

India and the United States: The Contours of an Asian Partnership

Walter C. Ladwig III and Anit Mukherjee

Asia Policy, Volume 14, No 1 (January 2019)

WALTER C. LADWIG III is an Associate Professor of International Relations in the Department of War Studies at King's College London. He is the author of *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counterinsurgency* (2017). He can be reached at <walter.ladwig@kcl.ac.uk>.

ANIT MUKHERJEE is an Assistant Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. He can be reached at <isamukherjee@ntu.edu.sg>.

NOTE: The authors would like to thank the participants at the January 2018 workshop "A Global Partnership or A Relationship Oversold? Taking Stock of the India-US Strategic Relationship," organized by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies where the papers in this special issue were discussed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This essay explains the rationale and assumptions underlying this special issue. In doing so it examines the concepts of strategic partnerships, foreign policy cooperation and describes the history of Indo-U.S. cooperation in Asia addressed in the individual articles.

Main Argument

This special issue of *Asia Policy* scrutinizes the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership by examining the prospects for bilateral cooperation in Asia. Although peacetime foreign policy collaboration between major powers is a rarity, China's rapid rise in the international system appears to have forced the United States and India into unprecedentedly close consultation on regional security issues. Will this consultation mature into active cooperation? To answer this question, this introductory essay first examines the concept of strategic partnerships—a nebulous type of political relationship that have proliferated since the end of the Cold War. It then highlights the obstacles to peacetime cooperation between major powers in other regions of the world. Following this, attention turns to the articles in this special issue which examine the history of Indo-U.S. cooperation in various sub-regions of Asia. Collectively, these pieces challenge misperceptions and misunderstandings of each country's policies and past behavior, as well as identify the differing understandings of both the bilateral relationship and the region held by each party. Taken together, these articles provide a clearer sense of the geopolitical scope and depth, as well as the important limitations, of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. The article concludes by identifying the key insights that come from this collection and offers some thoughts the overall trajectory of U.S.-India relations.

Policy Implications

- Bilateral Indo-U.S. cooperation in Asia is often hindered by an “absent dialogue” between the two sides, highlighting the need for constant communication between officials in both countries.
- Despite an apparent congruence of interests between the two sides, sustaining and developing the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership will require considerable attention and imagination in both countries.
- India and the United States urgently need to focus on infrastructure development and connectivity enhancement in Asia.

One of the key geopolitical developments of the past two decades has been the transformation of the Indo-U.S. relationship from estrangement to strategic partnership. The most commonly held explanation for this development is the changing alignment of interests between the two countries.¹ Indeed, ahead of a visit with U.S. president Donald Trump in June 2017, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi declared that he was “confident in the growing convergence between our two nations.”² The idea that India and the United States are moving closer together has been repeated in a number of official statements and echoed by foreign policy analysts.³ Yet, skeptics suggest there are glaring differences between the two sides and that when it comes to foreign policy preferences, India is no closer to the United States than are Russia or China.⁴ This divergence of views raises a number of questions about the state of the Indo-U.S. relationship. When it comes to geopolitical developments in Asia, is there a junction of interests between India and the United

¹ Teresita C. Schaffer, “Security Ties,” in “India-U.S. Relations in Transition,” ed. Dhruva Jaishankar, Brookings India, June 2016, 11.

² Narendra Modi, “For the U.S. and India, a Convergence of Interests and Values,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 2017.

³ “The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century,” U.S.-India Joint Statement, June 8, 2016, <https://www.narendramodi.in/india-us-joint-statement-during-the-visit-of-prime-minister-to-usa-the-united-states-and-india-enduring-global-partners-in-the-21st-century--484150>; Jeff Smith, “Assessing U.S.-India Relations: The Strategic Handshake,” *Diplomat*, September 26, 2016; “U.S., India Have Increasing Convergence of Interests: Pentagon,” *Times of India*, Economic Times web log, August 10, 2017; Gurpreet S. Khurana, “Optimising India–U.S. Maritime-Strategic Convergence,” *Strategic Analysis* 41, no. 5 (2017): 433–446; and C. Raja Mohan, “Modi’s American Engagement: Discarding the Defensive Mindset,” Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, Working Paper no. 203, April 8, 2015.

