



India-US Strategic Synergy

This editorial is based on “[Clearing the fog on the state of India-US relations](#)” which was published in The Hindustan Times on 01/07/2025. The article brings into picture the evolving India-U.S. relationship, highlighting a shift towards long-term strategic cooperation in technology, defense, and economic growth.

For Prelims: [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty \(NPT\) norms](#), [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#), [Artemis Accords](#), [Mineral Security Partnership](#), [MQ-9B Reapers](#), [Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies](#), [International North-South Transport Corridor](#).

For Mains: Key Areas of Cooperation Between India and the US, Key Areas of Friction Between India and the US.

[India's relationship with the U.S.](#) is evolving beyond traditional frameworks, with a focus on mutual strategic interests such as technology, defense, and economic growth. **Recent joint statements** and new frameworks for collaboration signal a deepening partnership. However, despite external challenges and fluctuating narratives, India needs to chart a new chapter in its ties with the U.S., **emphasizing sustainable, long-term cooperation across diverse sectors**. The evolving dynamics reflect a shared commitment to addressing global challenges while enhancing bilateral ties. This moment calls for India to redefine its relationship with the U.S. through pragmatic and visionary diplomacy.

How India-US Relations Evolved Over Time?

- **Early Years (1947-1960s)-Cold War Tensions and Diverging Ideologies:** In the early post-independence years, India adopted a **non-alignment** policy under **Jawaharlal Nehru**, which often placed it at odds with the US, particularly during the Cold War.
 - The US, keen on containing the spread of communism, aligned with Pakistan, India's neighbor, which led to strained relations.
- **1970s- Nuclear Tensions and Divergence:** The 1970s marked a significant low in India-US ties, driven largely by India's **nuclear ambitions**.
 - In **1974**, India conducted its first **nuclear test** (Smiling Buddha), which angered the US and led to the imposition of **sanctions** under [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty \(NPT\) norms](#).
 - Furthermore, the US's support of **Pakistan** during the **1971 Indo-Pakistan War** and its involvement in the **Bangladesh Liberation War** created further friction.
- **1980s-Attempts at Repairing Ties:** In the 1980s, despite differences, there were efforts to stabilize relations. **Indira Gandhi's** state visit to the US in **1982** sought to repair ties, focusing on **trade and nuclear cooperation**.
 - However, the [Bhopal Gas Tragedy](#) of **1984** and continued nuclear tensions kept the relationship under stress.

- The **Soviet invasion of Afghanistan** in 1979 was a critical event, where India and the US found common ground in opposing Soviet expansion, although India's closeness to the USSR remained a challenge for the US.
- **1990s- A New Era of Engagement Post-Cold War:** The end of the Cold War and the **collapse of the Soviet Union** in **1991** opened a new chapter in India-US relations.
 - The **economic reforms** initiated by **Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao** transformed India's economy, making it more integrated with the global market, and particularly with the US.
 - The **1991 Gulf War** marked the beginning of US interest in India as a strategic partner in the **Asian** region.
 - Additionally, the **nuclear tests** by India in **1998** (Pokhran II) led to **sanctions** once again, but these were lifted relatively quickly, signaling a shift towards a more pragmatic and cooperative relationship in the coming years.
- **2000s-Strategic Partnership and Civil Nuclear Deal:** The 2000s saw a significant transformation in India-US ties, especially after **President Bill Clinton's** visit to India in **2000**, the first visit by a sitting US president in over two decades.
 - The **2005 US-India Civil Nuclear Deal** was a landmark moment in bilateral relations, marking a strategic pivot.
 - The deal ended a 30-year US embargo on nuclear cooperation with India, recognizing India as a nuclear power and promoting cooperation on **nuclear energy** and **security**.
- **2010s-Strengthening Strategic and Defense Ties:** Under **President Obama**, India-US relations grew stronger, focusing on **defense cooperation**, **counterterrorism**, and **economic partnership**.
 - The **2010 US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement** was followed by **strategic dialogues**, and in **2016**, the US designated India as a **Major Defense Partner**, cementing military cooperation, including **joint military exercises**.
 - India's inclusion in the **Asia-Pacific** strategy, its participation in the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** with the US, Japan, and Australia, and the signing of key **military agreements (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement)** showed a deepening defense and strategic alignment between the two countries.
- **2020s-A Comprehensive Global Partnership:** The 2020s have seen India and the US consolidate their partnership as a key pillar of global security and economic stability.
 - The **Indo-Pacific** strategy, shared concerns over **China's rise**, and **climate change** have propelled cooperation into new areas, such as **cybersecurity**, **clean energy**, and **artificial intelligence**.
 - India also joined the **Artemis Accords** and **Mineral Security Partnership** that further strengthened the ties.

