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Revitalizing U.S.-India Ties: Recommendations for a More Resilient Partnership

BY

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Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing.¹ There are few relationships that have the potential to be as consequential to the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as to the future contours of the global order, as the U.S.-India partnership. After decades of positive momentum in this partnership, the past year has been a rocky one, which has exposed underlying fragility in the bilateral relationship. With the announcement of a framework for an interim trade deal between the United States and India, both nations now have an opportunity to reexamine our partnership and consider how best to put it on a more stable and enduring footing in the future. I commend the commission for taking up this important topic and for its interest in exploring the role Congress can play in advancing one of America's most consequential relationships.

I'd like to take a few moments to discuss the strategic underpinnings of the U.S.-India partnership, as well as the challenges and opportunities now facing policymakers in Washington and New Delhi. Finally, I would like to offer several recommendations to help rebuild a more secure and mutually beneficial partnership in the future.

I. A Partnership of Unique Consequence and Scale

In March 2021, I arrived in India with U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on his first official visit to the country. No one realized at the time, but India was already in the early throes of a devastating COVID-19 wave that would soon produce hundreds of thousands of new infections every day. Within weeks of the visit, the U.S. military surged to execute an enormous airlift, sending multiple planeloads of testing kits, masks, antiviral medicine, and the raw materials needed to produce life-saving vaccines.² The airlift was not merely an offer of unilateral assistance. It was also, as former U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken noted, a chance to pay forward the medical help India provided to the United States in the earliest days of the pandemic.³ As the domestic situations in both countries stabilized, the United States and India would soon

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² Travis Air Force Base, "Travis AFB to Deliver More Life-Saving COVID-19 Assistance to India," press release, April 30, 2021, <https://www.travis.af.mil/News/Display/Article/2591366/travis-abf-to-deliver-more-life-saving-covid-19-assistance-to-india/>.

³ Reuters, "Secretary of State Antony Blinken Says the U.S. and India Are United in Tackling Covid," CNBC, May 28, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/05/29/antony-blinken-says-the-us-and-india-are-united-in-tackling-covid.html>.

come together again—through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)—to deliver millions of vaccine doses to countries across the world.⁴

This story illustrates what make the U.S.-India partnership unique and immensely consequential. At its best, the U.S.-India partnership has a nearly unparalleled capacity to deliver technological ingenuity, industrial capacity, and human capital resources for the benefit of both nations and for partners around the world. Take, for example, the semiconductor industry—the United States leads the world in chip design, yet approximately 20 percent of the world’s chip design engineering talent is located in India.⁵ Similarly, as the world races to more fully harness the power of artificial intelligence, India and the United States each have distinctive, and potentially complementary, advantages in data and cutting-edge model generation. And for many U.S. companies seeking to reduce overdependence on Chinese supply chains, India’s vast manufacturing potential makes it a particularly important partner.

As authoritarian nations such as Russia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) align more closely, like-minded democracies around the world are facing new pressure to not only counterbalance authoritarian advancements but also to demonstrate that democracies can still deliver on the promise of economic growth, production, and prosperity. In the face of this generational challenge, democracies must, as my former colleagues Kurt Campbell and Rush Doshi have argued, leverage “allied scale” in order to compete more effectively.⁶ Equally important, democracies will need to scale their combined capabilities more quickly in order to blunt destabilizing Chinese military and technological developments over the next decade, a period of time that some officials have referred to as a “decisive decade.”⁷ A closer alignment between the United States and India will be essential to both of these ambitions.

II. Reluctant Strategic Interdependence: The Beijing Backdrop

U.S. and Indian leaders have frequently pointed to the importance of their partnership. President Donald Trump has acknowledged the United States has a “very special relationship with India,” while Prime

⁴ U.S. Embassy in Singapore, “The Wilmington Declaration Joint Statement for the Leaders of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States,” press release, September 23, 2024, <https://sg.usembassy.gov/the-wilmington-declaration-joint-statement-from-the-leaders-of-australia-india-japan-and-the-united-states/>.

⁵ ANI, “Around 20% of World’s Chip Design Engineers Based in India, Key to Global Semiconductor Ecosystem: Report,” *Economic Times*, September 2, 2025, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/electronics/around-20-of-worlds-chip-design-engineers-based-in-india-key-to-global-semiconductor-ecosystem-report/articleshow/123645768.cms?from=mdr>.

⁶ Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi, “Underestimating China,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 10, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/underestimating-china>.

