



Implications of Biden's administration on the India-US relations

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Abstract

This paper seeks to look at the prospects for improvement in Indo-US ties under the Joe Biden Administration. It also attempts to examine the implications of Biden's Administration on the India-US Relations. President Joe Biden has yet to establish a definitive policy toward India, and it is too early to make predictions about India-US relations in the next four years. However, a few of his statements during his presidential campaign and since taking office provide a glimpse into the general outlines and contours of a policy that can be expected. Think tanks, analysts, and industry experts are optimistic about potential strategic and economic actions to be taken by Biden's administration. This paper also analyses the bilateral relations on various issues such as containment of China, Defence, Economic, Climate Change and Immigration.

Keywords: Biden's administration, India-US relations, defence, strategic

Introduction

Since the US Presidential election, there is a debate among members of the academic and strategic community on the new US administration's policies and their impact on relations with India. The bilateral relationship between India and the United States has evolved into a strategic partnership over the years. The relationship has greatly expanded to include cooperation in areas such as defence, commerce, nuclear energy, science and technology, which include space, the climate, and health. In 2020, the relationship was elevated to a comprehensive global strategic partnership.

When Joe Biden took office on January 20, 2021, the most pressing question was whether the liberal Democrats would continue the policy devised by the Republican neoconservatives in the Trump administration. While the change of guard may imply a less contentious US approach to trade relations, it does not imply a significant shift in US strategic priorities or willingness to compromise on long-standing points of contention between the two countries. Early indications suggest that close strategic relations between India and the United States will be continued under President Joe Biden.

In the past, the Republicans have been more inclined towards India than the Democrats, and have offered a more India-friendly policy in the South Asian region. However, in recent years, India and US relation have generally remained steady regardless of which party is in power. While personality of the leaders matters, relationships are between states and not between heads of state as demonstrated by US President Donald Trump's administration. In international relations, however, personalities should be taken into account because those in power shape foreign policy through their perceptions and attitudes. Despite several challenges, the India-US relationship has been consistent since the 1990s, with each succeeding US President building on the legacy of his predecessor.

Implications of Biden's Administration

President Biden's earlier policies towards India have remained largely positive. As a senator in 2008, he voted to approve the US-India civil nuclear deal, widely regarded as a watershed moment in the relationship. He was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the time, and he was the driving force behind the ratification of the agreement. He has called the relationship between the United States and India as the "defining relationship" of the twenty-first century. He has also expressed his support for the Indian-American community, which has long been seen as a bridge between the two countries.

During the early days of Biden administration, the administration has signalled that it will focus on two key areas of US-India cooperation: the promotion of a "free and open Indo Pacific," as well as the strengthening of ties with two other close US maritime partners in the region, Australia and Japan, as part of the "Quad" arrangement. These issues were discussed during a phone conversation between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Indian counterpart, Dr. S. Jaishankar.

On India's Independence Day in August 2020, a special message stated that a Biden Administration would also work with India to promote an Indo-Pacific region based on regulations in which no country, including China, would be able to threaten its neighbours with impunity. Biden has long believed that India and the United States are natural partners. Biden believes that South Asia, whether cross-border or not, cannot tolerate terrorism.

According to a policy paper released by the Biden Campaign, Biden will deliver on his long-held belief that India and the United States are natural partners. It states that the Biden administration will prioritise strengthening the US-India relationship. He went on to say that no common global challenge could be solved unless India and the United States worked together as responsible partners. Both countries will work together to strengthen India's defence and anti-terrorism capabilities, improve health-care systems and pandemic response capabilities, and expand cooperation

in areas such as higher education, space exploration, and humanitarian aid.

India-US relations are one of the few policy areas where both parties agree, particularly when it comes to defence cooperation. We must remember that the United States designated India as a “major defence partner” in December 2016. Biden was the Vice-President of the Obama administration at the time, and he wielded significant power over foreign policy. Because of this designation, India has had unrestricted access to dual-use American technologies since then. Biden will expand on the number of formalised arms sales and defence agreements signed by the Trump administration.

