



RSIS Policy Brief
India-U.S. Maritime Partnership:
Time to Move Forward



**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**
A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

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Admiral Jonathan Greenert, Chief of the United States' Naval Operations (right) shakes hands with Indian Navy Chief, Admiral Nirmal Verma during his ceremonial reception in New Delhi, April 23, 2012^a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Indo-Pacific becomes the world's geopolitical and economic centre of gravity, the India-U.S. maritime partnership needs to firmly inject geopolitical reasons to go forward from where it seems now to have plateaued. India can meaningfully influence the Asian balance of power if it sustains its rise by aligning its maritime interests with the U.S., which has publicly stated it wants to assist India's rise as a great power. An India that dithers on this partnership with its political obsession for strategic autonomy and non-alignment will risk losing a vital geopolitical opportunity in the emerging Asian Century. On their part, U.S. military planners can today ill afford to ignore the systemic significance of the Indian Ocean.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Indian Ocean Region comes under the area of responsibility of three U.S. commands, thereby creating a structural impediment for the India-U.S. naval partnership. This perpetuates the Indian concern that the U.S. lacks an integrated geopolitical approach to the Indian Ocean. The fragments need to be brought together into a cohesive structure.
- India needs to sign a Logistics Supply Agreement (LSA), a Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMoA) and a Basic

Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) to meet its own national interests by dispelling its political inhibitions and considering the practical benefits. These enabling agreements will improve greater interoperability with the U.S. defence forces, give India access to high technology and help the power projection capability of its navy and air force.

- An improved defence relationship with the U.S. will balance China's rising military and political power. India's obsession with strategic autonomy and non-alignment will not help eliminate the security dilemmas created by China's growing power in both the continental and maritime spheres. China's adjacency to India makes it a potential natural adversary.
- The U.S. should assist in building India's maritime power projection capability in the Indo-Pacific and facilitate India's emergence as a net security provider and stabilizer. India has the potential to fill the void of a resident great power in the Indian Ocean Region.
- India needs to develop its expeditionary armed forces in keeping with its rising great power interests. The U.S. has the incentive to provide the requisite support as it stands to gain from this capability.
- The U.S. should facilitate its defence trade with India to change from a buyer-seller relationship to a partnership for co-production and joint research and development. It should give India access to sensitive defence technologies for India's indigenization of its defence industry. On its part, India also needs to reform its defence procurement process to give easier access to U.S. firms.
- India as the rising resident great power in the Indian Ocean should take the lead in maritime counter-proliferation by joining the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). India and the U.S. face the common challenge of nuclear proliferation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- India should support U.S. membership in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and should facilitate a greater role for the U.S. in the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). On its part, the U.S. should support Indian membership in the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) and encourage India's maritime diplomacy in the Western Pacific.
- Both the navies should continue to do joint exercises focusing on non-traditional security issues like terrorism, piracy and HA/DR for future operational cooperation.



The U.S. aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) and the Indian navy fleet oiler INS Shakti (A57) conduct a refuelling exercise during the Malabar Exercise 2012^b

INTRODUCTION

India is turning its geopolitical attention away from a purely continental geopolitical outlook to the oceans as its rising naval power and maritime interests would lead us to expect. Under pressure to reduce its own commitments, the United States increasingly sees India as “a partner and net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond.”¹ According to the new defence strategy unveiled by the Pentagon in January 2012, “the United States is also investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region.”² India too sees its increasing maritime partnership with the U.S. as meeting its interests in the Indo-Pacific with economics and politics driving the integration of the two ocean spaces. The unprecedented coincidence of interests in the overall context of the growing India-U.S. strategic partnership has provided the necessary context for stronger maritime cooperation between the two, particularly after the initiation of the pivotal nuclear agreement in 2005, which ended India’s nuclear isolation as well as the prolonged “estrangement” between the two democracies that had developed during the Cold War.