⁴ Hamza Shad, “Can America and India Really Be Strategic Partners?” *National Interest*, August 29, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/can-america-and-india-really-be-strategic-partners-29967>.

States? In which regions and with which set of countries do the policy priorities of the two states converge and where do differences remain? To what extent can differences be bridged and commonalities enhanced? Where convergences of interest exist, what do they mean for their policies? Are there indications that the two countries are actively working together? Finally, how is the bilateral partnership between the United States and India perceived by other regional states? This special issue of *Asia Policy* examines the ability of India and the United States to cooperate and manage their differences in a variety of regions in the Indo-Pacific.

To set the stage for this discussion, this introductory essay begins by exploring the concept of strategic partnerships and assesses the prospects of such partners to cooperate in a third country or region. As we shall argue, peacetime foreign policy cooperation between major powers is a rarity. At the same time, however, China's rapid rise in the international system has forced the United States and India to consult more closely in an unprecedented manner. Next, the essay introduces the articles in this special issue which focus on the history of Indo-U.S. collaboration and the prospects for future cooperation in different subregions of Asia. By examining Indian and American policies toward third countries—some friends, some not—they challenge misperceptions and misunderstandings of each country's policies and past behavior as well as identify the differing understandings of both the bilateral relationship and the region held by each party. Taken together, these articles provide a clearer sense of the geopolitical scope and depth, as well as the important limitations, of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. This introductory essay then

concludes by offering some thoughts on the key insights from this collection and the overall trajectory of U.S.-India relations.

Strategic Partnerships in the 21st Century

It is an exaggeration to say that alliances have become passé in the post–Cold War world, but among the major powers “strategic partnerships” now appear to be the preferred means of forming important bilateral relationships in the 21st-century.⁵ Terming a relationship a strategic partnership generally indicates a desire for a more significant level of bilateral engagement than would occur through regular diplomatic interaction.⁶ The prospect of realizing mutually beneficial economic opportunities or reacting to shared security challenges—in a manner that may not be possible alone—is frequently the objective of enhancing the relationship.⁷ Since the focus is on maximizing shared gains in specific areas, strategic partnerships can exist between states whose interests are largely aligned, as well as between those whose relations are characterized by a mix of cooperation and competition.⁸ Countries forming strategic partnerships are not clearly antagonists, but they do not necessarily have

⁵ As Rohan Mukherjee has noted, since 1991 new alliances “have typically featured either minor powers allying with each other or major power allying with one or more minor powers.” Rohan Mukherjee, “Japan’s Strategic Outreach to India and the Prospects of a Japan–India Alliance,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2018): 836.

⁶ Vidya Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia: Balancing without Alliances* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 48.

⁷ Thomas S. Wilkins, “Russo–Chinese Strategic Partnership: A New Form of Security Cooperation?” *Contemporary Security Policy* 29, no. 2 (2008): 363.

⁸ Sean Kay, “What Is a Strategic Partnership?” *Problems of Post-Communism* 47, no. 3 (2000): 15.

to be close friends. Consequently, their interests may overlap and diverge depending on the issue at hand.⁹ As Francois Godement notes, the use of the term “strategic” to describe a partnership refers more to “the absence of divisive issues than to a joint strategy in the traditional sense.”¹⁰

Glenn Snyder defines alliances as “formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership.”¹¹ Scholars who study strategic partnerships differentiate them from alliances on several grounds. First, strategic partnerships are seen to focus on the achievement of specific objectives that are “positive” goals, rather than a “negative” focus on deterring or opposing a hostile state. Whereas alliances are often—though not always—targeted against a specific threat, strategic partnerships do not necessarily identify a particular enemy.¹² Arguably, one of the main reasons these types of relationships have proliferated since the end of the Cold War is the fact that a lack of clarity as to the source of the next major security challenge makes more flexible partnerships preferable to formal commitments.¹³ At the same time, the ambiguity surrounding strategic partnerships may also avoid provoking a

⁹ Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia*, 48–49.