What are the Key Areas of Cooperation Between India and the US?

- **Defense and Strategic Ties:** The US has designated India as a **Major Defense Partner**, marking a significant shift in defense ties. The cooperation is expanding in **intelligence sharing**, **military exercises**, and **defense technology transfers**.
 - For example, the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** signed in 2018, grants India access to advanced communication technologies for **real-time data sharing** during joint operations.
 - In **2024**, both countries signed an agreement for the **MQ-9B Reapers**, enhancing India's surveillance capabilities.
 - India is part of the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)**, conducting joint military exercises like **Malabar** with the US, Australia, and Japan, reflecting their shared security interests in the Indo-Pacific.



- **Technology and Innovation:** The India-US partnership is increasingly defined by collaboration in **emerging technologies** such as artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, and space exploration.
 - The **Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)** launched in 2023, focuses on strengthening these ties, providing India access to cutting-edge technologies while fostering innovation ecosystems in both countries.
 - In **2023**, the US and India committed to **\$825 million** investments in **India's semiconductor industry**, reflecting their shared interest in technological leadership.
- **Economic and Trade Relations:** In 2024-25, the US remained India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year, with **bilateral trade reaching \$131.84 billion**.
 - **FDI inflows** from the US to India totaled **\$4.99 billion** in FY 2023-24, marking the US as India's third-largest source of foreign direct investment.
 - In **2024**, both countries signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** to promote cooperation on **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**, highlighting mutual interest in boosting sectors that support innovation and growth.
- **Climate Change and Clean Energy Cooperation:** The climate change agenda has seen significant alignment between India and the US, particularly under the **Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030** partnership.
 - The **US-India Roadmap** on clean energy, launched in **2024**, aims to build **safe and secure global clean energy supply chains**, with \$1 billion in multilateral financing.
 - In **2023**, the **India-US Renewable Energy Technology Action Platform (RETAP)** fostered collaboration on lab-to-lab cooperation, piloting cutting-edge energy technologies.
- **Counterterrorism and Security Cooperation:** Terrorism remains a significant shared concern, with both India and the US working closely on **intelligence sharing, counterterrorism operations, and joint law enforcement efforts**.
 - The **India-US Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism** has held regular meetings, most recently in **March 2024**, ensuring real-time cooperation on operational matters.
 - Following the **2019 Pulwama attack** in Kashmir, both nations enhanced their counterterrorism cooperation, with the **FBI** actively supporting Indian authorities.
 - In **2023**, both countries expanded **cybersecurity** efforts under their bilateral framework, addressing emerging threats in the digital realm, underlining the growing relevance of **cybersecurity** in modern counterterrorism.
- **Space Exploration and Cooperation:** India and the US have a long history of collaboration in space exploration, with both nations working together on **space science, satellite technology, and human spaceflight missions**.
 - The **civilian space cooperation** between the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** and **NASA** is set to expand, with numerous collaborative ventures underway.

- The **Chandrayaan-1 mission**, launched in **2008**, was a hallmark of India-US collaboration, as it carried instruments developed by NASA.
- The [NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar \(NISAR\) satellite](#), set to launch in **2025**, will jointly advance research in Earth observation, particularly in disaster management and climate science.
- [NASA's Axiom Mission 4](#), featuring **ISRO astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla**, is a hallmark of India-US Space collaboration.

What are the Key Areas of Friction Between India and the US?

