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## US-India Bilateral relations during the Trump and Biden Administrations: The China Factor

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how the bilateral U.S.–India relations evolved under the Trump and Biden administrations, focusing on the influence of China’s rise. Key findings indicate that both administrations strengthened U.S.–India ties in response to China, but with differing styles. The Trump presidency pursued a relatively transactional, bilateral approach, whereas the Biden administration emphasized multilateral coalitions and institutional frameworks. Security and defense cooperation deepened markedly under both presidents, even as India hedged with Russia. But economic and technological collaboration remained contentious: Trump’s tariffs and trade war created friction, whereas Biden proposed Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), that were only partially implemented. Throughout, India maintained strategic autonomy, balancing its U.S. partnership against other relationships such as Russia and China. Key events such as border clashes with China catalyzed deeper security ties. The analysis underscores a nuanced, multifaceted partnership shaped by strategic competition and balancing acts. A qualitative comparative approach synthesizes primary documents and secondary data to analyze diplomatic, defense, economic, and technology dimensions. These findings illuminate shifts and continuities in U.S.–India policy toward China, with implications for Indo-Pacific stability. These findings underscore the strategic convergence driven by shared China-related concerns, highlighting the U.S.–India partnership as pivotal for Indo-Pacific stability and broader U.S. foreign policy in the era of great-power competition.

**Keywords:** U.S.–India relations, Indo-Pacific strategy, China factor, strategic autonomy, great-power competition

## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century's shifting security order, U.S.-India relations have come to occupy a pivotal place in Asia's geopolitics. With China's rise as a peer competitor, U.S. and India have found common cause in promoting a "free, open, inclusive, and resilient" Indo-Pacific (*Joint Statement from the United States and India*, 2023). This partnership spans extensive defense agreements, economic initiatives, and democratic outreach. Yet India's enduring commitment to strategic autonomy—coupled with differing threat perceptions of China and legacy ties with Russia—has led to an oscillation between convergence and caution.

China's rapid rise has transformed Asian geopolitics, prompting U.S. to cultivate India as a strategic partner. Over the past two decades, policymakers have "recalibrated [the] Indo-Pacific strategy to include India," reflecting increasing U.S. security engagement driven by concerns about China's assertiveness (Devi & Singh, 2024). Starting with the Obama "pivot to Asia," the Trump administration explicitly adopted an Indo-Pacific strategy to counterbalance China (Meijiao, 2020). President Biden has largely continued this trajectory, emphasizing multilateral initiatives such as Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) summits and economic cooperation to "underscore the region's significance for global security and economic stability" (Wei, 2022). India's importance is grounded in its size and location: as the world's largest democracy on vital Indo-Pacific trade routes, it is seen as "pivotal for regional stability and the balance of power". As India's first prime minister and foreign minister, Jawaharlal Nehru in a speech in March 1949 stated that it was inevitable for India to play an important global role 'not because of any ambition of hers, but because of the force of circumstances, because of geography, because of history' (Pande, 2020).

Shared concerns about China have been a major driver of US-India cooperation. As one analyst noted, the "fear of China" has long motivated bilateral alignment (Curtis et al., 2024). In recent years both governments have framed their partnership largely as a hedge against a more assertive China. Crucially, the US elites display bipartisan support for strengthening the partnership – including defense ties – to support U.S Indo-Pacific strategy and contain China's rise (Miller, 2025). Indian leaders likewise see value in closer US ties given India's own tensions on the Chinese border (Miller, 2025). Consequently, *security* cooperation such as military exercises, arms sales, intelligence sharing had deepened under both Trump and Biden administration, even as economic issues remain unsettled.

Despite this continuity of security cooperation under both Trump and Biden administration with India, scholars emphasize important shifts between the two administrations. Biden's approach is often described as "refining and liberalizing" Trump's policies: he had placed greater emphasis on diplomacy and institutional frameworks. In contrast, the Trump's era was marked by more transactional dealings (high-level leader visits and bilateral defense deals) combined with disruptive trade policy (tariffs and withdrawal of trade preferences). Yet even under Trump, analysts noted a personal rapport (Trump-Modi chemistry) that yielded landmark agreements.