¹⁰ Francois Godement, “Neither Hegemon Nor Soft Power: China’s Rise at the Gate of the West,” in *Facing China’s Rise: Guidelines for an EU Strategy*, ed. Marcin Zaborowski (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2006), 63.

¹¹ Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4.

¹² Thomas S. Wilkins, “Japan’s Alliance Diversification: A Comparative Analysis of the Indian and Australian Strategic Partnerships,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11, no. 1 (2011): 123.

¹³ Mukherjee, “Japan’s Strategic Outreach to India,” 837.

countervailing response from countries that feel implicitly targeted by the relationship in the way that a military alliance might. Unlike alliances, which have formal commitments and can require binding responses by parties to specific events, strategic partnerships involve a much lower level of commitment. Whereas the cost of entry into an alliance is the loss of a degree of autonomy and freedom of action, the informality of strategic partnerships places far less constraint on states' independence.¹⁴ In a similar vein, the lack of concrete commitments to the other party makes the entry and exit costs of partnerships much lower than formal alliances. Thus, a strategic partnership is far less than an alliance and the existence of a strategic partnership does not necessarily indicate an intent to form an alliance in the future.¹⁵

As a result of the nebulousness of strategic partnerships, they tend to be open-ended relationships. As long as the collaboration facilitates the achievement of both individual objectives and shared goals for the states involved, they could persist indefinitely. Consequently, as Thomas Wilkins argues, the durability of strategic partnerships is a product of the degree of alignment between the values and interests of the two partners.¹⁶

In terms of diplomatic practice, two countries forging a strategic partnership seek to establish regular summits between their political and military leaderships,

¹⁴ James D. Morrow, "Alliances: Why Write Them Down?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, no. 1 (2000): 65.

¹⁵ Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia*, 49.

¹⁶ Wilkins, "Japan's Alliance Diversification," 126.

tone down conflicts in favor of cooperation on issues of mutual interest, and generally work to encourage a long-standing economic and political relationship.¹⁷ In other words, the two sides seek to advance their shared interests in specific areas while enabling future cooperation by establishing procedures to cope with disagreements when differing interests come to the fore.¹⁸ Thus, process is often a key focus of bureaucratic efforts between partner states, leading Colleen Chidley to describe strategic partnerships as being “formed in pursuit of cooperation, for the purpose of cooperation.”¹⁹ Repeated interactions between pairs of states can increase trust and diminish uncertainty, which in turn reduces the cost of future bilateral cooperation.

Interstate cooperation can be conceived of in two general ways. The more expansive way of understanding cooperation—particularly between major powers—is the mutual acceptance of outcomes, rules, and constraints that result from repeated interactions between pairs of states.²⁰ Though real, the achievement of such tacit cooperation is not necessarily the explicit aim of either side. Indeed, such forms of cooperation often result, in Edward Kolodziej’s phraseology, from the “grudging crystallization of compromises” that occurs when each state realizes that they cannot

¹⁷ Avery Goldstein, “An Emerging China’s Emerging Grand Strategy: A Neo-Bismarckian Turn?” in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, ed. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 75.

¹⁸ H.D.P. Envall and Ian Hall, “Asian Strategic Partnerships: New Practices and Regional Security Governance,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): 91.

¹⁹ Colleen Chidley, “Towards a Framework of Alignment in International Relations,” *Politikon* 41, no. 1 (2014): 154.