President Biden has always been regarded as an India friend, and his views on China allow for the development of a bilateral security relationship in the coming years. During the campaign, he referred to India as a “natural partner”. Following the election in November, during a phone call, Modi and Biden both reaffirmed their commitment to the strategic partnership between the US and India, as well as discussed common priorities such as the Indo-Pacific region’s commitment to cooperation. However, as previously stated, President Biden as a strong sense of values, which includes Human rights, and his decisions to re-join the Climate Change Accords suggests that the other pillars of bilateral relations will not be neglected. Over the years, a solid foundation has been laid in Indo-US relations, which are marked by multifaceted dimensions such as political, economic, strategic, nuclear, and diplomatic facets. Climate change, trade, and visa-related issues are likely to see more cooperation under President Biden’s administration.

Containment of China

The Indo-US strategic partnership has advanced significantly, and it is based on changing geopolitical dynamics, with China’s rise appearing to be a major factor. The Biden Administration would almost certainly be working on a strategy for dealing with China. The relationship between the two countries has deteriorated over the last four years. China aggressiveness has increased, posing a significant challenge to the United States. The Biden Administration has yet to establish a clear policy toward Beijing. The Covid-19 pandemic which causes havoc, has provided opportunities for the United States and India to strengthen their relationship. Because of geopolitical imperatives, India will rise to the top of the US priority list.

President Biden will not take a stance that is incompatible with the growing friendship between India and the United States. India and the United States have worked closely on a number of issues affecting global peace and stability. India is being viewed as a responsible and rising power. Bilateral strategic engagement between the United States and India has grown in importance in the new world order.

During Trump’s presidency, the United States and India appeared to be getting closer. The two countries strengthened their ties by signing a number of agreements and cooperation frameworks. Following the standoff between China and India in Ladakh, such a projection of stronger ties became even more important. Given the current rate of growth in Indo-US relations, significant changes are unlikely under Biden’s administration. Because of changing geopolitical dynamics, China will undoubtedly be at the

forefront of the United States’ foreign policy agenda. China has been identified as America’s primary threat in the US national security strategy, defence strategy, and military strategy. China’s aggressive behaviour in space and in the South China Sea, as well as its “wolf warrior” diplomacy and military aggression on the India-China border, has raised concerns about the peace and stability of the evolving global order. In the broader global scenario, and particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, it may be assumed that the United States will need to work closer with India as Asia’s fulcrum in counterbalancing Chinese power, which directly affects America’s international role and helps to establish a balance of power. Together, India and the United States will have to assume responsibility and leadership in global affairs. The rest of the world, in general, and the United States in particular, are becoming more aware of India’s growing importance in almost all domains, whether maritime or outer space. Furthermore, the United States requires a friendly country that is interested in sharing burdens and countering China’s growing aggression - a role that India can easily fill because it is not dependent on other countries.

All of this points to a bright future for India. Because China is seen as a common enemy, Indo-US security relations are likely to improve, and India’s position as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific and the Quad appears to be unaffected, especially now that Pakistan has consented to provide China with naval base facilities in Sind, in addition to the existing one in Baluchistan. In fact, President Biden emphasised in a virtual event that strategic partnership with India is crucial to US national security.

Defence Cooperation

There is no denying the fact that cooperation in the defence sector has become the main pillar of the India-US strategic partnership. Evolving threat perceptions from an aggressive China in the Indo-Pacific region have accentuated the imperative for greater synergy in the defence partnership, which stands on a strong footing as the Biden Administration sets out to take the baton of the India-US relationship.

There has been a discernible broad curve of positive continuity in India-US defence cooperation. Convergence in both the global and regional security environments has resulted in India being designated as a major US defence partner, with growing cooperation in capability enhancement and capacity building. The US Pacific Command was renamed the Indo-Pacific Command to reflect India’s growing role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region. This has centred on maritime cooperation between India and the United States, which can be seen in increased defence sales and purchases as well as increased maritime information sharing in order to raise awareness of India’s maritime domain. The Indian Navy, in collaboration with the US Central Command’s naval arm (NAVCENT), has demonstrated a stronger sense of common purpose and action to maintain peace and security in the Indian Ocean.

Much progress has been made in India-US defence cooperation in a relatively short period of time; however, much more needs to be done to create all-around synergy between the two military forces as well as the respective defence industrial bases in the two countries. The changing dynamics of the global and regional security environments

would necessitate India and the US revisiting standard operating procedures and innovating new areas of defence cooperation on a regular basis in order to build a strong joint deterrent capability across the Indo-Pacific region.