SHORTCOMINGS

In the last decade, the Indian and U.S. navies have not only held joint exercises, personnel exchanges, bilateral staff talks, port visits, and joint training, they have on four occasions operationally cooperated even outside the UN mandate, which was India’s traditional preference in utilising its forces cooperatively with others. The two navies have developed a level of interoperability and the capacity to work together should an occasion arise in areas such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR)³. India now conducts military exercises with no

other countries in the world as it does with the U.S. [See Table 1]. In recent years, the U.S. has emerged as a leading arms supplier to India [See Table 2]. India’s purchase of the P8-I maritime surveillance aircraft makes it only the second country in the world after the U.S. to operate the aircraft. Following President Obama’s assertion that India, more than looking East, should “engage East,” the India-U.S. strategic consultation on East Asia has grown, marked by the fifth regional dialogue on the Asia-Pacific in April 2012 and the first-ever U.S.-Japan-India trilateral dialogue in December 2011.

Whereas India-U.S. military-to-military relations have grown to an unprecedented level when viewed over the long term, India appears to be reluctant to extend the bilateral defence relations further as it defines the relationship as being one of “less than allies, more than friends.”⁴ Following Chinese protests, India has limited the Malabar naval exercises, which were multilateral, to the bilateral level. Though it has for the first time joined in the U.S.-led multinational Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2012 exercise, its participation is limited to “desk duties.” It has not sent any warships for the exercise, only personnel. India has concerns about China’s growing military power and its maritime ambitions in the Indian Ocean, and New Delhi has maritime interests in the South China Sea, but it does not want to be seen as aligned against China.

India has also been unwilling to ink what the U.S. calls “foundational agreements” for enhancing defence ties. These are: the Logistics Supply Agreement (LSA), the Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMoA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). While the LSA deals with providing mutual logistical support for the two armed forces, the latter two are concerned with technology safeguards. New Delhi’s political commitment to “strategic autonomy” constricts greater interoperability between the two defence forces these agreements would promote. Though the Malabar exercise has grown into “a full-scale engagement across all functional areas of naval warfare,”⁵ it is apparent that the relationship envisioned by the signing of the “New Framework in the India-US Defence Relationship”⁶ in June 2005 and subsequently the “Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation”⁷ in March 2006 is today falling below expectations. Commenting on the state of maritime cooperation between the two states, Saurav Gupta, a Senior Research Associate at Samuels International Associates in Washington DC, points out, “Far from suggesting a willingness to extend Indian maritime security obligations beyond the IOR [Indian Ocean Region], as some have inferred the trilateral Malabar

¹ Secretary of Defence Robert M. Gates, Speech at The Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, May 30, 2009, Available at: <http://www.defence.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1357>

² United States, Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defence*, January 2012, p.2, Available at: http://www.defence.gov/news/Defence_Strategic_Guidance.pdf

³ Author’s interview with Admiral Arun Prakash (retd), former Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy, 17 January 2012.

⁴ “India and America: Less than Allies, More than Friends,” *Economist*, 16 June 2012, Available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/21556935>

⁵ Leon E. Panetta, U.S. Defence Secretary, *Partners in the 21st Century*, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, India, June 06, 2012, Available at: <http://www.defence.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1682>

⁶ *India-US Defense Relations*, Embassy of India, Washington, DC, June 28, 2005, Available at: <http://www.indianembassy.org/india-us-defense-relations.php>

⁷ *Indo-U.S. Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation*, March 2006, Available at: <http://www.defence.gov/news/Mar2006/d200600302indousframeworkformaritimemilitarysecuritycooperation.pdf>

exercises in the East China Sea to be, it reveals an Indian *disinclination* to be appended to an American and allied maritime strategy in its Indian Ocean zone of core interest.⁸ Similarly, India's reluctance to join the U.S.-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) "offers a cautionary tale in India-U.S. maritime relations."⁹ What then is the future of this maritime partnership?

The main problem is that the shadow of the past still lingers, shaping the way India sees the world strategically. India's emphasis on autonomy – which sometimes appears to be an over-emphasis – continues to lean heavily on the vestiges of nonalignment, an ideology that still carries weight among its elites¹⁰. In a sense, Indian thinking continues in some ways to reflect a history of defensiveness and anxiety in relations with the United States, still by far the dominant power despite its apparent "decline." To some extent, the strategic behaviour of both is responsible for this. But the more fundamental point is that, after years of mutual suspicion, the two countries are unsurprisingly taking their time to adjust to their new relationship. That said, it would be helpful if both sides were to be more self-aware on this score and to take appropriate steps to give a more durable foundation to their strategic partnership.



President Barack Obama in a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Hyderabad House in New Delhi, India, November 8, 2010^c

POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS

In order to grow as maritime partners, India and the U.S. need to pay attention to the following policy issues.