²⁰ Edward A. Kolodziej, “The Cold War as Cooperation,” in *Cold War as Cooperation: Superpower Cooperation in Regional Conflict Management*, ed. Roger E. Kanet and Edward A. Kolodziej (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 6.

dictate terms to the other or achieve their entire range of objectives in a given situation.²¹ Much of the “cooperation” that occurred between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, for example, was of this type. A second, narrower conception of cooperation and the one adopted in this series of articles, focuses on the similarity between the two states in terms of both objectives and strategies to achieve them. This latter type of cooperation is far less common in international politics, at least when it comes to relations between great powers.²²

The existence of common interests between pairs of states is rarely enough on its own to engender cooperation. Commitment problems, lack of information about true intentions, and the incentives states have to misrepresent themselves, are just a few of the obstacles to mutually beneficial cooperation.²³ Even if states could transcend these complications, cooperation may still be rebuffed because the parties are unhappy with the way the benefits of collaboration are distributed.²⁴ Although the two sides may gain in absolute terms from bilateral cooperation, the fact that one of the two gains relatively more may be enough to scupper any deal entirely.²⁵ The question as to whether states are more concerned with absolute or relative gains, and

²¹ Kolodziej, “The Cold War as Cooperation,” 7.

²² Kolodziej, “The Cold War as Cooperation,” 5.

²³ James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379–414.

²⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 105.

²⁵ Joseph M. Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 487.

the likelihood of cooperation that this implied, was a key component of the classic paradigmatic debate between neorealists and neoliberals in international relations.²⁶ The two sides reached a point of convergence in the recognition that when security concerns dominate international politics, states will be more attuned to relative gains, rendering cooperation more difficult, but in a more benign environment, a focus on absolute gains, and thus international cooperation, is possible.

The expectation that states find it easier to cooperate in the economic sphere than the security domain is borne out by experience.²⁷ Even the most successful wartime military alliance of the twentieth century, that of the Allied powers against Nazi Germany and imperial Japan, was riven by differences over both aims and the strategies to achieve them. As the eventually unfolding of the Cold War demonstrated, theirs was not a cooperation underpinned by shared values and objectives. Even in the face of a powerful military threat, it was difficult to transcend interstate differences and sustain cooperation.²⁸

Cooperation between major powers becomes still more difficult when the domain of action is not on one's border but abroad in a third region. During the Cold War, the United States was able to get some of its allies—notably Australia, New Zealand,

²⁶ For an overview of this debate, see Robert O. Keohane, ed. *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); and David A. Baldwin, ed. *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

²⁷ Charles Lipson, "International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs," *World Politics* 37, no. 1 (1984): 1–23.

²⁸ William Hardy McNeill, *America, Britain, and Russia: Their Co-operation and Conflict, 1941–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).

Thailand, and South Korea—to contribute to the war in Vietnam but other traditional partners such as the United Kingdom and Canada resisted involvement. After 1991, cooperative military interventions become more commonplace as the United States led, or contributed to, operations in Iraq, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. These operations involved participation—real or symbolic—from a number of different countries and organizations, including NATO. Yet the challenges of reconciling differing priorities and preferences that affected the Grand Alliance, remain. To take but one example, in the 1999 Kosovo War, leading European NATO countries and the United States had markedly different positions on the escalation of airstrikes against Serbia, targeting of dual-use infrastructure, and potential deployment of ground forces.²⁹ The disputes among allies grew so contentious that at one point the Italian foreign minister warned his country might leave NATO.³⁰

Why would extraregional powers cooperate in a different part of the world? There are three main motives for this type of cooperation. First, they could jointly resist a third, nonresident, great power that they feel threatens the region. This might be seen in the various British and U.S. efforts to establish regional defense pacts in the Middle East during the Cold War to deter perceived Soviet aggression.³¹ A second motivation could be to work against a hostile regime in the region that

²⁹ David P. Auerswald, “Explaining Wars of Choice: An Integrated Decision Model of NATO Policy in Kosovo,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2004): 648–53.

³⁰ Auerswald, “Explaining Wars of Choice,” 653.

