
UNIT – 5 INDIA’S POLICY TOWARDS USA

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit is about how the two largest democracies in the world have seen the ups and downs in their bilateral relations since 1947. India and US have collaborated on areas of economic growth, trade and defence. After going through this Unit, you shall be able to:

- Set the context of India’s diplomatic ties with US since independence;
- Differentiate India’s diplomacy and foreign policy during the Cold War and Post-Cold War years; and
- Explain the areas of cooperation and irritants in bilateral relations through various administrations.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

India has had a peculiar hot and cold relationship with the US since its independence. Throughout the Cold-War era, despite having many shared common values, both countries lacked conviction in their respective policies. The myopic Pakistan-centric American policy completely disregarding core Indian interests was the major cause of differences and mistrust between the two nations. Pakistan was an important cog in US Cold War strategy in the wider region of South Asia and the Gulf. India's was leader of the Non-aligned countries; and had a tilt towards socialism. India's model of 'mixed' economy was a closed model that had high tariffs and regulations for the operations of foreign multinational corporations – leading MNCs after the Second World War were American MNCs. And the US, too, always alleged that India's strategic perception and policies were heavily tilted in favour of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Many scholars described India's Non-aligned policy as unethical in the context when, they said, the world was facing the threat of Communist totalitarianism against freedom.

In the post-Cold War period, the central issue in US–India relations has been management of the tension in their mutual strategic calculations. Both Washington and New Delhi have viewed each other as partners that share common—but not always congruent—strategic interests. The US seeks to preserve its extant primacy in the international system. India, in contrast, seeks to increase its relative power at the regional and global level both in order to satisfy its own development goals domestically and to increase its security and influence externally. India has been less of a conformist and more of a 'revisionist' power in international relations; it has invariably sought to question the dominant norms and institutions of global governance. In changed geo-strategic environment that emerged after the post-Cold War, while India continues to adhere to and pursues the policy of Non-alignment and strategic autonomy, periodic hiccups across Pakistan and China have been irritants to strategic India-US relations. China's intents to establish its hegemony in trade and foreign relations has upset US. The objectives of both India and the US have been constantly challenged by China and Pakistan axis which threatens India's security and influence along the common borders. In a way, the competition between the US and China, on one hand, and between China and India, on the other, has opened the door for greater India-US cooperation since the end of the Cold War.

5.2 EARLY YEARS

India achieved independence in the midst of Cold War and in an era of bloc politics. As an independent nation, it was a difficult choice to side with a particular superpower in a world divided into power blocs. Long before independence, India's freedom movement had rejected the then prevailing norms of military alliances and use of force in international relations. After independence, the best way out of that was to stay Non-aligned, and organise other developing countries as a voice of freedom and development in international relations under the banner of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM). Non-Aligned Movement found resonance with host of African and Asian countries that gained or were in the process of gaining independence from the colonial rule. NAM was spearheaded by India along with Egypt, Indonesia and Yugoslavia.

India chose to be friends with both the superpowers and India's leadership of the NAM provided it the strategic edge. India engaged both US and USSR in the task of India's economic development with its five year plans that focused on agriculture, industry and growth of science and technology etc.

The US soon became India's most important and trusted bilateral partner. Notwithstanding strategic divergences, the two democracies have been uniquely moulded together since India's independence in 1947. Since then, the US has been a partner of trust for India, helping the country set up the early Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), helping Indian atomic energy programme, food aid programme and spurring India's Green Revolution, fostering educational exchange through the 200,000 Indian citizens studying in US today. There are approximately 4 million Indian-Americans in the US enhancing this strategic relationship which expands beyond the bilateral trade that rose to \$126 billion in 2017. The partnership has developed into more than a friendship between two democracies and their leaders.

India's relation with three important neighbours (Pakistan, China and Soviet Union or erstwhile USSR) and US policy towards Asia and Africa have been most important determining factor of India-US relationship. India-US relationship in the early phase started with the positive note. In order to have a clear understanding of this relationship, one can see divided into two phases, i.e., Cold War phase (1947-1991) and Post –Cold War phase, i.e., 1991 onwards.

