 launched the Partnership to Advance Clean Energy to enhance bilateral co-operation on energy security and clean energy. India and USA have also signed Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen co-operation in promoting clean energy. The Indian Railways and the Government of U.S.A represented by the U.S Agency for International Development on June 22, 2023 declared a Memorandum of Understanding to tackle climate change and secure the goal of Indian Railways net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. The Indo-US Energy Dialogue launched in 2005 renamed as US –India Strategic Clean Energy Partnership represents the collaboration between India and U.S.A in the field of increasing energy cooperation. Presently, it possesses the following pillars: responsible oil and gas, emerging fuels, power and energy efficiency, renewable energy and sustainable growth.

The Indo- US energy collaboration can be witnessed through investment by Indian companies such as Reliance Industries, GAIL (India) etc in the U.S natural gas market. On February 13, 2025, both India and U.S issued a joint statement where both the President of USA Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi stated their commitment to build wide global partnership across various sectors. During the meet both the leaders also agree to enhance security underlined the significance to collaborate to bring energy affordability, reliability, and stable energy markets.

Counter- Terrorism Cooperation between India and USA

Global terrorism is a serious phenomenon affecting the lives of everyone all over the world. Many nations and international organizations are working to counter terrorism. In the field of combating terrorism both India and United States are also collaborating developing bilateral partnerships through exchange of information, regular dialogue, joint working groups, capacity building etc. Right from 11 September 2001, both India and



USA collaboration have intensified in the fight against terrorism. The 9/11 attack on America in 2001 began to influence politics throughout the world including Indo-US relations, terrorism, nuclear proliferation etc. A joint statement was issued between U.S and India on November 9, 2001 between President George Bush of America and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of India where both the leaders consider both affected by terrorism and agreed that proper steps should be taken to bring the offender to justice, while safeguarding the lives of the people affected by these efforts. A global war on terrorism was initiated by America where India provided all assistance and aid. In the year 2017 both India and USA started a dialogue on domestic and international terrorist designations listing proposals. On March 5, 2024, at Washington D.C, the United States of America and India held the 20th meeting of the U.S- India Counter Terrorism Joint Working Group and 6th Designations Dialogue. Both the sides renewed their commitments to counter terrorism and foster regional security as a significant part of their wider bilateral association. India and U.S.A made a joint statement on February 13, 2025 where the executive of both the countries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Donald J. Trump of USA expressed that the world-wide terrorism must be fought and terrorist refuge to be destroyed from every area of the world. The leaders also undertook pledge to collaborate together to stop proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and refusal of granting access to such weapons by terrorist and non-state actors.

Co-operation between India and USA for Environmental Protection

Environmental issues have become a matter of serious concern globally posing widespread consequences for the ecosystems, nature and human well-being. To protect and preserve the environment and address numerous environmental issues, both India and U.S.A are also holding bilateral talks and are developing shared partnership. Numerous Memorandum of Understanding have been signed to enhance environmental co-operation. India and U.S.A both have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to renew their dedication to work together on environmental issues in New Delhi on April 2, 2007. The MOU gave importance on four key areas: air quality, water quality, toxic chemicals and waste and management of environmental agencies. The United States of America



represented by the U.S Agency for International Development and Indian Railways on June 22, 2023, announced a Memorandum of Understanding to resist climate change and accomplish goal of Indian Railways net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. During the year 2009 and 2017, climate and energy collaboration increased between India and USA marked by two significant changes more focus on enhancing climate cooperation along with energy cooperation, and energy cooperation gave much importance on clean energy. The Paris Agreement is a legally binding global agreement to deal with climate change. Both India and U.S.A are signatories to the agreement. To achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, both leaders Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and President Joe Biden of U.S.A at the Leaders' summit meeting on April 22, 2021 agreed to start high-level India-US Partnership envisaging shared collaboration. The U.S - India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda for 2030 partnership reflects an important step and growing collaboration between the two countries to tackle climate change and building a sustainable future.

