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<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the curriculum. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The 2022 National Security Strategy labels China as America's pacing challenge and India is in a unique position to affect that competition. Despite a rocky history, India and the U.S. have grown much closer in recent years, most notably with Quad memberships. However, India is not Japan or Australia regarding capabilities or, more importantly, interests. While India will likely continue its non-aligned policies, it has the potential to greatly aid U.S. efforts, though differently than other regional partners. Short of armed conflict, India will soon become the world's most populous country and has a massive economy to back it which gives India the potential to further shift the balance of power in Asia. The U.S. should help India grow and prosper to compete with China by giving another general economic option, including defense industry, and security partner. India's non-aligned position could open diplomatic opportunities to reach politically unsavory nations and its value of international organizations ensure reasonable alignment of national interests. If the U.S. can foster its revived Indian relations, it will compound China's security dilemma and increase its risk associated with further aggressive actions in the region.					
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## **Leveraging U.S.-Indian Ties to Compete with China**

## Leveraging U.S.-Indian Ties to Compete with China

The 2022 United States National Security Strategy (NSS) labels the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the U.S.'s pacing challenge.<sup>1</sup> "The PRC is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it."<sup>2</sup> President Biden identifies alliances and partnerships as the U.S.'s "most important strategic asset...contributing to international peace and stability" in this era of competition with the PRC and other authoritarian regimes. In the Indo-Pacific region, the NSS references the Quad as one of, if not the most, important partnerships. But of the four Quad members (the U.S., Australia, Japan, and India), one stands out as potentially the most influential but complicated – India.

The U.S. has not enjoyed the close, mutually supportive relationship with India that it has with Japan and Australia. Decades of disagreement over India's nuclear status stymied relations and pushed it toward the USSR for its defense needs while retaining a non-aligned status. India has ebbed and flowed on siding with the U.S. on foreign policy issues, generally taking the side that most benefits India and has international consensus. Many of the Indo-U.S. rifts occurred because of a mismatch of primary enemies. India fought multiple border wars with Pakistan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ultimately leading both to develop nuclear weapons. The U.S. partnered with Pakistan to curb Soviet influence in the Middle East during the Cold War and for access in the War on Terror. However, in the last decade, the PRC has emerged as a common threat and the U.S. pull-out from Afghanistan dramatically reduced its requirement to deal with Pakistan. Both countries are now poised to cooperate at historic levels. Certainly, a union between the world's largest democracies, 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> largest economies, and 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> most powerful militaries in the

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> NSS, p. 23.

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Indo-Pacific would dominate the region and easily counter the Chinese challenge.<sup>3,4</sup> Still, a full alliance is improbable to ever occur between the U.S. and India despite shared interests.

The U.S. can leverage ties with India to better compete with China by fostering India's own growth and development. India's non-alignment stance makes it unlikely ever to form a mutual defense pact, but a robust Indian Armed Forces still confound Beijing's security picture, even if it's not bound to employ with the U.S. When military interests do align, India's strategic geographic position and large armed forces can significantly bolster U.S. influence. India is ripe for a high-tech industrial boom and could prove a dependable alternative to Chinese trade. Finally, India's non-aligned posture gives it diplomatic connections to countries the U.S. shuns, opening up a potential to work out issues short of violence. The U.S.-Indian relationship could be the most influential of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but expectations must be limited and crafted with Indian interests in mind to work.

### **History of U.S.-Indian Relations**

Understanding the complicated history of the U.S.-Indian relationship is vital to move forward in partnership with India. Since gaining independence at the start of the Cold War, India maintained a relationship with the U.S., but its depth and cohesion varied. As far back as the Korean War, India played a major role in the UN Armistice Council and helped end hostilities.<sup>5</sup> After the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the U.S. "...transferred conventional weapons to India [and] discussed covering India under its nuclear umbrella..."<sup>6</sup> The Sino-Indian border dispute

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<sup>3</sup> The CIA, "World Factbook – India," accessed on 6 January 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/india/>

<sup>4</sup> The Lowy Institute, "Asia Power Index, 2021 Edition," accessed on 6 January 2023, <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/countries/india/>

<sup>5</sup> Amit Gupta, *The U.S.-India Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Gupta, "*The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?*", p. 2.

