

## **ABSTRACT**

The present research has attempted to chart out the course of India-U.S. strategic relations over the period 1998 to 2022.

The 1998 moment is the starting point for the research work done here. The aftermath of the Pokhran test resulted in widespread curbs on India in the realm of defence and technology, constraining the country severely. At the same time, in retrospect the 1998 decision to go nuclear can also be seen as the starting point of a newer understanding of India based on its strength and enormous economic and political clout which the U.S. could hardly overlook. Since then, both the countries have worked hard to fashion a new and enhanced relationship that is developing in many directions over the last more than two decades. The 9/11 terrorist attack on the U.S. led to the “war on terror” waged by the U.S. and allies. This also led to the need for cooperation and collaboration with India, a country facing terrorist attacks repeatedly and raising the issue of threat from terrorism as a major plank of its foreign policy especially with Pakistan. The U.S. could now readily see and appreciate the Indian stand on terrorism and the need to take resolute measures at the international level. The convergence between the two countries on the issue of terrorism helped in downgrading the hostility the U.S. had displayed in the wake of the 1998 nuclear test. At the same time India was taking several measures to assuage the U.S. and other countries of its own commitments for preserving the nuclear order. One of the aims was to reduce the vulnerabilities from the sanctions and simultaneously work toward its eventual withdrawal.

More recently India and the U.S. conducted 2+2 dialogue, between the U.S. Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence on the one hand and Indian Minister of External Affairs and Minister of Defence on the other. The closer bilateral, security and strategic ties built between the two countries over the last two decades, after the freeze in the relationship in 1998, is significant in many respects. Not only have the two countries signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), they have opened up a series of initiatives that binds the two sides on a much more secured framework in defence and strategic cooperation. The 2+2 dialogue has further firmed the defence and security ties between the two countries. In 2022, President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi met each other twice- first on the sidelines of the QUAD summit in Tokyo and again on the margins of the G-20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia. Additionally, there was 2+2 Ministerial Meeting in Washington DC and several visits by senior members of the Governments of the two sides.

The starting point of the thesis therefore is 1998 constituting the “low”. Initially it was proposed that the thesis would focus on the period 1998-2018. However, subsequently the scope of the research work had to be extended, to cover the period up to 2022, both because of the continued high-level bilateral engagements as well as due to the growing emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region by both the countries. Several milestone developments in this respect encouraged the researcher to expand and extend the scope of the work so as to present an updated account in what seems to be a fast evolving bilateral relationship within the framework of a dynamic, multilateral and a multipolar world. In 2022, the relationship has not only improved but both the countries are committed to “strategic partnership”. This transformation,

covering about a quarter century from 1998 to 2022 is the period of study for this thesis.

The present thesis is an attempt to answer the research questions related to the bilateral relationship between India and U.S. within the context of the dynamic multilateral relationship of the two countries. As such, the discussion and analysis, flowing from the extensive primary sources have been supplemented by secondary sources that attempt to interpret the dynamics involved. Description, analysis and interpretation form the content of the thesis and as such a historical-descriptive approach and qualitative methodology has been adopted in the preparation of this thesis. The primary sources consisting of Congressional records and parliamentary proceedings, national policy documents and agreements and statements have been consulted. Historical records of the dynamics of the relationship have been analyzed based on extensive consultation of the declassified papers of the U.S. State Department. Secondary sources in the form of books and scholarly articles in various journals as well as commentary by well recognized experts in newspapers and on online platforms have also been consulted.

The research undertaken in this thesis has attempted to answer the research questions raised on the entirety of relationship of the India and the United States as well as questions related to specific areas of cooperation between the two countries.

It has been asked in the research questions **if it is possible to contextualize the India-U.S. strategic relationship as a global partnership or is it best to understand it as a strengthened bilateral partnership.** Despite an unprecedented level of synergy and cooperation, India and the U.S. are not global partners in any specific domain or area of international engagement. Though there has been

significant convergence, there are no indications that divergences in the relationship, whether on the question of international outlook or on issues related to peace and conflict in the Middle East, democratization of international institutions, strategy vis a vis China, war between Russia and Ukraine, a common position on Pakistan etc. have been sorted out between the two countries. As such, even when the two countries have been able to arrive at a strengthened relationship and extended the scope of their cooperation, the two countries are far removed from achieving a global partnership.