Space Co-operation between India and U.S.A

The co-operation between India and U.S with regard to space is seen to be increasing in the 21st century. In 2005, the two countries signed a Science & Technology agreement to enhance co-operation in science, space, energy and various allied sectors. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) of USA in 2006 to promote bi-lateral co-operation to include two US Scientific instruments on board India's first mission to Moon, Chandrayaan- 1. India and the U.S. signed the bilateral Space Situational Agreement in 2022 to build a framework for sharing data and services, for bringing the long-term sustainability of outer space activities and protecting each other's satellites from artificial or natural dangers. India and U.S.A for promoting space collaboration have also established a joint dialogue mechanism named 'Civil Space Joint Working Group. In January 2023 the 8th meeting of India-USA Civil Space Joint Working Group was held in Washington D.C. the occasion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official working visit with President Donald Trump in 2025, India and U.S.A has issued a joint statement highlighting space co-operation along the lines of building a strong Indo-



U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. The leaders commended 2025 as a beginning year for U.S.-India civil space cooperation, with plans for a NASA-ISRO effort through AXIOM to bring the first Indian astronaut to the International Space Station (ISS), and early launch of the joint “NISAR” mission.

Cultural Co-operation between India and U.S

The cultural co-operation between India and U.S can be witnessed through several routes such as people-to-people ties, educational exchanges etc. Various cultural programmers are conducted by the Indian Embassy and Consulates to display various aspects of Indian culture. The artists and technical experts from both the countries get training in each other's institutions. Through pursuing higher education abroad is also contributing to promoting cross-cultural understanding, and building cultural exchange and cooperation between countries. United States of America is considered to be one of the highly favored countries to obtain higher education by the Indian students abroad. As per the Open Doors Report 2023, the total number of international students from India to United States increased by 35 percent which resulted in enrollment of 268,923 students in the year 2022-2023. In July 2024, India and U.S signed the Cultural Property Agreement in New Delhi to limit the illegal trafficking of antiquity. India and USA cultural ties are also strengthened by the Indo-American diaspora, number ranging over 4.5 million in 2025.

Cyber Security Co-operation between India and U.S.A

To prevent cybercrime, India and USA are actively collaborating in the sphere of building cyber security. The framework for the U.S –India cyber relationship was signed at New Delhi on August 30, 2016 which focused on various areas of cooperation such as identifying, sharing, executing cyber security practices, undertaking capacity building programs together for cyber security, making attempts to stop cybercrime etc. The U.S-India partnership have much deepened with the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the United States of America in the year 2023 and 2024, the chief focal point being cyber security. The collaboration between India and U.S.A represented a commitment to solve cyber threats, bring world-wide stability, promote resilient digital ecological systems etc. in



an associated world. On 17th January 2025, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between India and U.S.A to increase co-operation in cybercrime investigations at Washington D.C. The Memorandum of Understanding was based on several commitments and understanding such as the agencies of both the countries to establish cooperation and training with regard to the utilization of cyber threat intelligence, digital forensics in criminal investigation.

To promote bilateral relations between the two countries there has been frequent visit by executive of both the countries. In March 2000, President Bill Clinton visited India with fostered warm relations with the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and also expressed his urge to become stronger partners in the economic field and to find a similar ground in building the world trading system which raises the life of both the rich and the poor. The US Secretary of State Collin Powell on July 2002 made a visit to New Delhi, engaging in discussions on Kashmir, economic collaboration, energy, science and technology etc. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi of India made an Official Working visit in Washington D.C, U.S.A on 13th February 2025.

on India as a rising global power, the then US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice wrote 2006, 'As a rising global power, India can be a pillar of stability in a rapidly changing Asia and a strategic partner for the US as we meet the challenges of 21st century.'

India's relation with U.N has also deepened at the G20 international forum. In one of the initial meetings of the foreign ministers of the G20 held in 2023, both US and India have collaborated to accomplish the twin objectives of making a successful leadership for India and achieving partnership in the spheres of food, economy, energy, women's security etc.