- **Trade Imbalances and Market Access:** Trade imbalances between India and the US have been a persistent point of contention.
 - The US has regularly criticized India for its **high tariffs** and **restrictions** on foreign investments in specific sectors, while India is frustrated by **US trade practices** and **protectionism** under recent administrations.
 - For example, **in 2019, the US ended India's preferential trade status under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)**, citing India's refusal to provide "equitable and reasonable access" to its markets.
 - In response, India imposed **retaliatory tariffs** on 28 US products, escalating trade tensions.
- **US-India Divergence on Russia and Defense Purchases:** India's continued defense ties with **Russia** remain a major point of contention between the two nations.
 - Despite growing military cooperation with the US, India continues to purchase **Russian defense equipment**, including **S-400 missiles**, which has led to tensions under **US sanctions (CAATSA - Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act)**.
 - Despite these frictions, India continues to prioritize its defense needs, which has prompted India to maintain a **diversified defense procurement strategy**.
- **Data Privacy and Digital Trade Concerns:** The US has expressed concerns about **India's data privacy laws**, particularly regarding the [Personal Data Protection Act, 2023](#).
 - The act's provisions on data localization and its potential impact on US tech giants like **Google, Facebook, and Amazon** have created friction.
 - India's push for **data sovereignty** challenges the operational flexibility of US-based tech firms, while the US government raises concerns about the potential **overreach** of India's proposed laws.
 - This regulatory divergence risks **disrupting cross-border digital trade** and raises questions about the future of **US-India tech collaboration**.
- **Intellectual Property Rights and Patent Disputes:** Intellectual Property (IP) rights have been a recurring issue in India-US relations.
 - The US has frequently criticized India's **patent laws** for not sufficiently protecting **pharmaceutical patents**, which it claims affects the profitability of US-based pharma companies.
 - India's **generic drug industry**, which produces affordable medications for developing countries, is often at **odds with the US pharmaceutical sector's demand for stronger IP protection**.
 - In **2023**, India was named in the **US Trade Representative's (USTR) Special 301 Report** as a country of concern regarding **IP enforcement**.
 - India's stance on **patent-free drugs**, including those for **HIV/AIDS**, is seen as essential for public health, but it places India at odds with the US pharmaceutical industry, which claims that patent rules need strengthening.
- **China-US Rivalry and India's Neutrality:** While the US and India share concerns about **China's rising influence** in the Indo-Pacific and the global stage, India's approach to the [US-China rivalry](#) is more cautious.
 - India prefers to maintain **strategic autonomy**, avoiding any overt alignment that could make it part of a **US-China conflict**.
 - This careful balancing act often leads to **friction when the US pushes India to take stronger positions against China**, especially in multilateral forums.
 - In **2021**, the **Quad Summit** was more focused on **cooperative regional security** than directly countering China, reflecting India's preference for engagement with China, despite its growing security ties with the US.

- As the **US-China trade war** escalates, India finds itself caught between **maintaining strategic ties with the US** and its **economic relations with China**, a situation that complicates its foreign policy.
- **H1-B Visa and Immigration Disputes:** One of the most significant sources of tension in India-US relations is the issue of **H-1B visas**, which are crucial for Indian IT professionals seeking employment in the US.
 - The US has frequently imposed stricter regulations and caps on these visas, which disproportionately affect Indian workers.
 - India has expressed concern over these limitations, as they impact **economic opportunities** for highly skilled professionals and disrupt the growth of **India's IT services exports** to the US.
 - In **2017**, President Trump's administration introduced the **"Buy American, Hire American"** initiative, which directly impacted Indian tech companies that rely on H-1B visa holders.
 - The reduction in the availability of these visas could also impact India's IT export industry, which is heavily reliant on American clients
- **US Sanctions and India's Relationship with Iran:** India's strategic interests in the **Middle East** often lead to tensions with the US, particularly concerning its relationship with **Iran**.
 - Despite the US's **sanctions** against Iran, India has maintained **energy ties** with Tehran, particularly for its oil imports, and has been part of the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** that links India to Iran.
 - The US views this as undermining its **sanctions** on Iran, which creates a diplomatic rift between the two countries.
 - In **2018**, following the US's withdrawal from the **Iran Nuclear Deal**, India continued to engage with Iran, particularly on **energy imports** and the **Chabahar port project**, which is seen as a strategic corridor for trade.

What Measures can India Adopt to Enhance Ties with the US?