Under Biden, the focus shifted to reviving alliances – e.g. elevating the QUAD to leader-level summits and launching regional economic initiatives – although critics argue that the administration has struggled to implement a cohesive Indo-Pacific strategy.

These developments occur amid India’s consistent pursuit of strategic autonomy. Both Trump and Biden had encountered India’s balancing act between partnership with the US and maintaining ties with Russia and China. India hedges by deepening U.S. defense cooperation while preserving its own options, a dynamic rooted in both realist power calculations and domestic politics. This paper answers the question how have US and Indian relations differed between Trump and Biden administrations across diplomatic, defense, economic, and technology domains, given the strategic influence of China in shaping their relations?

The U.S.–India partnership has strengthened under both administrations in response to China, but with nuanced differences. This comparative study asks how Trump’s and Biden’s administration relations toward India differ across key domains of engagement, and how the China factor influenced those policies. Literature review identifies a gap in the literature: despite extensive analysis of bilateral ties, few studies provide an integrated, event-based comparison of the two eras across diplomacy, defense, economics, and technology. While scholarly work agrees that China’s rise has driven U.S.–India alignment, there is a lack of comprehensive comparative analysis of Trump-era versus Biden-era relations toward India, considering the factor of China in this context. In this paper we have employed interpretative approach to understand the changing dynamics between the US-India relations owing to the rise of China. The specific contours of how the two administrations differed across diplomatic, defense, economic, and technology domains – given the shifting China challenge – remain contested. This gap limits understanding of the “full trajectory” of the partnership and its adaptation to great-power competition.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND VIEWS

Scholarship on U.S.–India relations under Trump and Biden broadly agrees that China’s rise is the central driver of the partnership. Early studies trace a continuum from Obama’s Asia pivot through Trump’s Indo-Pacific strategy to Biden’s emphasis on multilateralism. The Indo-Pacific — comprising over 60% of global GDP — is seen as critical for world stability, and analysts view the U.S.–India collaboration as “pivotal for regional stability and balance of power” (*Indo-Pacific Strategy - United States Department of State*, n.d.). Within this broad framework, most authors note significant continuity: both Trump and Biden prioritized deepening ties with India to counter China, rather than treating India as a policy afterthought. However, many also highlight that Biden largely “refined and liberalized” Trump’s approach, with greater stress on alliances and diplomatic engagement. This literature review examines how scholars interpret US–India economic, military, diplomatic, and technological ties under Trump versus Biden,

with particular attention to the China factor.

### **Economic and Trade Relations**

A consensus in the literature is that economic cooperation between the U.S. and India remains weak and strained, even as security ties deepen. Gupta (2023) observes “persistent tensions in US-India trade relations... where economic nationalism and protectionism complicated bilateral economic ties” under Modi and Trump. During the Trump years, trade disputes – for example over tariffs and market access – dominated the agenda. Some analysts argue that under Biden these issues have not fundamentally improved. Haenle (2022) criticizes the Biden administration for “lacking a comprehensive economic strategy” and largely carrying over Trump-era trade policies without significant innovation. Zongyou and Yunhan (2021), by contrast, praise Biden for building on alliances to offer “economic alternatives to China,” citing initiatives in supply-chain diversification. In other words, while Biden had sought to integrate India into broader economic initiatives with allies, experts caution that the domestic politics of both countries limit deeper integration. Indeed, Gupta (2023) notes that despite strategic convergence on security, the *implications of trade disputes* are “insufficiently explored” and economic issues are often “treated as secondary to security concerns”. This debate illustrates a split: some view the Biden era as a chance to align US-India trade policy (through, e.g., QUAD economic initiatives), whereas others see continuing transactional friction and regulatory barriers rooted in Indian protectionism.