⁷ U.S. Department of War, ““The Decisive Decade”: Remarks by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III at the Reagan National Defense Forum (As Delivered),” press release, December 3, 2022, <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/3235391/the-decisive-decade-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-at-the-r/>.

Minister Narendra Modi recently referred to the U.S.-India partnership as one of “limitless potential.”⁸ Yet despite this lofty rhetoric, U.S. and Indian officials have said relatively less about the strategic rationale for this partnership or the value both nations derive from strategic interdependence.

The United States and India share many similarities as large, multi-ethnic democracies, and our relationship is grounded in strong economic cooperation, people-to-people ties, and shared innovation. Yet the strategic challenges posed by a rising PRC have always been an important backdrop propelling the U.S.-India partnership forward.⁹ At its core, the US-India partnership is rooted in a simple and profound interest. The United States and India share an interest in ensuring that the Indo-Pacific region is not dominated by an authoritarian power and that the preponderance of the region’s economic, technological, and military resources are marshalled by like-minded democracies.

For the United States, failure to secure this interest would represent an unacceptable threat to America’s ability to freely trade and operate in a region of vital importance. As the 2026 National Defense Strategy argues, “The American people’s security, freedom, and prosperity are . . . directly linked to our ability to trade and engage from a position of strength in the Indo-Pacific.”¹⁰ And for India, its vision of playing a leading role in a multipolar global order can only be achieved by ensuring that Beijing is unable to dominate the Asian region.¹¹ For both countries, this shared interest is existential, and it necessitates a closer partnership. Neither India nor the United States can balance China alone.

Despite America’s considerable military, technological, and economic power, a partnership with India provides unique advantages: **geography and scale.** India is now the world’s most populous nation, its fastest-growing economy, one of its largest arms importers, and an emerging technological powerhouse. No other close Asian partner can provide the United States similar advantages of scale and growth potential over the next 20 years. Even as many traditional U.S. allies face the prospect of serious demographic challenges, India’s working-age population will increase over the next two decades by approximately the same amount as the current combined working-age total of both Japan and Germany.¹² In the face of PRC chokeholds over electronic supply chains, dominance of military shipbuilding and industrial robotics, and

⁸ Shashank Mattoo and Rezaul H. Laskar, “Donald Trump Shifts Tone, Says US Ties with India Are ‘Special,’” *Hindustan Times*, September 7, 2025, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/donald-trump-shifts-tone-says-us-ties-with-india-are-special-10175718984446.html>; Sanstuti Nath, “PM Modi’s “Natural Partners” Reply to Trump’s Post on India-US Trade Talks,” NDTV, September 10, 2025, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/also-looking-forward-to-speaking-to-us-president-says-pm-modi-on-trumps-social-media-post-9248429>.

⁹ Tanvi Madan, “The Pitfalls and Promise of a US-India Partnership Driven by China,” Brookings Institution, February 27, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-pitfalls-and-promise-of-a-us-india-partnership-driven-by-china/>.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of War, *2026 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (U.S. Department of War, January 23, 2026), <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

¹¹ PTI, “Multipolar World Is Feasible Only by a Multipolar Asia: Jaishankar,” *Times of India*, May 15, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/multipolar-world-is-feasible-only-by-a-multipolar-asia-jaishankar/articleshow/100241064.cms>.

¹² Anirudha Dutta, *India: Leveraging a Population Boom for Growth* (Capital Group, April 3, 2025), <https://www.capitalgroup.com/institutional/insights/articles/india-leveraging-population-boom-for-growth.html>.

rapid investments in frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, India's ability to help the United States generate "allied scale" cannot be ignored.¹³

Equally important, as the PRC expands its military activities throughout the Indo-Pacific region, India could play a larger role enhancing military deterrence on the western edge of the Indo-Pacific region. India is the only large, like-minded military power that shares a land border on China's western flank, and as the largest naval power in the Indian Ocean, it has the ability to monitor maritime chokepoints or conduct sea denial activities in strategically vital sea lanes. India could also help boost defense industrial capacity in the Indo-Pacific region, working with the United States and its allies to ramp up production of items such as artillery or munitions.

For India, a closer partnership with the United States provides the advantage of **power acceleration**, enhancing India's defensive position at home, accelerating its role in regional and global fora, and enabling it to more quickly leapfrog ahead in frontier technologies. While India has demographic advantages over the PRC in the long run, China has already accrued political, industrial, and military advantages that will be hard for India to match in the near term. For India, there are few partnerships that provide as much benefit as the United States does in accelerating New Delhi's ability to compete with Beijing across multiple domains.