5.2.1 Cold War Phase – 1947-1991

The Indo-US relations have been best described as one of roller-coaster; at times, it has been punctuated by brief intervals of warmth and friendly gestures as well. To illustrate, both India and the

United States were on the same side on the Suez Canal issue in 1956. Again, in 1959, when President Dwight Eisenhower visited India, he was given a tumultuous welcome and the President on his part observed: "The strength of India is our interest." Similarly, in October 1962, when China invaded India, America along with Britain came to support India and thereby saved her from a military disaster.

Indo-US relations became very cordial during the John F Kennedy period. His successor, President Lyndon Johnson also kept the cordiality intact by establishing the Tarapur Atomic Plant Station (TAPS) and by supplying a large quantity of foodgrains to enable India to fight over the acute shortage caused by the severe drought in 1966-67. Again in 1973, as a friendly gesture, the US wrote off the largest amount of foreign debt ever cancelled in history by liquidating two-thirds of its accumulated rupee holdings (\$2 billion) in India acquired in return for wheat shipments under PL-480. It was a case of rare magnanimity on the part of Washington. Again, in 1978, President Jimmy Carter paid a goodwill visit to India to register and restore American sympathy and amity for India. Its economic aid, suspended since the Bangladesh crisis, was resumed and the US administration agreed to resume supply of the nuclear fuel for the TAPS, which was cut due to India's peaceful nuclear explosion at Pokhran in 1974. Clearly, Carter was predisposed to look to India as the leader of South Asia, but unfortunately these brief intervals of warmth were soon followed by bouts of bitterness and disillusionment for one reason or another.

Although the two countries were never in a direct confrontation but their world vision and approach for future world was totally different. Cold War phase has been considered to be a phase of back-and-forth diplomacy. A number of factors were responsible for this negative phase of relationship like:

- a) India's role in the foundation of NAM and its active propagation of Non-Alignment in international forums and as a basic principle of its foreign policy;
- b) Socialist planning of Indian economy through Five Year Plans by socialist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru etc.;
- c) Recognition of Communist China by India (December 1949);
- d) Pakistan's closeness to USA;
- e) The Korean crisis and India's refusal to endorse the US sponsored "Uniting for Peace Resolution";
- f) United States stand on Jammu & Kashmir in the United Nation's Security Council;

- g) India's closeness to USSR and the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation of 1971;
- h) India's nuclear programme and its refusal to sign the international non-proliferation treaties like the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) post India's peaceful nuclear explosion at Pokhran in 1974;
- i) The US refusal to supply nuclear fuel to Tarapur Atomic Power Station (TAPS);
- j) Refusal of India to sign NPT and US intent on enforcement of Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) against India, which further added to bitterness;
- k) Bilateral relations suffered a setback in 1979 due to Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. India refused to rally behind the US and refused to describe Soviet Union as an aggressor;
- l) India also was critical about US supply of arms sell to Pakistan.
- m) During the tenure of Ronald Reagan, bitterness increased due to differences over Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and India wanted dismantling of the US base in Diego Garcia. India demanded establishment of Indian Ocean as a 'Zone of Peace'.

The bone of contention between Indo-US relations was the American hostility towards Soviet communism and the danger of its spread in South Asia as well as heavily-favouring America's Pak-oriented Indian sub-continent and Central-Asia policies. Under Baghdad Pact, US considered Pakistan, Iran and Iraq as the 'frontline' states against Soviet expansionism towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. These points alienated the position of the two countries in the policy making circles of each other and created a sense of mistrust and suspicion which remained up to the end of the Cold War.

5.2.2 Post-Cold War Phase 1991– Immediate Years

Indo-US relations have made significant strides in the post-Cold War era, leaving the infamous tag of "estranged democracies" behind. In fact, the two countries have premised their strong bonds upon the strength of their traditions as the oldest and largest democracies in the world. As governance structures, education, awareness and governments themselves have evolved in both countries, there is even more that has come under the ambit of "common values" shared between the US and India.

These shifts have also coincided with changing contours of the international order since the end of the Cold War. This marks one of the most important changes concerning India-US relations: one that seeks to balance shifting global power centers with a stable world order essentially determined by a new balance of power. As Asia transitions into the strongest continent, there is a new power scramble

that seeks to upend the world's traditional understanding of state alliances and partnerships.