First, the use of the term "Indo-Pacific" by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others in their policy pronouncements firmly links India and the Indian Ocean with the U.S. and the Pacific, but the U.S. needs a more integrated geopolitical approach to the Indian Ocean. Its disjointed approach to the Indian Ocean is indicated by the fact that this integrated maritime region comes under the jurisdictions of three U.S. combatant commands – the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM); the United

States Central Command (USCENTCOM) and the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) – which raises questions about how the institutional linkages between the Indian and U.S. navies can be structured. The fragments need to be brought together into a cohesive structure.

Second, India remains hesitant to sign the LSA, the CISMoa and the BECA. Though the U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta, unlike his predecessors, declared recently that he does not see the absence of these agreements as being a "barrier" to furthering bilateral defence relations,¹¹ Indian decision makers need to go beyond their political commitments to "strategic autonomy" and seriously consider the practical benefits of these agreements for India's national interests.

As far as the LSA is concerned, the argument¹² can be made that India has bilateral arrangements with several countries to use their logistical facilities. As per its maritime interests, India will use U.S. facilities less than the U.S. uses Indian facilities. India already gives access to the U.S. on an individual case-by-case basis. Yet it does not want to be bound by a more substantial longer-term agreement. Clearly, the underlying reason is that India lacks the confidence to shed its anxieties about being taken undue advantage of. In fact, by utilising U.S. facilities, India could *strengthen* its growing maritime position and be better able to pursue its interests. As things stand, thanks to its fears about losing "strategic autonomy," India's inhibitions on the other two agreements foreclose the potential for gaining access to advanced technology which it needs to further its capability.

Third, though India and the U.S. have developed some level of interoperability through the Malabar exercises and operational cooperation in disaster relief efforts during the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004-2005, India still has political inhibitions for greater interoperability with the U.S. forces. There is no need for Indian policymakers to remain obsessed with "strategic autonomy" and non-alignment, which were, after all, designed as instruments for defending the national interest in the specific historical context of decolonization and the Cold War. Why worry about antagonizing China? As long as rising China remains authoritarian, threatens India along their long disputed border, and continues to arm the Pakistani state against India, New Delhi should treat its neighbour in a Kautilyan¹³ geopolitical framework and build stronger security links with democratic countries like the U.S. that are wary of Chinese power. The future of India-U.S. maritime relations thus needs to be defined at the grand-strategic level.

⁸ Sourabh Gupta, "US-India Defence Ties: The Limits to Interoperability," *East Asia Forum*, 10 Sep 2011, Available at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/07/31/us-india-defence-ties-the-limits-to-interoperability/>

⁹ James Holmes, Andrew C Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.125.

¹⁰ See Sunil Khilnani et al., *Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century*, Centre for Policy Research, February, 2012, http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0_1.pdf.

¹¹ Leon E. Panetta, Defence Secretary, "Q & A Session: Partners in the 21st Century," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, India, June 06, 2012, Available at: <http://www.idsa.in/video/AddressbyLeonE.PanettaDefenceSecretary>

¹² This aspect was brought up during an interview with Dr. P. K. Ghosh (a retired Indian Navy officer) by this author, 21 January 2012.

¹³ Kautilya was an ancient Indian political theorist who propounded that adjacency creates enmity and that the enemy's enemy is a friend. For details, See, Narendra Nath Law, *Inter-State Relations in Ancient India, Part I* (London: London Agents and Messrs. LUZAC & Co., 1920).

Fourth, as the U.S. reorients its maritime forces to the Asia-Pacific, it sees its defence cooperation with India as a “linchpin” in its new defence strategy¹⁴. Following the Bush Administration’s decision in 2005 to help India’s rise – reaffirmed by the Obama Administration in 2010 – the U.S. should help India’s maritime power projection capability not only in the Indian Ocean, but also in the Western Pacific in order to provide security and stability in maritime Asia. India on its part should make explicit its desire for a leadership role in the Indian Ocean and ignore criticisms over its so-called hegemonic threat to the region. It bears noting that India’s smaller neighbours have sought to improve economic links with it even as its profile as a military power has grown. The Indian Ocean lacks a resident great power. And India has the potential to fill that void with a benign leadership role.