³¹ Nigel John Ashton, “The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955–1958,” *Review of International Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993): 123–37.

threatened stability or the local balance of power. The U.S.-led multilateral coalition that came together in 1990 to counter Iraq's annexation of Kuwait would be emblematic of this type of purpose. A third motive for cooperative engagement could be to contain a regional crisis that has the potential to escalate. U.S. and British diplomatic efforts, among others, for example, are credited with helping prevent the outbreak of armed conflict between India and Pakistan in the wake of the 2001 terror attacks on the Indian parliament.³²

If wartime cooperation is challenging, peacetime cooperation among major powers in third countries is a rarity. This is because, in the absence of war, differing national interests are more likely to dominate decision-making. Thus, episodes that appear superficially to be cooperative, such as U.S. and British efforts to establish a defensive perimeter in the Middle East during the 1950s, contain significant elements of rivalry under the surface.³³ If it is difficult enough for two allies to cooperate in this manner, the difficulty only increases when the countries are not even in a formal alliance relationship.

The looser ties that characterize strategic partnerships make collaboration complicated as the roles of "leader" and "follower" are not clearly defined in the relationship. Moreover, because the strength of the ties between the states are so ambiguous, it is rarely apparent how countries in a strategic partnership will behave

³² P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 164.

³³ Ayesha Jalal, "Towards the Baghdad Pact: South Asia and Middle East Defence in the Cold War, 1947–1955," *International History Review* 11, no. 3 (1989): 409–33.

when faced with common threats and challenges. Despite their increasing ubiquity, academic discussion of strategic partnerships and foreign policy remains limited. Under what conditions do strategic partners sharing similar interests cooperate? What forms does this cooperation take, and if it does not occur, why not? What are the sources of change either facilitating or hindering such cooperation? The articles in this special issue examine these questions in the context of the U.S.-India strategic partnership and assess distinct aspects of U.S.-India relations in various subregions of Asia as well as their bilateral defense relationship.

The United States and India: Difficult Partners

Despite being two large democracies—or perhaps because of it—the United States and India have not traditionally had an easy relationship. During the Cold War, they were divided in their approach to both regional and global developments.³⁴ At times these differences were magnified by each side’s sense of being an exceptional, exemplary state in the international system.³⁵ Consequently, mistrust and antipathy often obscured the shared values and interests that did exist.³⁶ Since

³⁴ For recent works on Indo-U.S. relations, see Ashley J. Tellis, “U.S.–India Relations: The Struggle for an Enduring Partnership,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Srinath Raghavan, *The Most Dangerous Place: A History of the United States in South Asia* (Gurgaon: Penguin Press, 2018).

³⁵ Anit Mukherjee and Manohar Thyagaraj, “Competing Exceptionalisms: U.S.-India Defense Relationship,” *Journal of Defense Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 12–28.

³⁶ S. Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, “The Transformation of U.S.-India Relations: An Explanation for the Rapprochement and Prospects for the Future,” *Asian Survey* 47, no. 4 (2007): 643.

the early 1990s, however, the two countries have found greater freedom to maneuver in the international system and successive governments in both states have worked to forge a robust partnership.³⁷ This transformation has become evident over the last fifteen years as a once tense bilateral relationship metamorphosed into a strategic partnership, complete with close defense ties, frequent joint military exercises, and a civil-nuclear deal that accommodated India into the global nuclear nonproliferation regime. The benefits to both countries from this development are significant. India obtained access to technology and economic assistance to facilitate its rise, while the United States gained the friendship of an emerging democratic partner.³⁸ Although diplomats in both countries may deny it, the U.S.-India bilateral relationship has also taken on greater urgency because of the rise of China.

China's emergence as an economic and military power has brought about systemic and regional challenges. At the systemic level, China's economic growth over the last decade has placed it as the closest peer competitor to the United States in the world.³⁹ A number of Chinese schemes, including island-building in the disputed South China Sea, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, are perceived in some quarters as challenges to the U.S.-led global order.

³⁷ C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Viking, 2003), 83–115; and Dinshaw Mistry, *Aligning Unevenly: India and the United States*, Policy Studies 74 (Honolulu: East West Center, 2016).

³⁸ Dhruva Jaishankar, "Looking Back: Highs, Lows, and Steady Progress," in Jaishankar, "India-U.S. Relations in Transition," 11.

³⁹ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival* 60, no. 3 (2018): 7–64.