In 1990-1991, the collapse of Soviet Union, the end of Cold War and the economic liberalization of India, the two countries looked afresh at their bilateral relations. During Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's tenure, therefore, despite several irritants both sides tried to move forward with their bilateral relations. Two countries held Joint Naval exercise in May 1992. Prime Minister Rao paid an official week-long visit to the US in May 1994, which helped to strengthen ties and was followed by signing of several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

In 1995, following the India visits by the US Defence and Commerce Secretaries, several agreements were signed. However, US trade laws still affected India's export, which again was a disturbing factor in Indo-US relations. Relations saw setback regarding the sale of F-16 aircrafts to Pakistan. Once again supply of nuclear fuel to Tarapur reactor suffered, sales of cryogenic engines were hit, which created discomfort between the two. And US refused to sell super computer to India needed for better forecasting of weather – so necessary for the agriculture-dependent economy. India responded by devising one of its own which made US realize India's growing technological prowess.

The high rates of economic growth in India ushered through domestic reforms attracted international investors and India's strategic thinkers quickly captured this opportunity. Economic attractiveness gave the country space to engage the rest of the world on its own terms. This meant that India would not give in easily on strategic issues, but it would at the same time be flexible and engage with the rest of a world to achieve win-win outcomes.

As India's economy continued to grow and the country engaged with the rest of the world on a more equal footing, India underwent a third evolution in the country's strategic outlook. This shift, which is ongoing even today, seeks to position India among the great powers by showcasing a willingness to take on more international responsibilities. India is taking on these responsibilities to achieve the holy grail in the international order: a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Check your progress Exercise 1:

1. What was the nature of Indo-US Relations during Cold War years (1947-1991)?

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2. How did end of Cold War and collapse of Soviet Union impact Indo-US relations?

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5.3 MODEST BEGINNING IN DEFENCE TIES

The security and defence perceptions of India and the United States during the entire Cold War period were so divergent and conflicting that they could not collaborate on security and defence issues. There was hardly any significant economic cooperation and political convergence between India and the US on various international issues that could enable them to enter into strategic and defence cooperation.

Despite the differences, some initiatives were taken during the Cold War years too. The US strategists saw India as the “pivotal” state of the region and Pakistan as a useful place to base long-range US bombers, as well as a potential ally to best serve US interests in the tense Persian Gulf region. Also, the US administration took a strong interest in India in the 1950s and 1960s with the hope that New Delhi could emerge as a credible balancer to Communist China. This was the period of the greatest US involvement and interest in South Asia.

India-US defence relations date back to the 1950s when the two countries engaged in joint exercises along with the British and Australians. The US approved the sale of 200 Sherman tanks worth \$19 million and S-55 helicopters and 54C-119 Fairchild military transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force (IAF). These were not in use in the US and were not of the Combating System or of the US Force Structure Group (FSG) weapons. Overall, Indian defence procurement from the United States during the early years was extremely limited: the defence equipment was of indifferent quality and the US was not forthcoming in giving the kind of weapons that India required.

During the Sino-Indian War in 1962, the US provided military supplies to India. This assistance

came in the form of small arms, ammunition and communication systems for mountain warfare. In a short reconciliation period after the Sino-Indian border war in 1962, the US gave economic assistance for fiscal years 1961-62 and 1962-63 in excess of \$2 billion, to blunt the Communist influence in South Asia.

During the Cold War, in the 1980s, a change in Indo-US defence cooperation was visible. In the wake of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the United States offered to sell American military hardware to India as well. An Indian team visited the United States in 1980 to explore the possibility of buying TOW anti-tank missiles and long-range howitzers. The Carter Administration had reversed its earlier policy of disapproving the use of an advanced American electronic guidance system in India's Jaguar aircraft and in the nuclear field, it permitted two more enriched uranium fuel shipments to Tarapur.

An MoU was signed between the US and India in 1984 on transfer of technology. In exchange for alterations to India's own export-control regulations, the United States would begin allowing access to civilian and dual-use technologies as well as some military assistance, subject to previous restrictions imposed by US law. Under this agreement, sensitive technology transfers took place. India received super computers, General Electric (GE) F-404 engines for the light combat aircraft (LCA) programme, LM-2500 gas turbine engines for upgrading Indian naval vessels, night vision devices for tanks as well as permission to co-produce the devices, co-production of the Northrop Corporation TF-5 aircraft in India and F-5 tooling facility at 5 per cent of the original cost.