Fifth, India has a very limited history of overseas power projection, thereby making for, as Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon has said, “an Indian way, an Indian view and Indian practice in the use and role of force.”¹⁵ But with the world’s third-largest armed forces, growing nuclear deterrent capability, and expanding security horizon, there is no reason why it should not develop an operationally sound expeditionary force for power projection, reviving some of the expeditionary tradition of the “Oriental expeditionary force”¹⁶ to secure its national interests and contribute to regional security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. stands to gain from and should support an overseas expeditionary capability for India.

Sixth, India needs more than the latest equipment. It needs access to cutting-edge technologies to enhance its military capability (including its naval capability) and indigenize its defence industry. The U.S. should reform its export controls to facilitate transfer of sensitive defence technologies. India also needs to reform its defence procurement process. Not only must it show flexibility in its offsets requirements, it should also allow foreign direct investment (FDI) in the defence sector above the current 26 percent level to facilitate higher FDI inflows to India. Instead of remaining in a buyer-seller relationship in defence trade, the U.S. should be encouraged to enter into joint research and development projects and co-production with India. Closer naval cooperation should be viewed in this larger strategic context.

Seventh, India has not joined the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) even though it conforms fully to the PSI’s rules. Here again, Indian thinking seems to stem from a reluctance to be involved in a non-universal cartel-like arrangement. But India has long been a signatory to the Antarctic Treaty, which is just such an arrangement

and has never been viewed as problematic. It is also in the midst of a process of trying to become a member of the cartel-like Nuclear Suppliers Group. Moreover, merely being a member of the PSI will not oblige it to toe any particular line. On the contrary, once inside, it will be able to shape the organisation’s activities and potentially also emerge as a leading player as a consequence of a stronger India-U.S. strategic relationship.

Eighth, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which was convened in 2008 under Indian leadership to discuss maritime security, was conceived of as having littoral states as members. Therefore it is sometimes argued that the U.S. should not become a member of it.¹⁷ But the fact remains that, though not a littoral, the United States has a powerful presence in the Indian Ocean and plays a pivotal role in its strategic politics. India should give full support to U.S. membership of IONS. On its part, the U.S. should support the upgrading of India from observer status to full membership in the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) to help India increase its maritime role in the Western Pacific. India, which is seeking to breathe new life into the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), has supported the U.S. as a “dialogue partner” and should continue to enhance the American role in it.

Finally, in order to sustain naval cooperation, both the navies should continue to carry out joint exercises relating to non-traditional security issues such as terrorism, piracy and HA/DR for future operational cooperation.

CONCLUSION

Maritime cooperation between India and the U.S. has reached an unprecedented level. Common interests such as freedom of navigation, curtailment of piracy, uninterrupted commerce and HA/DR underpin growing maritime relations. Regardless of what the pessimists might think, this relationship is likely to grow as both seek equilibrium in the Asia-Pacific. It is time to shed the hesitations and inhibitions of the past, draw on the strengths of a major naval power, and build a closer naval relationship with the United States. India as an emerging resident great power in the Indian Ocean region must partner with the U.S. to emerge credibly and responsibly as a security provider in the Indian Ocean region and extend net security beyond its immediate maritime environs.

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¹⁴ Leon E. Panetta, U.S. Defence Secretary, “Partners in the 21st Century,” Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, India, June 06, 2012, Available at: <http://www.defence.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1682>

¹⁵ Address by Shivshankar Menon, National Security Advisor of India, “The Role of Militaries in International Relations,” Cariappa Memorial Lecture, New Delhi, October 05, 2011, Available at: <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=190018351>

¹⁶ For details, see Ashley Jackson, “Britain in the Indian Ocean Region,” *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 7:2, (2011), pp. 145-160.

¹⁷ This aspect was raised by Vice Admiral Pradeep Kaushiva (Retd.) during this author’s interview with him, 20 January 2012.