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continues today, mistrust climaxing with the bloody Galwan Valley incident in June 2020.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. has a track record of providing India with food for famine relief and agricultural assistance. The natural attraction of two large democracies started to bud during the Cold War's ideological struggle.

However, India actively was not aligned with the West. India also collected military aid from the USSR after the Sino-Indian War and maintains that military hardware relationship to this day because Russia was willing to sell the equipment India needed.<sup>8</sup> This relationship likely influenced India to avoid condemning a brutal USSR intervention into Hungary in 1956, while it did denounce Israel, France, and the U.K. for their invasion of Suez that same year.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. and India continued to communicate throughout the Cold War but struggled to progress the relationship.

Longstanding border disputes with Pakistan, a top national security priority for India, put the largest strain on the U.S.-Indian relationship. U.S. attempts to resolve the border dispute tended to grow mistrust in New Dehli.<sup>10</sup> Following another Indian border war with Bangladesh, India began its nuclear program which proved to be a massive wedge between India and the U.S.<sup>11</sup> During the Soviet-Afghan War, the U.S. gave weapons and aid to Pakistan at the remonstrance of India.<sup>12</sup> Desperate to remain competitive with its regional challenges, these issues further pushed independent India towards the USSR.

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Bloomfield, *The India-China bilateral relationship: a 'serious and enduring rivalry'*, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 17:1, 5-23, DOI:10.1080/19480881.2021.1878580, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Gupta, *"The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?"*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Gupta, *"The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?"*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Gupta, *"The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?"*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Gupta, *"The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?"*, p. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Gupta, *"The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?"*, p. 3.

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As the Cold War came to an end, U.S.-India relations improved. The U.S. lifted restrictions on some dual-use (space/nuclear) items. While still not acknowledging India as a nuclear state, the dual-use trade significantly softened the U.S.'s previous position of only discussing Indian nuclear technology in the context of the Nonproliferation Treaty.<sup>13</sup> The conclusion of U.S. operations in Afghanistan also allowed a deepening of U.S.-Indian relations. No longer needing to placate Pakistan for line of communication (LOC) access, the U.S. shifted towards India for regional development. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) have also picked up between the two countries from the 1990s onward. India now operates U.S. CH-53, MH-60R, and AH-64 helicopters, C-130J and C-17 transport aircraft, and is the first non-treaty partner able to purchase significant unmanned aerial vehicle technology, the SeaGuardian.<sup>14</sup> Economic ties have deepened with India receiving preferred trade status with the U.S., Quad membership, regular 2+2 dialogue, and recent information security and technology protection agreements.<sup>15</sup> Russia is still a significant trade partner with India but the U.S. is quickly climbing in influence.

### **Indian Interests**

India sets the standard for a rational actor regarding self-interest. Throughout India's history, it acted to promote its own interests over those of any other nation. This rational perspective tempers the realism of grand alliances. As former Indian foreign minister Natwar Singh stated, "The people of India will not allow this country to be a camp follower of any

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<sup>13</sup> Gupta, *"The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?"*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, "U.S. Security Cooperation with India," 20 January 2021, U.S. Dept of State, accessed 30 November 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/>

<sup>15</sup> Richard M. Rossow, "A More Balanced U.S.-India Strategic Partnership," CSIS, 20 December 2019.

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country, howsoever powerful.”<sup>16</sup> This independent mindset explains many of India’s international and domestic policy decisions - non-alignment for the betterment of India.

India staunchly believes in a multi-polar world. In addition to its Quad membership, India is also in BRICS, which would appear largely at odds with the Quad.<sup>17</sup> India continues to maintain or strengthen its economic ties with China, often during periods of tension. Economic ties with China have been a way to defuse border tension but are largely one-sided – India importing Chinese goods. As India continues to develop its economy, the one-way trade relationship with China is becoming less enticing.<sup>18</sup> India does continue to remain close to Russia through trade and diplomacy, though diplomacy is often by lack of rebuke rather than support. These relationships show India’s willingness to deal with anyone as long as it benefits India.