In terms of export licenses issued by the US in 1987, India ranked number seven. In the period 1984-88, there was a five-fold increase in US government approvals of civilian technology exports to India. The MoU did lead to a surge of technology licences to Indian companies and government institutions, but mainly for the items that were below the level of state-of-the-art technology.

Since 1985, policymakers in the Reagan Administration began to use the term "opening to India." The US defence secretary visited India in 1986 and 1987 and his successor Frank Carlucci, in 1988, paved the way for improving ties between the US and India. The US also indicated the desire to forge closer relations with India and vice versa. There was a new beginning in Indo-US defence cooperation in 1989, when apart from the official dialogue, Track II diplomacy entered the scene.

Although India had walked out of the NPT in spite of sponsoring it in 1965, it had never confronted the dominant discourse of the international system so directly as when it walked out of the CTBT

negotiations and then challenged the existing international norms when it ended its self-imposed 24-year moratorium and embarked on a series of nuclear tests on 11 and 13 May 1998. As a result of India's nuclear test, the United States imposed mandatory sanctions and mobilized other nations, in particular, Japan, to cut economic assistance to India. France and Russia were more sympathetic to India but could not prevent the United States from creating an international framework of the UNSC Resolution in June 1998, which laid down that India sign the NPT and address the Kashmir dispute. China and UK were far more aggressive on this UNSC resolution. Also, during his visit to China in June 1998, Clinton announced a new strategic partnership with China and condemned India's nuclear test.

In the meantime, in 1999, the Kargil conflict took place which helped India put across strongly its point on defence and security concerns. In the Kargil case, for the first time, the US Administration viewed the Kashmir problem objectively. The policymakers regarded the whole episode of Kargil in an impartial way and found that Pakistan was guilty.

The two nations have signed defence contracts worth more than \$15 billion since 2008, up from \$500 million in all previous years combined. Major anticipated sales include 24 MH-60 Seahawk multi-role naval helicopters and a potential commercial sale of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters.

Check your progress Exercise 2:

1. How did the defence ties start between India and US?

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2. How did non-proliferation concerns impact India-US defence cooperation?

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5.4 NUCLEAR RELATIONS

In March 2000, India agreed to allow close international monitoring of its nuclear programme while refusing to give up its current nuclear arsenal. In 2002, negotiation for deal 123-Agreement were conducted, which allowed waiver to allow peaceful nuclear activities in India.

The Indo-US nuclear deal signed on 18 July 2005, now known as the Henry J. Hyde United States-India Peaceful Atomic Cooperation Act 2006, aimed at meeting India's energy requirements, has almost put an end to the nuclear confrontation between India and the US. The legislation allowed India to use it by purchase of US nuclear material and reactors. It was expected to lead to dismantling of the technology denial regimes that constrained Indo-US cooperation and commerce in defence technology. The deal strengthened the Indo-US ties as it expanded the scope of the Next Step in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) and High Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG) and opened up avenues for India in regard to dual use technology with United States.

After NSG waiver in September 2008, other countries like France and Russia have signed separate agreement for full nuclear cooperation with India. Further the signing of the civil nuclear deal, it promoted qualitative and quantitative upgradation in the defence cooperation. In March 2009, the US provided sale of P-8 Poseidon military aircrafts to India worth \$2.1 billion, which was considered as largest military ties between the two countries.

Many Indian observers termed the deal as marking the country's return to the non-proliferation mainstream, even as some sections alleged a compromise of national interests by submitting a 'self-reliant' programme to international scrutiny. On the other hand, critics across the globe questioned the privileged treatment to one country by transcending the NPT framework, which, they felt, could weaken the Treaty. Indo-US nuclear deal, was approved by the US Congress into law, now called the United States-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Non-proliferation Enhancement Act, on 8 October 2008 and was signed by India and US on 10 October 2008.

The promise of participation in global nuclear trade, facilitated by the September 2008 India-specific waiver from the guidelines of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), entailed three major outcomes for India:

- Uninterrupted flow of uranium for its reactors.
- Introduction of advanced reactor technologies to expand its nuclear energy programme.

- The strategic spin-off of gaining a seat at the high-tables of the non-proliferation regime.