Over the past two decades, the United States has repeatedly supported India's ability to be a rule shaper in the international order, including through supporting India's membership in groups such as the Wasenaar Arrangement (WA) and enhancing the role of multilateral groups like the Quad. The United States has also helped India accelerate its military modernization and enhance its defensive position, selling key capabilities such as long-range surveillance assets, agreeing to transfer cutting-edge jet engine technology, and deepening interoperability between the U.S. and Indian militaries. And finally, the United States has invested in a closer technology partnership in fields such as semiconductors, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence, including through research and development, capital investments, and workforce training.

III. A Steadily Deepening Security Partnership

India and the United States have a long-standing relationship, but our bilateral partnership has accelerated significantly over the past 25 years, in no small part due to growing alignment over the challenges posed by Beijing. In 2000, when former President Bill Clinton became the first U.S. president to visit India in 22 years, annual bilateral trade between our two countries was only around \$18 billion.¹⁴ Today, it stands at over \$200 billion, a number that is only poised to increase with the recent announcement of an interim trade

¹³ Campbell and Doshi, "Underestimating China."

¹⁴ "India-U.S. Trade Relations," Embassy of India in Washington, D.C., <https://www.indiagov.org/indusrel/trade.htm>.

deal that is poised to reduce tariffs across a swath of industrial and agricultural goods.¹⁵ In 2000, India was still under the specter of U.S. sanctions as a result of its 1998 nuclear tests, severely limiting potential exports of sensitive technologies. Today, the United States has not only officially removed decades-old restrictions limiting engagement with prominent Indian nuclear institutions, but the United States and India have also agreed to explore the potential for U.S.-designed civilian nuclear reactors to be built in India.¹⁶

The U.S.-India defense partnership has also accelerated in recent decades, especially in the aftermath of the deadly 2020 Galwan Valley crisis between India and the PRC. Today, while the United States and India do not have a formal alliance, the defense partnership has taken on many functions that are not dissimilar to those of U.S. alliances. These include:

- Information sharing, including the conclusion of a Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement that enables sharing of geospatial data;¹⁷
- Defense industrial base integration, such as through completion of a Security of Supply Arrangement and a Roadmap for U.S.-India Defense Industrial Cooperation;¹⁸
- Sophisticated joint training and exercises, including the participation of a U.S. B-1B strategic bomber in the most recent Cope India 2025 exercises, incorporation of unmanned systems into the 2025 iteration of Tiger Triumph, and combined P-8 maritime domain awareness patrols in the Indian Ocean;¹⁹ and
- Enhanced operational coordination between the U.S. and Indian militaries, such as through the placement of Indian officers at U.S. military commands and through India's incorporation into multilateral military task forces including the Combined Military Forces.²⁰

¹⁵ “India Trade Summary,” Office of the United States Trade Representative, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia/india>.

¹⁶ The White House, “United States-India Joint Statement,” press release, February 6, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2026/02/united-states-india-joint-statement/>.

¹⁷ Indian Ministry of External Affairs, “India-US sign BECA empowering India’s military valour,” press release, October 26, 2020, <https://indbiz.gov.in/india-us-sign-beca-empowering-indias-military-valour/>.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of War, “DoD, India Ministry of Defence Enter into Security of Supply Arrangement,” press release, August 22, 2024, <https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3880791/dod-india-ministry-of-defence-enter-into-security-of-supply-arrangement/>; “Roadmap for U.S.-India Defense Industrial Cooperation,” U.S. Department of War, June 5, 2023, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Jun/21/2003244834/-1/-1/0/ROADMAP-FOR-US-INDIA-DEFENSE-INDUSTRIAL-COOPERATION-FINAL.PDF>.

¹⁹ Pacific Air Forces, “B-1 Participates in Cope India,” press release, April 12, 2023, <https://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Photos/igphoto/2003200766/>; U.S. Navy, “U.S.-Indian Forces Go High-Tech at Tiger Triumph 2025,” press release, April 10, 2025, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/4151278/us-indian-forces-go-high-tech-at-tiger-triumph-2025/>; U.S. 7th Fleet, “U.S., Indian Navies Conduct Bilateral Training Near Diego Garcia,” press release, October 27, 2025, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/4325918/us-indian-navies-conduct-bilateral-training-near-diego-garcia/>.