TABLE 1. INDIA-U.S. JOINT EXERCISES IN THE PAST DECADE

Indo-U.S Military Practices	Type	Comments	Year of Beginning
Joint Exercise India (JEI)	Joint and combined exercise for a HA/DR scenario	Between U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) and the Indian Integrated Defence Staff (IDS). It is planned that both will conduct "command post exercise" in 2012	2010-
MALABAR	Naval exercises	In 2007, Japan, Australia and Singapore joined the exercise and after Chinese reaction it was again reduced to bilateral exercise	1993-
HABU NAG	Naval amphibious operations (and HA/DR)		2006-
SPITTING COBRA	Naval explosive ordnance destruction		2010-
SALVEX	Diving and salvage		2005-
SHATRUJEET	Amphibious doctrine and operations	Between the U.S. Marine Corps and the Indian Army	2006-
YUDH ABHYAS	Between two armies which includes field training exercise, fire exercises and command post exercises		2004-
COPE INDIA	Between Indian and U.S. Air Force		2004-
RED FLAGNELLIS	Joint, combined training exercise between Indian and U.S. Air Force	Likely for 2013 involving fighters and airborne warning and control system aircraft	2008-
VARJA PRAHAR	Between American Special Forces and Indian Army's 3 Para (Special Forces)		2003-

Source: "Report to Congress on U.S.-India Security Cooperation," U.S. Department of Defence, November 2011, http://www.defence.gov/pubs/pdfs/20111101_NDAA_Report_on_US_India_Security_Cooperation.pdf, and media sources

TABLE 2. TRANSFER OF MAJOR CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS FROM THE U.S. TO INDIA, 2000 TO 2011

Weapon Type	Year of order/deliveries	No. delivered/produced	Comments
TPE-331 Turboprop	1983/ 1986-2011	(112)	For 61 Do-228 MP aircraft from FRG
LM-2500 Gas turbine	(1999)/ 2010-2011	4	For 3 Shivalik (Project-17) frigates produced in India
AN/TPQ-37 Firefinder Artillery Locating Radar	2002/2006	8	Part of \$142-190 m deal; originally planned for 1998 but embargoed by USA after Indian nuclear tests in 1998; AN/TPQ-37(V)3 version
AN/TPQ-37 Firefinder Artillery locating radar	2003/ 2006-2007	4	Part of \$142-190 m deal; AN/TPQ-37(V)3 version
LM-2500 Gas turbine	(2003)		For 1 Vikrant (IAC or Project-71) aircraft carrier produced in India
F404 Turbofan	2004		\$105 m deal; for Tejas (LCA) combat aircraft produced in India; F404-GE-IN20 version; ordered after Indian Kaveri engine delayed
Austin AALS	2006/2007	1	Ex-US; INR2.2 b (\$48 m) deal (incl modernization); Indian designation Jalashwa
S-61/H-3A Sea King Helicopter	2006/2007	(6)	Ex-US; \$39 m deal; UH-3H version
F404Turbofan	2007		\$100 m deal; for Tejas (LCA) combat aircraft produced in India; F-404-GE-F2J3 version
C-130J-30 Hercules Transport aircraft	2008/ 2010-2011	6	\$962 m deal (incl \$596 m for aircraft and rest for special equipment); for special forces
CBU-97 SFW Guided bomb	2010		\$258 m deal; CBU-105 version
RGM-84L Harpoon-2 Anti-ship MI/SSM	2010		\$170 m deal; AGM-84L version
C-130J-30 Hercules Transport aircraft	(2011)		For special forces; contract not yet signed
C-17A Globemaster-3 Transport aircraft	2011		\$4.1 b deal; delivery 2013-2014/2015
Mk-54 MAKO ASW torpedo	(2011)		\$86 m deal; contract not yet signed
P-8A Poseidon ASW aircraft	(2008)		\$2 b deal (offsets 30% incl production of components in India); P-8I version; delivery by 2015
F414Turbofan	(2011)		\$800 m deal; for Tejas (LCA) combat aircraft produced in India; F-414INS-6 version
FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank guided missiles	2012		Contract not yet signed; Defence Secretary Leon Panetta saying "committed" to sale.

Source: SIPRI arms transfers database and media sources (up to 23 June 2012). Blank spaces in Column 3 indicate unknown dates.

- ^a Source: http://www.daylife.com/photo/0b5N2F918u8wC?__site=daylife&q=Nirmal+Kumar+Verma, accessed on 25 July 2012
- ^b Source: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Andrew K. Haller, The US Navy, http://www.navy.mil/view_single.asp?id=121697, accessed on 25 July 2012
- ^c Source: Official White House Photo by Pete Souza, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/photogallery/president-and-first-lady-india>, accessed 25 July 2012



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