The deal was also part of a broader courting of India by the US to help fight global terrorism and counter China's rising influence in Asia. The US also was hoping for greater alignment on other strategic issues, such as how to deal with a nuclear-armed Iran – a country that had long enjoyed friendly ties with India.

5.4.1 UN Security Council Reforms

Recognizing India as a “rising global power”, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton declared that the USA was definitely committed “to consider India’s bid for a permanent seat in the UNSC”. US President Barack Obama’s affirmation in 2010 that “the United States looks forward to a reformed UN Security Council that includes India as a permanent member” was viewed as a major evolution in the US position. The US’ openness to India’s hope for permanent membership on the Council however remains at a declaratory stage.

5.4.2 Export Control Regimes

On 11 and 13 May 1998, India conducted a total of five underground nuclear tests, breaking a 24-year self-imposed moratorium on nuclear testing. Pakistan followed, claiming 5 tests on 28 May 1998 and an additional test on 30 May. The unannounced tests created a global storm of criticism, as well as a serious setback for decades of US nuclear nonproliferation efforts in South Asia. On 13 May 1998, President Clinton imposed economic and military sanctions on India, mandated by Section 102 of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) and applied the same sanctions to Pakistan on 30 May. Some effects of the sanctions on India included: termination of \$21 million in FY1998 economic development assistance; postponement of \$1.7 billion in lending by the International Financial Institutions (IFI), as supported by the Group of Eight (G-8) leading industrial nations; prohibition on loans or credit from US banks to the Government of India; and, termination of Foreign Military Sales under the Arms Export Control Act. Humanitarian assistance, food or other agricultural commodities are exempted from sanctions under the law.

In early 2002, India tested a 700-kilometer range version of the Agni missile to give it a credible second-strike capability against Pakistan. Later, in April, the Indian Cabinet approved the establishment of a Strategic Nuclear Command (SNC) that would control the country’s nuclear arsenal.

In August 1999, India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government released a draft report by the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) on India's nuclear doctrine. The report, although retaining India's no-first-use policy, called for creation of a "credible nuclear deterrence and adequate retaliatory capability should deterrence fail."

Through a series of legislative measures, US Congress lifted nuclear related sanctions on India and Pakistan. In October 1999, Congress passed HR 2561, the Department of Defence Appropriations Act, 2000 and it was signed by the President as PL 106-79 on 29 October. Title IX of the act gives the President authority to waive sanctions applied against India and Pakistan in response to the nuclear tests. In a presidential determination on India and Pakistan issued on 27 October 1999, the President waived economic sanctions on India. On 22 September 2001, President Bush issued a final determination removing remaining sanctions on Pakistan and India resulting from their 1998 nuclear tests. Currently, the last effects of the nuclear sanctions are four Indian entities (and their subsidiaries) that remain on the Department of Commerce list of entities for which export licenses are required.

Since 1991, the two countries began to evolve a new relationship hence inched toward the friendship and cooperation. The two countries signed a lot of treaties and agreements for the better relations among them, the most prominent being the 123-Agreement between the Bush and Manmohan Singh government. Every year the leadership of the two countries visit each other which makes this relationship more viable and relevant. In 2010 the then President of US, Barack Obama visited India and acknowledged the emergence of India at the world stage as an emerging power "India is not emerging but has emerged as a leader at the international level and it would be in the interest of US to have close ties with it". In 2015 Barak Obama visited India again as Chief guest at the Republic day of India.

US President Obama expressed US support for India's membership to multilateral export control regimes like NSG, MTCR, the Australian Group (AG) and the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) in a phased manner and removal of India's defence and space related entities from the US 'Entity List'. US remained one of the main supporters of India's entry to MTCR and its NSG Bid. India Joined MTCR in 2016 marking India's first entry into any multilateral export control regime. But India's NSG bid failed due to adamant Chinese opposition.

From energy and education to the military and geopolitics, both India and the United States now have a convincing rationale to engage with each other as "strategic partners". The defence sector

partnerships between the two countries have emerged as one of the strongest pillars of U.S.-India ties. With a seminal agreement signed in 2005 and subsequently renewed in 2015, this defence partnership has formed the bedrock of bilateral exchanges. Furthermore, technology transfer along with partnership enhancers like co-production and co-development of new technologies under the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) have propelled this relationship to a new level.