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement on the Fifth Annual India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue,” press release, November 10, 2023, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-fifth-annual-india-u-s-22-ministerial-dialogue/>.

This is a stunning pace of change in a relatively short amount of time. And it is particularly notable that despite tensions in the bilateral relationship over the past year, U.S.-India military activities have continued apace.

IV. Lingering Challenges

Multiple challenges have come to the fore of the U.S.-India partnership over the past 12 months—legacy partnerships, immigration difficulties, and protectionism—all of which represent well-known irritants the United States and India need to address. The question of how best to manage U.S. and Indian legacy relationships—with Pakistan and Russia, respectively—is one that will have particular bearing on the future trajectory of the U.S.-India security partnership.

The U.S. security partnership with Pakistan and India’s military relationship with Russia have often created complexities for the U.S.-India partnership, with events such as U.S. arms sales to Islamabad or Indian defense purchases from Moscow fueling problematic headlines on both sides.²¹ Over the past handful of years, however, both the U.S.-Pakistan and India-Russia partnerships have narrowed and evolved.

The Trump administration’s decision to suspend security assistance to Islamabad in 2018, and to more openly acknowledge India’s right to self-defense following the 2019 Pulwama attacks, marked a shift in the U.S. approach toward Pakistan.²² While the United States and Pakistan continued to cooperate on counterterrorism issues in the following years, U.S. military assistance has declined significantly since the post-9/11 era. Similarly, while Russia remains one of India’s most important defense suppliers, Russia’s share of Indian defense imports has fallen from 76 percent in 2009–2013 to approximately 36 percent in 2019–2023.²³ In contrast to the brisk pace of annual military exercises conducted by the United States and India, India’s flagship exercise with Russia, Indra, is typically conducted on a biennial basis. And while defense has featured prominently in recent Indian summits with partners such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, the defense announcements following the July 2024 and December 2025 India-Russia summits were relatively circumscribed.²⁴

²¹ Reuters, “India’s Friction with U.S. Rises over Planned Purchase of Russian S-400 Defense Systems,” CNBC, January 15, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/15/india-us-friction-rises-over-russian-s-400-defense-systems.html>; Chidanand Rajghatta, “Trump Lines Up New \$686 Million Military Aid Package for Pakistan,” *Times of India*, December 11, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/trump-lines-up-new-686-million-military-aid-package-for-pakistan/articleshow/125913853.cms>.

²² Harsh V. Pant and Vivek Mishra, “India-US Relations: Pakistan Re-Emerges in Trump 2.0,” *Washington Quarterly* 48 no. 3 (September 29, 2025): 69–85, https://bpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/1/2181/files/2025/09/TWQ_48_3_PantMishra.pdf.

²³ Pieter D. Wezeman et al., *Trends in International Arms Transfers* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, March 2024), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs_2403_at_2023.pdf.

²⁴ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Joint Statement Following the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit,” press release, December 5, 2025, https://www.meaindia.gov.in/Images/CPV/LS2076_En.pdf; Prime Minister’s Office, Government of India, “Joint Statement Following the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit,” press release, July 9, 2024, https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/joint-statement-following-the-22nd-india-russia-annual-summit/.

Despite the evolution of U.S.-Pakistan and India-Russia defense ties, several issues still have potential to create friction between the United States and India. These include:

- **Ill-timed, high-level visits and military engagements that generate difficult political optics.** For example, U.S. officials publicly noted “disappointment” regarding the timing of Prime Minister Modi’s 2024 visit to Moscow, which occurred during a high-profile NATO summit being hosted in Washington, D.C.²⁵ Indian observers have also been alarmed by recent high-profile engagements between the Trump administration and Pakistani leaders.²⁶
- **Major sales or purchases of military capabilities that either the United States or India believe create zero-sum tradeoffs with their defensive needs or with ongoing areas of bilateral military cooperation.** For example, Indian officials have voiced frustration with continued U.S. support for Pakistan’s F-16 program, which they see as directed against India.²⁷
- **Concerns about adversarial access to sensitive technologies.** Recent U.S.-India joint statements, for example, have emphasized the importance of closer alignment on exports controls and preventing the “leakage of sensitive and dual-use technologies.”²⁸

If or as the U.S. or India share more sensitive information, technologies, or deepen their operational coordination, the need to make difficult tradeoffs between the U.S.-India partnership and these legacy relationships could grow. Neither Washington nor New Delhi should be expected to offer the other a veto over its foreign partnerships; the United States will continue to see merit in strengthening Pakistan’s role as a regional counterterrorism partner, while New Delhi will likely continue to see its relationship with Russia as a source of geopolitical optionality. Deeper military cooperation, however, typically necessitates a higher degree of trust and certainty demands that sensitive activities or capabilities be fenced off from military adversaries. This will increasingly require frank conversations between Washington and New Delhi about the specific military activities, transactions, or forms of technology cooperation that each partner views as triggering unacceptable risk to its interests.