At a regional level, the rise of China has created new dynamics in different subregions of Asia including Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia. The dominant power or powers in each of these regions are dealing with China's rise based on their own bilateral relations with China, the United States, and other key states in the region. India, the leading power in South Asia, has responded with a combination of accommodation and balancing. Like other countries acknowledging China's growing economic interests and capabilities, India has tried to accommodate some aspects of Beijing's expanding foreign policy remit and sought to keep bilateral relations on an even keel. For example, New Delhi has begrudgingly accepted that China will have interests in India's immediate neighborhood.⁴⁰ India also clearly sought to reduce bilateral tensions in the wake of the 2017 Doklam standoff on the China-India border via a private meeting between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Wuhan.

In terms of balancing, India has attempted to undertake extensive military modernization and infrastructure development along the border. Indicative of this, the Indian armed forces are increasingly focused on the threat posed by China, and have adjusted their military strategy accordingly.⁴¹ The most important element of external balancing undertaken by India has been the transformation of its

⁴⁰Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "India's Perspective towards China in Their Shared South Asian Neighbourhood: Cooperation versus Competition," *Contemporary Politics* 24, no. 1 (2018): 98–112; and "How India and China Are Vying for Influence in South Asia," *Times of India*, May 31, 2018, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/63395543.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

⁴¹ Yogesh Joshi and Anit Mukherjee, "From Denial to Punishment: The Security Dilemma and Changes in India's Military Strategy towards China," *Asian Security* 15, no. 1 (2019).

relationship and wide-ranging engagement with the United States.⁴² This transformation has been neither easy nor assured. Although attitudes toward the United States are mostly positive across the Indian population as a whole, anti-Americanism still retains some currency among opposition parties and foreign policy elites.⁴³ In many respects, this reflects a generation who came of age during the estrangement of the Cold War and have failed to update their ideological outlook.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, such actors have the concrete ability to retard cooperation such that a simple logistics agreement of the type that the United States has with more than a hundred countries took over ten years to negotiate with India. Even then, in ratifying such an accord, opposition parties and foreign affairs commentators in India accused Prime Minister Modi of surrendering the country's strategic autonomy.⁴⁵ Closer ties with the United States, especially on the terms that Americans are used to, does not fit well with India's traditional preference for strategic autonomy. This desire for an independent foreign policy explains the preponderance of strategic partnerships in India's foreign policy discourse but its abhorrence of alliances.⁴⁶ Not all of New Delhi's

⁴² Dhruva Jaishankar, "India and the United States in the Trump Era: Re-Evaluating Bilateral and Global Relations," Brookings, Policy Paper, no. 37, June 2017.

⁴³ Arzan Tarapore, "India's Slow Emergence as a Regional Security Actor," *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2017): 172.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Sumit Ganguly, "Has Modi Truly Changed India's Foreign Policy?" *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 2 (June 2017), p.138; and Tarapore, "India's Slow Emergence as a Regional Security Actor," p. 172.

⁴⁶ Rajesh Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals," *International Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 1 (2017), pp. 7–26.

strategic partnerships are equal, however, and undoubtedly, the partnership with Washington is the most consequential for India.

Outline of Articles

Constantino Xavier's article examines U.S.-India engagement in India's immediate neighborhood with a focus on their historical and contemporary interactions mainly in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. As is discussed in more detail in the article, U.S.-India relations vis-à-vis Pakistan were deliberately not addressed as the topic dominates extant literature on Indo-U.S. ties, often at the expense of the smaller nations of South Asia examined here. Xavier argues that with China's gradual emergence as a South Asian actor, India is increasingly willing to join forces with outside powers to pursue shared objectives in a region typically seen as New Delhi's exclusive sphere of influence. This opens a window of opportunity for greater U.S.-India convergence in South Asia, a pivotal region in their joint strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific. While in the past New Delhi's and Washington's policies toward the region's third countries have often coexisted, they are now more willing to join efforts to coordinate and cooperate across South Asia and the Bay of Bengal region. With reference to case studies of Indo-U.S. interactions in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar ranging from the 1950s to the 2000s, Xavier's article dispels assumptions about constant conflict and instead identifies a range of constructive engagements between U.S. and Indian officials. Based on these patterns, the author argues that these past dynamics can pave the way for a more sustained and closer Indo-U.S.

engagement, and offers concrete recommendations on how to deepen communication, coordination, and cooperation between the two partners in and around the subcontinent.