President Biden is expected to maintain his foreign policy stance while expanding defense relations. India has also reached a point in its development where it can negotiate with the US from a position of strength. Through joint ventures and co-production, the United States will play a critical role in assisting India in realising its Make in India dream. In the new environment, India's "buy and make" strategy with defence offset obligations will undoubtedly take precedence. The discussion will focus on how President Biden will steer the course of action in developing a strategic partnership with India.

The new administration appears to be committed to the continuation of a "strategic partnership." This would imply that India and the United States would place a greater emphasis on policy coordination and intelligence sharing. American defence firms are increasing their arms sales to India in an attempt to replace Russia as the country's largest defence partner.

His statements made during his campaign on certain internal issues of India -like Kashmir, CAA etc are also relevant. In an Op-ed article published in an Indian-American paper, he stated that the United States and India will work together to combat terrorism in all of its forms and to promote a region of tranquillity and stability in which neither China nor any other country will threaten its neighbours. He promised to collaborate with India to address other global issues such as climate change, global health, transnational terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. He also promised to face every challenge together as they worked to strengthen both democracies - fair and free elections, equality under the law, freedom of expression and religion, and the limitless strength that both nations derive from their diversity.

Climate Change

President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed their commitment to bilateral relations and identified combating climate change as one of their top bilateral priorities. Climate change cooperation is a key component of the US-India strategic partnership, and both countries have mutual and shared interests in making it a priority. The President of the United States, Joe Biden, has stated that achieving climate and energy goals should be a "core pillar" of bilateral cooperation with India, and that he is eager to work with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the matter. Biden's statements come a day after the two countries announced a US-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership to strengthen bilateral cooperation on actions to meet the landmark Paris Agreement's goals in the near future.

Biden has already stated that the United States will immediately join the Paris Agreement. India has ambitious plans in place to combat climate change, as well as a renewable energy power generation programme. India and the United States will be able to collaborate with the United States reinforcing its commitment to climate change mitigation. There are, however, obstacles, including an agreement on environmental goods and services.

Economic issue

Despite some irritants, economic relations between the two countries have improved. India's largest export market is the United States. It exports 16% of all goods and half of all IT and BPO services. In 2019-20, bilateral trade between the two countries was \$88.75 billion. The United States was India's largest goods export market (17 percent share) and third largest goods import supplier in 2019. From April to September 2020, the United States was India's second largest source of FDI. Higher portfolio investments influenced by federal rates are likely to benefit India. Trump's obsession with trade balances caused tensions with the withdrawal of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), but they are likely to dissipate as the US seeks to decouple from China's economic system. With the departure of US manufacturing firms from China, the country recognises the need for a new supply source.

According to the Hudson Institute's most recent report, "A US-India Trade Agenda for the Biden Administration", India should strive for better relations with American corporations because increased US investment and trade relations will increase the potential for US-India cooperation in confronting China's rise. According to the Hudson Institute report, the Biden administration should encourage India to lower tariffs, remove barriers to foreign retail, reverse highly restrictive data privacy rules, and provide economic incentives for foreign investment.

Biden is expected to establish a more stable and predictable policy environment that will benefit both global trade and India. We may see some progress on bilateral issues such as GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) benefits that have been withdrawn and trade deficit tensions. India's primary export market is now the United States. India's external economy is heavily reliant on the United States. It exports 16% of its merchandise and 50% of its information technology and business process outsourcing services. By 2024-25, India hopes to have a \$5 trillion economy. To achieve this, India has set a goal of \$660 billion in exports by 2024-25. Exports to the United States place a greater emphasis on resolving various domestic economic issues that are looming over the economy. The dynamism of US-India trade has been exacerbated by Trump's obsession with the trade balance. Although trade between the United States and India increased, trade tensions increased as well. India's unabated trade surplus with the United States was one of the reasons. Given that the United States is the largest export destination, it is a viable option for meeting the export goal. India's crude oil imports from the United States have increased dramatically. It eventually had an impact on the trade balance. India's trade surplus shrank from US \$ 21 billion in 2017-18 to US \$ 16 billion in 2018-19.

Economic relations between India and the United States have a long history, and India is one of the US' largest markets. As a result, the US administration led by the Democratic Party, is expected to maintain the policies with slight modifications and changes as needed. One positive aspect of Biden's policies is that, unlike Trump, they will be consistent, which will benefit the India-US relationship.