On September 24, 2021, U.S President Joe Biden hosted Prime Minister Modi at the White House, in Washington along with the Prime Ministers of Australia and Japan for the first in person's leaders summit of the quadrilateral security dialogue known as the Quad. In the summit, the leaders agreed to interrelate their strategic aims.

Major irritants in Indo- US Ties



India and USA though share several commonities among them and are bilateral partners in several fields, there also seem to be hurdles causing bitterness in their relationship. A mention of some of the irritants-

1. The relations between India and U.S were strained on account of India's stand with regard to cold war. The Cold war was a global geopolitical ideological fight which occurred between the two superpowers the United States of America , leading the western capitalist block and Soviet Union (USSR) leading socialist block and their respective allies during the period from 1947 to 1991. During the cold war era, India did not support either of the sides and preferred to support the Non- Aligned Movement under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru .The American policy makers criticized the non –alignment policy of India due to India's adoption of Nehruvian Socialism. Nehru's policy of socialism focused on the replacement of profit system by the societal and co-operative ownership. It had the characteristic of bringing progressive industrialization which would help to overcome Indian economic problems . To bring rapid industrialization Nehru supported the socialist model by nationalization of certain key industries and following cooperative approach in agriculture while providing opportunity to the private sector to take part in industry and agriculture. The United States however during the cold war advocated for free market principles and Jawaharlal Nehru's socialist policies which emphasized state control over certain sectors of the economy was seen far away from America's free market approach.
2. A major irritant in Indo- American relations was India's decision not to suspend or put an end to its nuclear programme and its refusal to sign both the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. India had the view that it would terminate its nuclear programme if all the nuclear weapon possessing states in due course of time go for complete disarmament. The United States of America wanted India to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty but India refused to sign it on the ground that it was discriminatory in nature. Moreover India argued that few countries in the neighborhood possess nuclear weapons, so India decided not to give up the nuclear option single-handedly. The United States of America also did not support India's missile programme development. The United States of America was the first country to sign the



Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, on September 24, 1996 a multi-lateral treaty to stop nuclear weapons test exploisions. About 70 countries also signed the treaty, after President of America,Bill Clinton’s signature.India however did not sign the nuclear treaty though President of America expressed the hope that India would do. India was not satisfied with only banning on nuclear test but wanted complete nuclear disarmament. So, pertaining to these issues differences existed between India and US.

3. India’s intimate relations with USSR and signing of the friendship treaty in 1971 with Soviet Union also created irritants in the relationship between India and USA. The Cold war was a global fight between the two superpowers USA and USSR. India during the cold war did not support either of the sides and adhered to the policy of non-alignment. Though India maintained close relationship with both the superpowers,its relationship with the USSR fosteredstrategic collaboration in several spheres of economic assistance, technology and defence. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971 also marked a significant landmark in the building of mutual relations of peace, friendship and co-operation between the two countries. It also led to create a bone of contention between India and USA as it was seen as a shift in the foreign policy of India, a deviation from India’s previous status of non-alignment building an intimate alignment with USSR during cold war era.
4. The relationship between both India and Pakistan arehistorically defined by various military conflicts and territorial disputes. Pakistan’s closeness to U.S.A has been an important factor in Indo-U.S relations. Pakistan was an active member of US led military alliance, such as the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The relations between India and U.S.A deteriorated owing to unhealthy relations persisted between USA President Nixon and Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in the early 1970s. The Nixon administration adopted a different strand towards Indo- Pak hostilities. He built a close relationship with Pakistan and assisting it with military and economic aid. During the Indo-Pak War of 1971, President of USA Richard Nixon sendoff the aircraft carrier enterprise to Bay of Bengal.
5. India’s neutral stand in the early 2022 on Russia’s hostility against Ukraine and abstention on all U.N votes condemning that invasion was met with distress among some members of the US Congress. The USA has restated its stand on India’s position stating that it has been



unsatisfactory but unsurprising owing to historical relationship with Russia. The increase import of Russian oil by India during the Russia-Ukraine war has been a source of tension in Indo-US relations.