- **Strengthen Strategic Autonomy while Aligning on Global Challenges:** India can continue to assert its **strategic autonomy** while deepening cooperation with the US on global issues such as **counterterrorism, climate change, and technology**.
 - By focusing on areas of **shared interests** and global challenges, India can **increase its influence in shaping multilateral solutions**, ensuring that its sovereignty is respected while reinforcing the collaborative nature of the relationship.
 - This approach will allow India to **engage constructively** with the US without being perceived as overly dependent, thus ensuring long-term **co-development** and a balanced partnership.
- **Enhance Technology and Innovation Collaboration:** India should take proactive steps to **deepen technology partnerships** with the US by investing in **co-development** initiatives in sectors such as **artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and semiconductors**.
 - Both countries can jointly explore **cutting-edge technologies** with a focus on making these innovations globally scalable, especially in emerging markets.
- **Comprehensive Economic Engagement through Multilateral Initiatives:** India can further expand its economic partnership with the US by engaging more actively in **multilateral trade frameworks** like the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)**, where both nations have significant interests.
 - Strengthening ties through **supply chain integration** and **cross-border investments** will help create **interdependence** and ensure greater market access for both.
 - By focusing on creating **global economic initiatives** that involve both the US and India in key sectors like **green energy, sustainable infrastructure, and smart manufacturing**, both countries can drive joint prosperity.
- **Commit to Shared Defense Capabilities and Security Innovation:** To enhance defense relations, India should actively pursue **co-production** and **co-development** of defense technologies with the US, building on existing frameworks.
 - By focusing on areas like **advanced surveillance systems, cybersecurity, and autonomous defense technologies**, India can not only strengthen its own defense capabilities but also contribute to **global security innovation**.

- This joint commitment to security will lead to greater **military interoperability**, fostering mutual reliance and a stronger strategic foundation.
- **Human-Centric Diplomacy for Cultural and Academic Collaboration:** India can enhance people-to-people ties with the US by investing in **educational exchanges, research collaboration, and cultural diplomacy**.
 - Programs like the **Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship** can be expanded to create a continuous exchange of **knowledge and innovation** across academic institutions.
 - By focusing on **collaborative academic ventures**, particularly in areas like **climate science, public health, and quantum computing**, India and the US can build a foundation of **mutual respect and shared knowledge**, leading to **co-development** in critical sectors for future generations.
- **Advocate for a Transparent and Inclusive Global Governance Framework:** India can take a more active role in advocating for **reform of global governance institutions** like the United Nations Security Council, where it has long sought a permanent seat.
 - By working alongside the US and other democratic nations, India can promote an inclusive, **rules-based international order**, ensuring that the needs of **emerging economies** are incorporated into global decision-making processes.
- **Pursue Climate Justice through Collaborative Clean Energy Projects:** India can position itself as a **leader in sustainable development** by scaling up **collaborative clean energy projects** with the US, particularly in **renewable energy and carbon capture technologies**.
 - Joint initiatives, particularly in the **solar energy** sector, can help both nations meet their climate goals while addressing the urgent global need for **climate justice**.
 - By leading in the development of **affordable green technologies**, India and the US can create **market-driven solutions** for a **carbon-neutral future**, aligning their interests in environmental leadership.
- **Refine and Expand Cybersecurity and Digital Cooperation:** As digital security threats continue to rise, India and the US must prioritize **cybersecurity cooperation**, including **data protection, AI-driven defense systems, and counter-cyber terrorism** measures.
 - India can propose the establishment of **permanent joint cybersecurity task forces** to foster innovation in **secure digital infrastructure**, benefiting both countries' economic growth.
 - This **co-dependence** in **cybersecurity** will provide shared benefits, allowing both nations to stay ahead in the **global digital arms race** while reinforcing trust in the technological domain.
- **Promote Comprehensive Health Diplomacy:** India should leverage its growing **biopharmaceutical** capabilities to strengthen its health diplomacy with the US, particularly in areas like **global health security and pandemic preparedness**.
 - By engaging in joint **public health initiatives and research on emerging diseases**, both countries can build a **robust health partnership** that benefits the global community.
 - This collaboration will foster mutual **interdependence**, ensuring both nations are better equipped to handle future global health crises, making the partnership more resilient and forward-looking.

Conclusion

India-US relations have evolved from **historical tensions to a robust strategic partnership**, defined by mutual cooperation in defense, trade, technology, and global governance. As **S. Jaishankar aptly put it, "The India-US relationship has steadily strengthened across successive American presidencies,"** emphasizing their growing interdependence. With a shared commitment to global peace and prosperity, the partnership is poised for even greater collaboration in the future.

Drishti Mains Question:

The India-US relationship has evolved significantly over the decades, transitioning from Cold War-era tensions to a multifaceted strategic partnership. Discuss the key factors that have contributed to this transformation and analyze the current areas of cooperation and friction.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. 'What introduces friction into the ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find for India a position in its global strategy, which would satisfy India's National self-esteem and ambitions'. Explain with suitable examples. (2019)

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