Immigration

In April 2020, President Trump issued a proclamation prohibiting the entry of immigrants who pose a threat to the US labour market. This effectively halted and restricted the entry of anyone seeking entry on an H-1B or H-2B visa, as

well as anyone accompanying or following such a person. This proclamation was later extended until March 20, 2021. This had a significant impact on the Indo-US relations. Between April and December of 2019, 1, 10, 582 H1-B visas were issued to Indians. This dropped to 5335 from April to December 2020. A similar drop in the number of H-4 visas issued was also observed. However, the Biden Administration has repealed these proclamations which will be benefitted to the Indian. While the issuance and entry of H1-B and H-4 visas have been restored, it is unclear whether President Biden will be able to restore GSP privileges or amend India's designation as a "developed country" through simple executive orders. Despite being one of India's top priorities, the issue of Indian worker mobility may finally gain traction in the Biden administration. Although India has raised this issue at various levels, the US government has remained steadfast in its position over the last four years. Since the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to restrict people's movement, eliminating these quotas may not have an immediate impact – but it could be a major talking point when President Biden and Prime Minister Modi meet for the first time.

Possible Problems

Despite Biden's past association with India, Kamala Harris' origin, the support that Democrats receive from Indian Americans, geopolitical compulsions, and India's economic importance, there is a scepticism in certain quarters with regard to Biden's remarks on policies like the Citizenship Amendment Act, as well as Kamala Harris's remarks on the revocation of Article 370 in Kashmir, that have resulted in certain quarters raising question marks in regard to the future of Indo-US relations under a Biden Administration. Biden's administration is expected to put pressure on India over contentious domestic issues. Democrats are generally strong supporters of human rights and liberties, and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris has spoken out against the Modi government's anti-Muslim policies and violations of human rights in Kashmir and elsewhere.

What to expect from Biden?

The new phase in India-US relations, which began with Bill Clinton's visit in 2000 and has continued to improve under the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations, is expected to be consolidated further under President Biden, who has claimed credit for the Obama-Biden administration's progress from 2009 to 2016.

The partnership between the United States and India is based on solid foundations (strategic, economic, human rights, and shared values) and is supported by major political forces in both countries. As a result, the change of government in the United States will not stop both countries' engagement. The United States will continue to support India as a regional stabilising force and a partner in countering China's growing influence in the Indo Pacific. Military, energy, and economic cooperation, as well as talks on a free trade agreement, will most likely deepen the relationship in the coming years.

While that dream has yet to come true, as president, Joe Biden has the opportunity to make it a reality over the next four years. One of his challenges will be that the relationship between the United States and India is stronger than ever before. Biden follows in the footsteps of three previous US presidents – George W. Bush, Barack Obama,

and Donald J. Trump – who have unquestionably advanced the relationship and elevated India's significance within the US strategic framework. This provides the Biden administration with a unique opportunity to foster a natural partnership.

Based on our observations, we believe that relations will remain constant for some time. With the exception of a few specific areas, such as the movement of Indian professionals to the United States or preventing FDI from entering India, a Biden administration may have less immediate impact on India. Although not less significant, more impact may be indirect in terms of trade, climate change, and security, which Indian policymakers should be aware of? The personal ties between Biden and Modi are also an important aspect of this relationship that has yet to develop. Personal relationships are crucial for any foreign policy, and they have the power to further develop relations. Under the Biden administration, the India-US relationship is in its infancy, and it will be interesting to see how it continues to develop.

Conclusion

Despite possible textural changes made by the Biden administration, overall India-US relations appear to be unchanged. Substantially speaking, the Biden administration is expected to strengthen strategic ties. India, like other Asian countries, seeks consistency and predictability in the relationship; however, this consistency is likely to be accompanied by criticism on domestic issues, which may pose a problem for India. Security and defence ties are likely to strengthen now that India has signed all four foundational defence agreements. Changing security dynamics in the Indian Ocean region and the larger Indo-Pacific region may increase the quantity and quality of security and military engagements between India and the US. As a result, India-US relations will see more constructive cooperation under the Biden Administration on the path to a burgeoning strategic partnership, despite of many difficulties and challenges.

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