While embracing many different powers may seem paradoxical for a rising power, India’s high value of international organizations rationalizes it. India has supported UN resolutions from its beginnings during the Korean War through more recent peacekeeping operations in Africa.<sup>19</sup> India has long sought to combat regional terrorism and backed the coalition supporting the Northern Alliance in its overthrow of the Taliban, then buoyed the Karzai government.<sup>20</sup> As an UNCLOS signatory, India promotes international maritime law and freedom of navigation, aligning with American interests.<sup>21</sup> As a rising power, legitimacy in the

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<sup>16</sup> “Bad Domestic Policy can never Produce Good Diplomacy” *Frontline*, Vol. 19, Issue 16, August 3-16, 2002. Quoted in Gupta, “*The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?*”, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, “Quad and BRICS Want to Grow as U.S.-China Rift Deepens,” *China-US Focus*, 11 June 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Bloomfield, “The India-China bilateral Relationship: a ‘serious and enduring rivalry,’ p. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Gupta, “*The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?*”, p. 32-33.

<sup>20</sup> Gupta, “*The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?*”, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> Jeff Smith, “UNCLOS: China, India, and the United States Navigate an Unsettled Regime,” *Global Politics*, 30 April 2021, The Heritage Foundation, accessed 26 January 2023, <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/unclos-china-india-and-the-united-states-navigate-unsettled-regime>

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international community is a staple of growth, as employed by India. India uses its ties to international organizations to leverage support in common interests and bolster its position and legitimacy with connections to other world powers.

India's beliefs in a multi-polar world and international organizations stem from its desire to increase its power and influence over a liberal outlook. India's pursuit of power has most recently come at odds with its international influence with its increased purchase of Russian oil post Ukraine invasion. As of January 2023, Russia is now India's main oil supplier, but India's Foreign Minister, Mr. Jaishankar, is quick to remind the world that Europe is still buying more Russian energy than India: "So if a \$60,000-per-capita society feels it needs to look after itself, and I accept that as legitimate, they should not expect a \$2,000-per-capita society to take a hit."<sup>22</sup> While India has not formally denounced Russia's invasion as many of those European oil buyers have, it points directly to India's need to "...sustain its 7% annual growth and lift millions out of poverty."<sup>23</sup> India will continue to make policies that promote itself while carefully balancing its international image and standing.

### **Future Areas For U.S.-Indian Development**

If the U.S. can accommodate Indian interests, there are many opportunities to advance the partnership. One area is promoting India's standing by supporting its bid for a permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat. President Biden already backs India's position, but achieving it will still be challenging.<sup>24</sup> Of the current UNSC permanent seats, China is the only member not supporting India's bid.<sup>25</sup> It will likely be difficult for India to overcome China's

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<sup>22</sup> Roger Cohen, "Russia's War Could Make It India's World," *The New York Times*, 31 December 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, "Russia's War Could Make It India's World."

<sup>24</sup> "India has Strongest Change of Getting Permanent Seat at UNSC if New Members Added: Survey," *The Times of India*, 10 January 2023

<sup>25</sup> "India has Strongest Chance of Getting Permanent Seat at the UNSC if New Members Added: Survey."

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veto if it appears aligned with the U.S. To combat this, India's UNSC campaign should precede some other new U.S.-Indian ties to help preserve India's non-aligned position. A permanent Indian UNSC seat will not give the U.S. a close UN ally like the UK, but it will strengthen India's regional power which indirectly helps the U.S. Throughout the last seventy years, the U.S. preferred the UN to condone its endeavors but also acted without UN approval. U.S. independence of UN resolutions makes any Indian UNSC veto low-risk compared to the status quo but may help negotiate the Russian votes.

India's economy is one of the fastest growing in the world and the U.S. should aid that growth and see benefit from it. According to the Centre for Economic and Business Research, India is on track to surpass Germany as the world's fourth-largest economy by 2026 and has already passed the UK into fifth place.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the World Bank reports that India's large domestic market may make its economy more resilient than comparable countries.<sup>27</sup> For the U.S., this is promising and challenging. Investment in India's domestically consumable markets would likely never give any export return due to the needs of its populace which would only indirectly benefit the U.S. by strengthening India. However, further U.S. investments into India's booming technology sector could quickly benefit both countries. India has many universities and engineering colleges that provide low-cost, quality education.<sup>28</sup> A U.S. effort to link its higher education system could make India a hotbed for technological advancement. "India's technology sector brought in over \$200 billion in revenue [in FY2022], and it is

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<sup>26</sup> "World Economic League Table 2023," 26 December 2022, CEBR, accessed 22 January 2023, <https://cebr.com/reports/world-economic-league-table-2023/>