Equally important, in the aftermath of an exceptionally difficult year in the U.S.-India relationship, it will be important for both Washington and New Delhi to keep in mind the long-term geopolitical trajectory of their interests in Pakistan and Russia. The trendlines are clear. Pakistan plays a less central role in U.S.

²⁵ Rezaul H. Laskar, “India Defends Ties with Russia amid Criticism from US Officials,” *Hindustan Times*, July 25, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-defends-ties-with-russia-amid-criticism-from-usofficials-101721913510287.html>.

²⁶ “Huge Setback: Congress Reacts to Donald Trump-Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir Meeting in US,” *Hindustan Times*, June 18, 2025, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/huge-setback-congress-reacts-to-donald-trump-pakistan-army-chief-asim-munir-meeting-in-us-101750257259456.html>.

²⁷ Nirupama Subramanian, “Why India Has Lashed out at the US over Its F-16 Package to Pakistan,” *Indian Express*, September 27, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/us-pakistan-f-16-package-india-jaishankar-concern-8175141/>.

²⁸ Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Joint Fact Sheet: India and the United States Continue to Chart an Ambitious Course for the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology,” press release, July 17, 2024, <https://www.meaindia.gov.in/Images/jfactsheet.pdf>.

strategy in a world in which the United States is reducing its military presence across South Asia and the Middle East. Russia's international isolation and increasingly close partnership with Beijing limits its long-term ability to serve as an independent pole in Indian foreign policy. Despite the frustrations of the past year, it will be important for both capitals to avoid over rotating toward historic patterns of interactions with Islamabad and Moscow that no longer align with their long-term geostrategic influence.

V. Looking Ahead: Policy Objectives and Recommendations

With the recent announcement of a new interim trade framework and the U.S. decision to lift Russian oil tariffs, the United States and India now have an opportunity to move beyond a disappointing and difficult period in their bilateral relationship.²⁹ However, the process of rebuilding trust in the bilateral relationship may be slow and ongoing trade negotiations could be difficult. Looking forward, defense and technology cooperation can provide a ballast in the bilateral relationship, anchoring bilateral ties as U.S. and Indian policymakers continue to work through other challenging policy conversations.

Over the next year, U.S. security policy toward India should focus on four primary objectives:

Restore Indian confidence in U.S. support for its military modernization. The May 2025 India-Pakistan crisis created deep concern for New Delhi on two fronts. As some analysts have noted, it both accelerated internal debates about India's requirements for high-end conflicts while reigniting lingering concerns about U.S. reliability as a security partner.³⁰ The United States could begin to restore trust by considering several steps.

- a. Prioritize scheduling the next U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, which has not been held since November 2023, as quickly as possible. Convening this meeting will provide a needed opportunity for U.S. and Indian national security leaders to identify a shared near-term agenda for the security partnership.
- b. Congress could encourage the Departments of Defense and State to conduct risk assessments with the aim of identifying additional advanced military capabilities that could be transferred to India. These assessments should focus on capabilities that could enhance India's deterrent posture vis-à-vis the PRC and reduce its reliance on Russian technology, such as long-range fires, advanced fighter aircraft, integrated air and missile defense, air and ground mobility systems, and undersea technologies.

²⁹ The White House, "United States-India Joint Statement."

³⁰ Sameer Lalwani, Shailender Arya, and David Brostoff, "Deep Learning From Operation Sindoar: Five Takeaways from a Four-Day War," War On Rocks, January 22, 2026, <https://warontherocks.com/2026/01/deep-learning-from-operation-sindoar-five-takeaways-from-a-four-day-war/>; "India Is Alone...?: Security Analyst Says Not One Big Power Showed Unequivocal Support Post Op Sindoar," Business Today, May 16, 2025, <https://www.businessstoday.in/india/story/india-is-alone-security-analyst-says-not-one-big-power-showed-unequivocal-support-post-op-sindoar-476552-2025-05-16>.