Check your progress Exercise 3:

1. What was the objective of US in improving its nuclear ties with India?

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2. What do you understand by export control regimes?

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5.5 ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Indo-US economic relations started improving after 2000. The decade witnessed the inflation of trade partnership between the two countries. On 21 March 2000, Prime Minister of India and President of United States released a document on the theme *India-US Relations: A Vision for the 21st Century* at New Delhi. In 1991, the bilateral trade figure stood at \$5.91 billion; in 2000 \$14.35 billion, in 2004 \$37.1 billion, in 2008 \$43.4 billion and in 2010 the figure stood at \$100 billion. Compared, US-China trade in the year stood to the tune of \$500 billion. Despite such sluggish pace of progress of Indo-US trade India seems to be lucrative destination of FDI and huge market of US exports and MNCs. IT sector is the major sector of cooperation between the two countries. However, outsourcing has been a serious problem and the domestic public opinion in USA is quite averse to outsourcing of jobs to India, China and elsewhere. In order to boost bilateral trade, cooperation in macroeconomic policy, financial sector and infrastructure financing, the two countries launched a new Economic and Financial Partnership between India's Ministry of Finance and the US Department of the Treasury in

April 2010. Earlier in 2005, to promote real and meaningful cooperation in trade and investment a US-India Trade Policy Forum was set up followed by the establishment of a Private Sector Advisory Group (PSAG) in 2007.

For greater involvement of private sector in discussion on issues involving trade and investment, the bilateral India-US CEO's Forum was reconstituted in 2009.

During Prime Minister Modi's visit in September 2014, it was decided to establish an India-US Investment initiative, with a special focus on facilitating FDI, capital market development and financing of infrastructure.

Indian IT companies contributed \$22.5 billion in taxes to the US Treasury between 2011 and 2013. Plus, they supported over 411,000 jobs in the US, including 3,00,000 jobs for US citizens and permanent residents during that time. More importantly, those jobs make US companies more efficient so that they can compete globally.

During 2014-15, India's export of computer services and IT/ITES services was around \$146 billion, of which exports to the US and Canada accounted for nearly 60 per cent.

Bilateral trade of goods and services between India and the US has gone up by 119 per cent since 2007, touching \$126.2 billion, according to the office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

The US and India view one another as important strategic partners to advance common interests regionally and globally. As on 2017, bilateral trade in goods and services is 2 per cent of US world trade, and has grown in recent years. The trade relationship is more consequential for India; in 2017, the United States was its second largest export market (16 per cent share) after the European Union (EU, 17 per cent), and third largest import supplier (6 per cent) after China (17 per cent) and the EU (10 per cent). US-India foreign direct investment (FDI) is small, but growing. Defence sales also are significant in bilateral trade. Civilian nuclear commerce, stalled for years over differences on liability protections, has produced major potential US supply contracts. The Trump Administration, which views bilateral trade balances as an indicator of the health of a trading relationship, takes issue with the US trade deficit with India and has criticised India for a range of "unfair" trading practices. Countering this view, India notes that the US bilateral trade deficit dropped in 2018.

Check your progress Exercise 4:

1. Why does US take India as an important economic partner?

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5.6 NARENDRA MODI TAKES OVER

When Narendra Modi took over as India’s Prime Minister in 2014, Barack Obama had been the President of the US for almost six years. His perception of India was shaped largely by his judgment that India, unlike Pakistan next door, was thankfully ‘not a problem’. India instead represented a great opportunity for the US and—in large measure due to his interactions with Modi’s predecessor, Manmohan Singh, at the height of the global financial crisis—could be a potential asset for Washington as Obama restructured the character of US global engagement in the aftermath of the excesses of the Bush era. Unfortunately for Obama and the US, the second UPA term in office was completely unlike the first one, and the hope of a deepened bilateral partnership quickly ran dry—to the President’s consternation—at exactly the time when most American policymakers were expecting a blossoming in the strategic partnership.

Narendra Modi’s political instincts allowed him to quickly appreciate the extent to which US-India relations had fallen around the time he took office. Despite his limited experience with Washington up to that point, he understood that the pervasive frustration in both capitals did not bode well for his larger project of revitalising India, balancing the threats posed by growing Chinese power, and expanding New Delhi’s influence on the international stage.