<sup>27</sup> "India Better Positioned to Navigate Global Headwinds Than Other Major Emerging Economies: New World Bank Report" 5 December 2022, The World Bank, accessed 22 January 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/12/05/india-better-positioned-to-navigate-global-headwinds-than-other-major-emerging-economies-new-world-bank-report.print>

<sup>28</sup> Gupta, "The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?", p. 40

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expected to net an estimated \$350 billion... by 2026.”<sup>29</sup> India’s massive workforce could create an industrial base to turn research and development into fielded products. These efforts could directly compete with China’s technological exports, giving a twofold benefit of strengthening India and weakening China. Additionally, India has already signed multiple technology and cyberspace security agreements bilaterally with the U.S. and through the Quad.<sup>30</sup> Those agreements provide more intellectual security over the Chinese alternative. Bilateral trade agreements can ensure the Indian technology industry benefits the U.S. and beyond.

Finally, both the U.S. and Indian militaries can benefit from further partnership development. Taking advantage of India’s growing industry and tech-skilled labor, the U.S. should continue to help India build a modern defense industrial base. Regulation framework is already in place to give India access to many advanced U.S. defense technologies. As a Strategic Trade Authorization tier 1 country, India can “...receive license-free access to a wide range of military and dual-use technologies...” from the U.S.<sup>31</sup> Both the Communications, Compatibility, and Security Agreement and the Industrial Security Agreement further remove barriers to Indian procurement and production.<sup>32</sup> While previous FMS procurements made a significant dent in India’s military modernization efforts, leveraging these recent defense security agreements to broaden U.S. defense contractor production efforts in India will help align India’s military to the U.S. long-term. India welcomes these efforts as they strengthen its ‘Make in India’ campaign.<sup>33</sup> One such program is Lockheed Martin’s joint venture with Tata for the F-21 advanced, fourth-

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<sup>29</sup> Lisa Curtis, Jacob Stokes, Joshua Fitt, Andrew Adams, “Operationalizing the Quad,” *Indo-Pacific Security*, June 2022, CNAS, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Richard M. Rossow, “A More Balanced U.S.-India Strategic Partnership,” CSIS, 20 December 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, “U.S. Security Cooperation with India.”

<sup>32</sup> Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, “U.S. Security Cooperation with India.”

<sup>33</sup> Yasmin Tadjdeh, *U.S. Defense Companies Eye Partnerships in India*, *National Defense*, June 2016, Vol. 100, No. 751, National Defense Industrial Association, p. 34-36.

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generation fighter. If approved, F-21 would give India a domestic, domain-aware fighter interoperable with modern U.S. fighters and containing many equipment similarities to the F-16.<sup>34</sup> F-21 would provide India a considerable capability improvement and additional logistics support for the USAF in the Indo-Pacific region. Both governments should work together to implement the F-21 and similar joint ventures which promote interoperability, capability increases, and defense supply opportunities.

In addition to modernizing the Indian military, the U.S.-India military relationship can compete with China better by improving integration through exercises. Combined exercises have increased in recent years and the decision to hold the bilateral Tiger Triumph exercise annually attests to both nations' buy-in. Indian participation in the Rim of the Pacific and Malabar exercises add more like-minded partner nations.<sup>35</sup> These exercises must continue and progress to a more advanced integration and in-depth scenarios.

The Indian and U.S. militaries can also work together more operationally to show an interest and ability to gain sea control in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy previously aided the U.S. in the region by escorting U.S. warships across the Indian Ocean during the War on Terror.<sup>36</sup> This affirms India's position as king of the sea bearing its name and willingness to work with the U.S. Navy in its backyard. China is beginning to challenge India's position with its port investments in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Kenya, Djibouti, and Tanzania.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "F-21. For India. From India," Lockheed-Martin, accessed 22 January 2023, <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/products/f-21.html>

<sup>35</sup> Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, "U.S. Security Cooperation with India."

<sup>36</sup> Gupta, "*The U.S.-Indian Relationship: Strategic Partnership or Complementary Interests?*", p. 30-31.

<sup>37</sup> David Brewster, *Silk Roads and Strings of Pearls: The Strategic Geography of china's New Pathways in the Indian Ocean*, *Geopolitics*, 22:2, p. 276-277.

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Combined maneuvers will help reinforce India's increasingly challenged position and allowing India to take the lead in the Indian Ocean improves their image of strength in the region.