6. Trade and Economic tensions also exist between Indo-US relations. At Manirbhar Bharat, India's self-sufficient drive has resulted in protectionist policies, voicing concerns in USA about market access and free trade. Moreover India's trade policies have been criticized by USA highlighting high tariffs on imports such as Harley Davidson motorcycles and may impose high tariffs on Indian exports. U.S President Donald Trump's chief economic adviser Kevin Hassett at the White House in Washington said on February 10, 2025, India has high tariffs which stand as a barrier for imports.

The USA has also criticized data localization norms of India and had drafted e-commerce policy. As per the US Trade Representative's 2019 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers, "India recently promulgated a number of data localization requirements that would serve as significant barriers to digital trade between the US and India. The proposals of India's draft national e-commerce policy like data localization requirements, restrictions on cross-border data flows are discriminatory in nature."

7. Tension also persisted between India and USA relations in April 2021 when India faced a huge increase in Covid-19 infections. The USA had turned to the Defence Production Act of 1950 to prohibit the export of raw materials needed to produce vaccines. This has given rise to an explosion of anti-US sentiment in India, as US had vaccine reserves and denied to share COVID-19 vaccine patents according to Times of India.

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Pathway ahead in India-US Relations

The pathway ahead for India-US relations includes strengthening their global shared association through increased bilateral cooperation across various sectors. Both India and U.S.A share a common vision to be achieved in the nearby future. They have also expressed several commitments and targets to meet through a shared level of collaboration. According to Joint Fact Sheet, of 23 September 2024, USA and India continue to increase wide and global strategic partnership. The USA President Joseph R. Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that the U.S India Comprehensive



Global and Strategic Partnership , the defining partnership of the 21st century is delivering on a large program which serves the global well being. The leaders of both the countries expressed commitment to increase constant engagements to improve cooperation in the spheres of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, clean energy etc. They also promised to trace opportunities to widen innovation and strategic partnerships by looking into new platform in civil, commercial areas. Both of the leaders observed the new U.S –India Drug Policy Framework for the 21st century accompanied with its Memorandum of Understanding which seeks to deepen association to disrupt the unlawful production and international trafficking of synthetic drugs and precursor chemicals and widen a holistic public health collaboration. The Indo-US. Joint Statement made on February 13, 2025 between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi represents several commitments made to fulfill in the route way ahead. Regarding trade , the leaders decided to widen their relationship to increase growth which will bring fairness, national security, drive job opportunities. To achieve this end, the leaders establish a new goal for carrying out bilateral trade known as Mission 500 which have the objective to more than double total bilateral trade 500 billion by 2030. In the field of developing co-operation on technology and innovation, the leaders announced the launch of INDUS Innovation which is set to advance industry and academic collaboration and will promote investment in space, energy and other rising technologies to build India and U.S leadership in innovation and to secure the needs of the 21st century. The leaders also gave commitment to advance opportunities for U.S and Indian companies to build greenfield investments in high-value industries in each other's countries. They also noted the importance of promoting people-to-people ties among the two countries. Acknowledging the significance of academic cooperation internationally in promoting innovation, growth of future ready workforce, the leaders also decided to build collaboration between the higher educational institutions and establishing offshore campuses of premier educational institutions of U.S in India. The leaders of both the countries also undertook pledge to sustain great level of engagement among the governments, industries, academic institutions of their respective countries and recognize their aim for a lasting India-U.S collaboration which advances the hopes of the people to have a bright and prosperous future.



Conclusion:

India and United States of America share a very warm and cordial relations based on shared commitments to boost collaboration across diverse sectors like trade and investment, technology, defence, clean energy, global health, advancing people-to-people ties etc. No doubt irritantsexist in their relationship but efforts are made to address these irritants through high-level meetings, diplomacy, exchange of dialogue etc. In the 21st century their relationship has been transformed into a comprehensive strategic global partnership, fostering engagement across various sectors and to make a way for bringing global peace and security.

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