Another broad research question addressed by this thesis is **whether it has been possible for India-U.S. strategic partnership to overwhelm and overshadow U.S.-China and U.S.-Pakistan relationship.** The research undertaken for this thesis has demonstrated that the answer to this question is in the negative. The U.S. and India are both committed to contain China, more specifically in the context of an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. But this understanding has not been enough to undercut U.S.-China relations, specifically in terms of economic interdependence of the two countries. Lately, the U.S. and China have differed and clashed on a number of issue areas but these have been short of building up of any coalition against each other. On Pakistan too, the U.S. policy and stance have undergone significant changes in the last two decades but this has been confined more in the realm of U.S.' counter-terrorism effort. As such even when the U.S. has been critical of Pakistan and has cut out financial packages to the country, it has enjoyed good understanding and accommodation with Pakistan on Afghanistan, to the extent of intensive negotiation and active collaboration for the facilitation of the return of the Taliban in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from that country.

Certain questions related to specific area of collaboration between the two countries were raised in the thesis. **Have there been substantive changes in the level of collaboration between India and the U.S. on counter-terrorism?** The answer to the question is in the positive. India had long suffered the painful consequences of terrorist activities and terrorism and this was not much appreciated by the U.S. in the 1990s. However, both the countries are on the same page on the threat posed by terrorism especially in the backdrop of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the U.S. There have been a very high level of cooperation and collaboration between the two countries and India has been able to garner the support of the U.S. on terrorism related aspects and issues, emanating from Pakistan. It has also been possible for India to achieve the active support of the U.S. in the UN and other international forums against Pakistan, especially in the context of designating some of the prominent terrorist groups as such and build up international opinion against them and their sponsors. Both the U.S. and India have been able to scale up and infuse qualitative collaboration against terrorism and terrorist groups and we see a very high level of convergence in this regard.

Yet another research question asked if India and the U.S. have been able to overcome the structural and legal constraints for achieving enhanced cooperation in the civil nuclear domain. The answer to this question is complex. India has received the support of the U.S. in overcoming the sanctions imposed in the wake of the Pokhran-II nuclear tests. The civil nuclear cooperation as such was expected to be revitalized. However, due to a number of legal issues related to full scope safeguards, it has not been possible for the two countries to achieve cooperation at a desired level. In fact, despite the support of the U.S., India has not been able to become part of the nuclear suppliers group though India has been able to access the

international nuclear market and has received waiver and exceptions for its nuclear facilities for peaceful uses.

Last two questions raised in this thesis is about **the conduct of defence and security cooperation between India and the U.S. and approach and outlook of the two countries toward Indo-Pacific region**. Chapter 5 and 6 of the thesis were devoted to the examination of these two questions. The answer is that the two countries have strengthened their defence ties and security cooperation. A lot of agreements have been inked to facilitate defence cooperation and mechanisms at the highest levels of the Governments of the two countries has been established. Defence purchases from the U.S. has been prioritized by India. However, this has not meant ending of defence relations with Russia. Despite the reservations openly expressed by the U.S. Government, India has gone ahead with defence purchases with Russia. Moreover, the differing approach of India and the U.S. over Russia-Ukraine war has shown that there are effective limitations on the India-U.S. relations. The bilateral content in the relationship has grown richer over the years but independent course of foreign policy choices and priorities of India cannot be discounted by the U.S.

With regard to the outlook towards the Indo-Pacific region, the two sides have been able to achieve a great degree of convergence. The interests of the two countries converge on Indo-Pacific region and therefore both the countries have achieved a lot of synergy in their approach toward the region. However, this has not been enough to overcome the differences amongst the partners and some of the allies of the U.S. in the region. There is no unanimity on a definitive approach towards China. India, Australia and Japan are not confident about steadfastness of the U.S.' commitment to the security of Indo-Pacific region. They are also wary of causing any provocation to

China. Besides, India is always chary of aligning itself with any country through an alliance system as this would undermine its independence. Therefore, we may say that both India and the U.S. are engaged in building framework of cooperation but they are not necessarily aligned to each other's approach and stance towards China in the region.