Despite the vastness of the Indian Ocean, narrow chokepoints largely contribute to its access and control. India is making strides to build its fleet numerically and in capability to ensure influence at those corners of the Indian Ocean. Logistics agreements give India access to the U.S. port at Diego Garcia and the French port at Reunion Island, granting the Indian Fleet reprieve on the western front.<sup>38</sup> On the eastern front, India's own facilities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) need attention. Possibly more important than new ships, the ANI lie strategically at the western entrance to the Strait of Malacca and off the coast of Myanmar, where the PRC has a 'gateway' port to overland LOCs.<sup>39</sup> Sea control in the vicinity of the ANI can cut off nearly all logistics to China from the west by denying all trade routes except its inefficient and dangerous China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.<sup>40</sup> However, India lacks the funding and expertise to fully realize its ANI tri-service theater command.<sup>41</sup> This is a perfect place for the U.S. to step in for assistance. A combined base could be created and possibly even become the headquarters of the rumored resurrection of the U.S. Navy's 1<sup>st</sup> Fleet.

### **U.S. Operational and Strategic Gains from its Indian Partnership**

As previously stated, any U.S. gain garnered from India must have a corresponding benefit for India. However, now that both countries have a common competitor in the PRC, U.S. strategic and operational payoffs courtesy of India are viable. The first of which comes from India's non-aligned stance. Indian diplomacy with U.S. foes, such as Iran and Russia, opens up a

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<sup>38</sup> Aman Thakker, "A Rising India in the Indian Ocean Needs a Strong Navy," *New Perspectives in Foreign Policy*, Issue 16, 17 October 2018, CSIS, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> Brewster, *Silk Road and Strings of Pearls*, p. 277.

<sup>40</sup> Brewster, *Silk Road and Strings of Pearls*, p. 283-285.

<sup>41</sup> Thakker, "A Rising India in the Indian Ocean Needs a Strong Navy," p. 39

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backdoor for communication without the U.S. or its foe losing face. Indian diplomacy could effectively defuse regional tensions and allow the U.S. to remain focused on its PRC pacing challenge. Similarly, though trickier, the U.S. can mediate with Pakistan to help avoid conflict on India's western border. Given the longstanding ties the U.S. and India have with countries the other lacks, both would see diplomatic gains without domestic concession.

Economically, India and the U.S. would benefit by offsetting Chinese industry in their domestic markets. At the very least, the growth of Indian industry gives the world another option, which includes industrial practice safeguards reducing the risk of unfair practices. Tech hubs in Japan and Taiwan are at risk if tensions with the PRC devolve into war, but striking Indian industry would be hugely escalatory since India is not a treaty ally with any of the protagonists. Also, supply chains from India are very difficult to disrupt due to its sea LOCs (SLOCs) west, away from potential conflict in the South China Sea. The same SLOC, while longer, can also benefit Quad partner Australia.

Militarily, India can relieve burdens for the U.S. in its INDOPACOM theater. While India's not likely to come to Taiwan's aid directly, existing agreements can give the U.S. additional nearby logistics options, namely ANI air and sea ports. If India does join a U.S. war effort against China, its potential to open a second front would have massive effects. A land battle on the Line of Control could divert the PRC's attention and force it to shift enormous amounts of combat power.<sup>42</sup> Indian Navy sea control efforts in the Indian Ocean would allow the U.S. to focus more on the South China Sea. Even short of war, closer India-U.S. military ties will likely force Beijing to redirect some funding away from its anti-access, area denial (A2/AD)

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<sup>42</sup> Evan Braden Montgomery, *Competitive Strategies against Continental Powers: The Geopolitics of Sino-Indian-American Relations*, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2013, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 77.

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weapons and amphibious fleet to the People Liberation Army (PLA) defense preparation against the sizeable Indian standing army.<sup>43</sup>

### **Risks of Closer U.S.-Indian Ties**

Despite the benefits, there are also risks in the U.S. deepening its relationship with India beyond existing transactional engagements. One of the main obstacles hindering a closer U.S.-Indian relationship is ties with Russia. India's procurement of Russian S-400 advanced, mobile surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems prove highly problematic. The long history of Russian supply to the Indian Armed Forces and the S-400's capabilities make it logical and rational to incorporate into India's layered A2/AD network, which includes U.S.-made Patriots and THAAD SAMs. However, the U.S. is highly concerned about the S-400 feeding intelligence data to Russia. Acquisition of S-400 will prohibit India from getting U.S. fifth-generation aerospace technology like the F-35, strain overall intelligence-sharing opportunities, and could even trigger U.S. sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).<sup>44</sup> India's quest to modernize by any means available comes directly at odds with its U.S. defense partnership.