- c. Congress could request an annual report on the India-China military balance that includes recommendations on new capabilities, expanded operational coordination, and enhanced information sharing that would help India address key deficiencies in its military posture along the Line of Actual Control and in the Indian Ocean. This report could also be shared with Indian counterparts.

Reenergize defense industry and defense technology cooperation in areas of near-term mutual benefit to the United States and India. Too often, U.S.-India defense industry collaboration has stalled because it has focused on capabilities that are not shared priorities for both countries or on ambitious projects with overly long development timelines. Instead, the United States and India should focus their efforts on enhancing existing defense trade and identify near-term technology wins that can be fielded more rapidly.

- a. Operationalize and identify funding support for the Autonomous Systems Industrial Alliance announced during the February 2025 summit between President Trump and Prime Minister Modi, which could help address both countries' desire to accelerate drone manufacturing. U.S. and Indian policymakers could commit to identifying new joint ventures in both aerial and undersea technologies that could be announced at the next leaders' summit.
- b. Accelerate U.S.-India efforts to more rapidly codevelop and field novel defense technologies by recommitting to the India-U.S. Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS X). This could include formally designating the director of the Defense Innovation Unit as the U.S. lead for this initiative to ensure high-level attention to its work; committing to executing two new joint challenges for U.S. and Indian technology companies in 2026; and prioritizing the establishment of a public-private pooled investment fund to help INDUS X companies scale their technologies.
- c. Congress could consider encouraging the negotiation of a U.S.-India Defense Trade Cooperation treaty, as well as supporting legislation, modelled after similar arrangements between United States and Australia. This effort could help establish a "white list" of certain defense articles and defense entities that could be preapproved for license-free defense trade between the United States and India, putting U.S. companies in a more competitive position in India's increasingly competitive arms import market.

Establish more frequent high-level bilateral dialogues to align China policy. The U.S.-India partnership is most effective when Washington and New Delhi see eye to eye on China policy and align their approaches toward Beijing. With both President Trump and Prime Minister Modi planning to meet Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2026, there is a heightened potential for misunderstanding or misalignment unless both countries intentionally elevate their dialogues on China policy.

- a. Prioritize frequent calls between senior U.S. and Indian leaders both before and after high-level meetings with Chinese officials, both to socialize new shifts in policy or new U.S.-China initiatives as

well as to encourage closer alignment between U.S. and Indian leaders in their approaches to key policy issues.

- b. Consider establishing a high-level interagency dialogue, led at the deputy secretary level, to exchange perspectives with India on Chinese activities, investments, and security assistance in regions of particular concern for both countries, such as the Indian Ocean region and the Western Hemisphere.
- c. Congressional leaders could increase the pace of Congressional visits to India, with an aim toward encouraging a broader dialogue on the U.S. approach to China policy with Indian politicians, national security experts, and business leaders.

Leverage the Quad to expand India's operational coordination with the United States and like-minded allies. Recent tensions between Washington and New Delhi could dampen efforts to be ambitious in expanding sensitive operational coordination between the U.S. and Indian militaries. However, progress in India's bilateral defense ties with both Japan and Australia may open the aperture for new security cooperation among Quad partners.

- a. Prioritize efforts to coordinate with India and other Quad partners on dates for the next Quad Leaders' Summit and emphasize the U.S. desire to explore potential security-focused deliverables in the next meeting.
- b. Work with Australia and Japan to identify existing bilateral and trilateral exercises or training activities that could be expanded to include India, especially in areas of shared interest such as logistics, maritime surveillance, and anti-submarine warfare. These engagements need not be formally branded as Quad exercises and Quad partners could determine their participation on a case-by-case basis.
- c. Identify new opportunities to operationalize Quad activities across both the western and eastern Indo-Pacific, including through the Quad's Indo-Pacific Logistics Network and coordinated air and maritime surveillance patrols with Quad partners in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea.

Conclusion

The United States and India have a vested interest not only in their partnership, but also in each other's success. In many ways, what makes this partnership so unique—and at times so difficult—is the many similarities between the two countries. They are both nations that prize and value their independence because they had to struggle so mightily to achieve it. They are democracies that often wrestle to manage the complexities of a multiethnic society. And they are both countries with young people who are hungry, and even impatient, for progress and innovation. While the past year has exposed underlying fragility in our bilateral partnership, Washington and New Delhi now have an opportunity to recommit to build a more sustainable and resilient partnership for the future.