Walter Ladwig and Anit Mukherjee's article examines U.S. and Indian policies toward Southeast Asia, a region characterized by a congruence of interests between Washington and New Delhi. They argue that there have been extensive diplomatic consultations leading to a significant convergence in policy statements; however, substantive collaboration between the United States and India in Southeast Asia is constrained by several factors: India's requirement to prioritize foreign policy challenges in South Asia, a fear of provoking China, an institutional mismatch in the foreign and security policy bureaucracies of the two countries, and the possibility of an adverse reaction from countries in the region. Consequently, while offering recommendations for enhancing cooperation, the authors argue that, for the time being, Washington and New Delhi will probably work in parallel rather than actively coordinate these regional efforts.

Sinderpal Singh's article examines the perceptions of India and the United States regarding the Indo-Pacific region and assesses the extent of their strategic convergence and co-operation. He argues that overly optimistic assessments of the Indo-Pacific as an area of cooperation between Washington and New Delhi neglects several significant divergences between the two states. Fundamentally, India and the United States have differing geographical conceptions of the "Indo-Pacific," which has important implications for broader strategic convergence. Moreover, bilateral

coordination of military and diplomatic policies in the region in response to China's rise is likely to be constrained by different positions on a number of key issues.

Sumitha Narayan Kutty's article focuses on a contemporary challenge that has been a cause of much anxiety in both capitals: Iran. Based on field research and interviews, she dispels the myth that policy differences over Iran are a major impediment to the bilateral relationship. Instead, both India and the United States are accommodative of each other's strategic interests and take the long view when dealing with their differences to avoid major disruptions in ties. They do so through direct, private negotiations at the highest levels of leadership, and downplay their disagreements in public. As a regional power with global aspirations, India is willing to adapt and absorb certain costs, such as the U.S. sanctions against Iranian oil imports in 2012 and in 2018, in return for U.S. accommodation of its own priorities like completion of the Chabahar port project.⁴⁷ As India and the United States expand their consultations on the Middle East, the article recommends leveraging differences and identifying complementary strengths that would prove useful to counter China's growing economic and security presence in this region.

Finally, Cara Abercrombie's article focuses squarely on the future of the U.S.-India partnership and draws on the author's personal experience managing the India portfolio at various levels for the U.S. Department of Defense over the past decade.

⁴⁷ The United States granted an exemption to India from sanctions for the development of Chabahar Port. Yashwant Raj, "US Exempts India from Sanctions at Chabahar Port in Iran," *Hindustan Times*, November 7, 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/us-exempts-india-from-sanctions-at-chabahar-port-in-iran/story-KsoiFfwuvjw18mB9Q2wjgJ.html>.

The article argues that although the defense and security dimension of the strategic partnership has demonstrated significant growth and progress in recent years, it lacks the elements of a mature partnership that are critical to enabling the type of cooperation envisioned. The two countries have not developed the “habits of cooperation” that the United States typically enjoys with its closest partners. This is not entirely surprising because India’s security partnership with the United States presents a departure from its traditional security partnerships. New Delhi is still learning how to cooperate deeply with a foreign counterpart across a broad security agenda. In turn, the United States is also learning how to adapt its established patterns of bilateral cooperation to a model that is acceptable to India. With additional effort, Abercrombie argues that the United States and India can habituate regular cooperation and realize the full potential of their partnership.