In a manner unlike his recent predecessors, Modi invested heavily in building up personal relationships with his peers abroad. Whether through his invitations to Presidents Obama and Trump to visit India as honoured guests on major national events or his repeated breaches of protocol by personally receiving visiting dignitaries at Indian airports, Modi sought to cement personal friendships with national leaders who are politically important to India. Beyond leaders within South Asia itself or those of Japan, Israel and a handful of European states, no one was more important to Modi than the US president. Consequently, he invested heavily in developing strong friendships with

his American counterparts, first Obama and now Trump, guided by the logic that, even if US and Indian national interests did not always cohere, the latter would always come out ahead if the individual steering policy in Washington were favourably disposed towards India. Modi personalized the conduct of India's international relations in ways not seen in decades to the advantage of India's interests as a whole.

While these changes in Modi's approach to foreign policy may appear to be stylistic, they have yielded important substantive successes. Two examples in widely different areas prove the point. The first is in the area of climate change. There is little doubt that the US and India played pivotal roles in the discussions leading up to the Paris Agreement. Prime Minister Modi, recognising the significance of securing an international consensus on mitigating climate change, pushed back against many in his own country to commit India to concrete pledges that made the final compact possible.

Modi's willingness to accept India's global responsibilities in mitigating climate change was equally vital to success in the lead-up to Paris: a concession unimaginable under India's tradition of 'Third World' posturing, which would have prevented it from accepting the obligations that finally made an international accord possible.

Another example of remarkable success has been India's cooperation with the US in shaping the security environment in the Indo-Pacific. While this term has taken on new life under President Trump, the defining agreement between the US and India occurred under President Obama. Prime Minister Modi's active involvement in shaping the 'US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region' was couched in innocuous language, but its import was momentous.

Check your progress Exercise 5:

1. How did Modi's diplomacy improve India's ties with the US?

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5.7 ADVENT OF TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

With the advent of Donald J Trump administration, a great degree of unpredictability in India-US

relations has ensued, particularly in the strategic domain. However, cutting through the cloud of uncertainty, the Trump administration seems to be gradually adopting clear positions on security and strategic concerns in South Asia. Although the Trump administration took close to eight months to outline a stated South Asian policy, it managed to dispel some traditional US foreign policy clichés, especially in the light of altered security scenario and commensurate threat perceptions in South Asia.

The Trump administration's firmer stance against Pakistan and its exhortation to India to play a larger role in Afghan security is a new change in United States' South Asia policy. Despite Pakistan's lack of conviction, the Trump administration has continued the previous administration's push to project India as a net security provider in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Projecting India as an emerging champion of security in Asia has some notable consequences. First, in one stroke, the United States will have a credible security partner in Asia that can theoretically and pragmatically counter-balance China's rise and hence create a perceived deterrent in the Asian theater. Second, India's proximity to the United States creates an Asian deterrent to Pakistan's rapidly growing strategic arsenal, which carries the risk of falling into terrorist possession. Third, the United States only stands to gain from the prospect of "burden-sharing" in Afghanistan through India's predominant influence in the region. In the past, India has repeatedly turned down Afghanistan's request for supply of military equipment.

5.8 LET US SUM UP

Today, the US–India relationship encompasses the most intense bilateral engagement that New Delhi enjoys with any nation. Given the steady expansion of the bilateral partnership over the last two decades, the range of joint activities today is breathtaking: from frequent bilateral summits between the heads of government to regular senior-level dialogues, the US and India today engage in numerous strategic consultations, wide-ranging defence, counterterrorism, homeland security, cybersecurity and intelligence cooperation, as well as myriad activities in energy, education, science and technology, public health and culture. Post-Cold War, each year adds new hopes and cooperation concerning India-US relationship. The relationship between two nations has largely expanded laying emphasis on each and every important global issue. Hence, in the last twenty years or so in general and five years in particular, the Indo-US relations have been developing on positive note of friendship and cooperation.

5.9 SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

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5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Your answer should be based on subsections (i) 5.2.1 and (ii) 5.2.2.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Carefully read Section 5.3 to write your two answers.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) Read carefully Section 5.4 and blend subsections 5.4.2 to write your answer.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) Your answer should be based on a careful reading of Section 5.5.

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- 1) Your answer should be based on Section 5.6