India touts itself as the world's largest democracy, however, it is sliding toward autocracy. India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's recent actions, such as the Citizen Amendment Act, show a trend away from inclusion as it discriminates against Muslims.<sup>45</sup> Modi's Hindu-first policies align more with Xi's actions towards the Uyghurs than U.S. religious

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<sup>43</sup>Montgomery, *Competitive Strategies against Continental Powers*, p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> Shaza Arif, *India's Acquisition of the S-400 Air Defense System: Implications and Options for Pakistan*, Air University Press, *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 25 August 2021

<sup>45</sup> Rossow, *A More Balanced U.S.-India Strategic Partnership*.

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freedom. American support for a government known for human rights issues will damage its international and domestic image.

Finally, despite its broad diplomacy, India's regional policy makes it a problematic military partner. India's recurring border skirmishes with Pakistan could drag the U.S. into regional turmoil it would otherwise prefer to avoid. Similar border issues with China could escalate regional tensions more than past clashes due to improved Indian equipment and U.S. support. At the same time, India is unlikely to step in directly to defend Taiwan against a PRC invasion.<sup>46</sup> India is prime to entrap the U.S. into a regional war it strives to prevent and not return the favor to aid the U.S. due to similar concerns.

Despite the risks, India is still an essential strategic partner. Russian defense equipment will prevent the acquisition of the most exquisite U.S. technology, but the U.S. will still see a strategic gain from India improving its defense. In addition to U.S. SAM systems, India-Israel co-developed SAMs are also in place in India already.<sup>47</sup> SAMs could be a future opportunity for India to work with American and Israeli companies to develop an Indian SAM to replace S-400. The U.S. has a long history of working with less-than-ideal governments. Even with unequal Hindu-promoting policies, India remains a diverse democracy where the ruling party still loses regional elections.<sup>48</sup> Muslim immigration restrictions are similar to post-9/11 U.S. policies considering India's troubles with terror attacks originating from Kashmir.<sup>49</sup> While India is not afraid to defend what it believes to be its territory, it also carefully avoids escalation. The 2021

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<sup>46</sup> Jabin T. Jacob, *A Potential Conflict over Taiwan: A View from India*, *The Washington Quarterly*, 2022, 45:3, p.148.

<sup>47</sup> Arif, *India's Acquisition of the S-400 Air Defense System: Implications and Options for Pakistan*

<sup>48</sup> Gareth Price, "Democracy in India" Asia-Pacific Programme, 7 April 2022, The Chatham House, accessed 27 January 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/04/democracy-india>

<sup>49</sup> Bloomfield, "The India-China bilateral Relationship: a 'serious and enduring rivalry,' p. 14-15.

## **Leveraging U.S.-Indian Ties to Compete with China**

non-lethal brush with the PLA attests to this.<sup>50</sup> If instead, the U.S. is the partner involved in combat in the Pacific, direct Indian military support would aid U.S. efforts in the region. However, logistics support and base access still give great benefits. Additionally, India's independent position may actually deter Chinese aggression toward Taiwan because it limits the feeling of encirclement by a treaty alliance and the U.S.'s slim ability to restrain unilateral Indian-initiated border aggression forces China to keep some attention south.

### **Conclusion**

The Indian-U.S. partnership strategically benefits both countries and gives both an edge in competing with China. While an alliance between the two is unrealistic and may be mutually undesirable, there are still gains in the partnership. India's growing economy can benefit from U.S. development and the U.S. needs a way to offset Chinese economic dependency. The geographic position of India makes it an ideal location for the U.S. to expand its influence in the South Pacific. India's military modernizations help align it with U.S. standards and capacity, as well as provide a customer for U.S. defense exports. The U.S. will never have the relationship with India that it has with the Five Eyes partners or Japan, but to compete with China, India has significant potential upside.

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<sup>50</sup> Jessie Yeung, "Indian and Chinese troops fight with sticks and bricks in video," *CNN*, 15 December 2022, accessed 27 January 2023, Warner Bros. Discovery Co.