Conclusion: The Future of U.S.-India Relations

What are some of the key insights from this special issue? First, as many of the papers point out, despite a seeming congruence of interests between the two sides, sustaining and developing U.S.-India relations will require considerable attention and imagination in both countries. For some, the strengthening defense relationship between the two sides—epitomized by the recent signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement—are indicative of a stable and secure strategic partnership. As our authors point out, however, sustaining this relationship requires high-level political

and diplomatic attention. Indeed, at the time of this writing, diplomats in both countries are engaged in damage control arising from India's \$5 billion agreement to purchase the S-400 air defense system from Russia, which may lead to sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act. This follows on earlier disagreements over Iran policy and contentions over trade liberalization and U.S. visas for high-skilled Indian workers that, at times, have overshadowed the positive developments in the relationship. Knowing that there are a range of issues on which New Delhi and Washington do not necessarily see eye to eye, sustained political attention and imagination is essential to ensure that the U.S. and India do not drift apart by accident.⁴⁸

Second, as a number of authors argue, India and the United States urgently need to focus on infrastructure development and connectivity enhancement in Asia. The issue is important not just for countries in India's immediate neighborhood but also for India's engagement with Southeast Asia and with Iran, as well as further into Afghanistan and Central Asia. To a significant extent, China's inroads into different subregions of Asia has been facilitated by its promise to improve infrastructure under the controversial Belt and Road Initiative. To address Asia's growing demand for infrastructure, India, the United States, Japan, and even the

⁴⁸ For a cautionary reading of U.S.-India relations, see Ashley J. Tellis, "How Can U.S.-India Relations Survive the S-400 Deal?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 29, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/08/29/how-can-u.s.-india-relations-survive-s-400-deal-pub-77131>; and Tanvi Madan, "Between a Cold War Ally and an Indo-Pacific Partner: India's U.S.-Russia Balancing Act," *War on the Rocks*, October 16, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/between-a-cold-war-ally-and-an-indo-pacific-partner-indias-u-s-russia-balancing-act/>.

European Union have all unveiled their respective versions of a “connectivity strategy,” however, much more remains to be done.⁴⁹ Washington and New Delhi need to engage in a serious discussion of their connectivity plans and strategies, which, at some stage, may also include like-minded parties such as Japan, Australia and the European Union.

Finally, this special issue highlights the need for constant communication between officials in both countries. India and the United States increasingly share a similar set of objectives in Asia. When disagreements occur, they are more often about means rather than ends. Nevertheless, as Xavier cogently points out in his article, bilateral cooperation “is hindered by an absent dialogue.”⁵⁰ The initial 2+2 meeting, held in New Delhi in September 2018, was a positive step, however, more engagement is necessary across different bureaucracies. For instance, if the United States and India were to more closely consult about developments in the South Asian neighborhood, in Southeast Asia, on the Indian Ocean littoral or the Middle East to help mitigate differences in regional policy, it will require direct conversations between the desk officers in the State and Defense Departments of both countries—by no means an easy task. Such consultations can, of course, also be expanded to include like-minded partners sharing similar regional interests. Creating a web of

⁴⁹ To its credit, the Trump administration has set aside funds for an “Indo-Pacific Economic Vision.” See Michael R. Pompeo, “Remarks on “America’s Indo-Pacific Economic Vision,” U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Indo-Pacific Business Forum, July 30, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/07/284722.htm>.

⁵⁰ Cite the typeset page from the Xavier article.

relationships and dialogue mechanisms is necessary to build trust—the cornerstone of any relationship, strategic or otherwise.

Notwithstanding the obstacles identified in these various articles, the overall geopolitical trend lines are clear: the United States and India are coming together and slowly and erratically learning to cooperate with each other. Despite the uncertainty surrounding President Trump’s foreign policy, there are encouraging signs that his administration is willing to work with India—even on areas of disagreement such as Iran and Russia.⁵¹ The articles in this special issue identify both the potential and the limits of an Asian, if not global, partnership between the United States and India. As all the authors readily acknowledge, there are considerable challenges to the partnership but there is also great potential. We hope that this collection illuminates different aspects of this complex yet promising relationship.

⁵¹ Seema Sirohi, “Strategy, Please, in Strategic Meet,” *Times of India*, Economic Times web log, August 22, 2018, <https://blogs.economictimes.indiatimes.com/letterfromwashington/strategy-please-in-strategic-meet/>.