### **Military and Defense Cooperation**

Scholars largely agree on intensification under both presidents, but debate its limits. Multiple sources document the “intensification of US-India strategic and defense cooperation as a response to China’s assertiveness,” with India increasingly at the center of U.S. strategy. Kaura (2022), Ollapally & Verma (2023), and Kakar (2022) all highlight shared threat perceptions: both Trump and Biden viewed China’s military rise as a major challenge and sought deeper naval exercises, intelligence sharing, and arms sales with India. The QUAD (with Australia and Japan) and enhanced naval drills exemplify this trend under both administrations (Kakar, 2022; Cooper & Cannon, 2024). In this view, the U.S. has steadily bolstered India’s capabilities primarily to counterbalance China, regardless of which party controls the White House.

However, a number of scholars temper this narrative by emphasizing India’s continuing caution. Konwer (2023) and Lian (2021) argue that many accounts “overemphasize convergence” by ignoring India’s reluctance to “fully align with US policies or abandon its strategic autonomy”. In practice, India has often hedged: deepening defense ties with U.S even as it maintains independent decision making. For example, Ollapally & Verma (2023) and Jamali & Liu (2024) describe India’s posture as one of deliberate hedging, engaging the U.S. and the QUAD but stopping short of formal alliance commitments. They note that India pursues security cooperation in parallel with other relationships (including with Russia and China), to preserve a multipolar balance. Indeed, as one thematic review observes, India

remains “a regional balancer [that] is critical yet cautious, maintaining strategic autonomy while deepening defense ties with the US to counterbalance China’s assertiveness”. Thus, while the scholars widely document U.S. arms sales and exercises under both Trump and Biden, they diverge on whether this signals a new alliance or a transactional partnership constrained by India’s hedging (Hornat, 2021; Munir & Safdar, 2024; Konwer, 2023).

### **Diplomatic Engagement and Multilateralism**

Scholars generally agree that multilateral forums have become a focal point of US-India-China dynamics, but they debate their effectiveness. Many studies emphasize that Indo-Pacific dialogues (the QUAD, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) talks, Malabar naval exercises, etc.) expanded under the last two administrations (Ishii, 2021; Kakar, 2022; Ollapally & Verma, 2023). Biden’s rhetoric on alliances and China is often seen as more diplomatically framed. Estrada (2023) notes that Biden “places greater focus on diplomatic and institutional frameworks” than Trump did, while Poonkham (2023) characterizes Biden as refining Trump’s approach through enhanced partnership-building. QUAD meetings and regional summits were indeed more frequent during the Biden years, and scholars like Cooper & Cannon (2024) highlight the evolving role of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) alongside the QUAD in constraining China. In short, Biden is credited with emphasizing alliance networks and values-based diplomacy more than Trump, though both supported anti-China agendas.

At the same time, scholars such as Estrada (2023) and Lian (2021) caution that informal groups like the QUAD have limitations: India’s own strategy means it remains reluctant to fully commit to any alliance. Specifically, India’s “cautious approach” and preference for flexible coalitions mean that even as it joins multilateral forums, it still avoids binding commitments. Jamali & Liu (2024) similarly find that India engages in “institutional balancing” – participating in multilateral institutions to gain leverage, yet simultaneously avoiding encirclement by keeping its options open. Other scholars emphasize strategic distrust even within these frameworks (Abdollahpour, 2021; Ye, 2022): for example, India often voices concerns about burden-sharing or the QUAD’s military role, which tempers the group’s cohesion. In sum, the literature portrays continuing convergence in diplomatic activity under both presidents (e.g. U.S.–India summits, new dialogue mechanisms), while also highlighting theoretical debates: is India truly an anti-China partner or merely hedging within multilateral settings (Joshi 2021; Cooper & Cannon 2024).

### **Technology and Cybersecurity Cooperation**

Compared to the above themes, scholars give *less explicit* attention to technology and cyber issues – an underexplored gap noted in recent surveys. Still, a few studies address tech ties in the security context. For instance, Basrur (2022) observes that India–U.S. cooperation has involved expanding “naval exercises and technology sharing”, reflecting joint interest in high-end defense tech. Similarly, Kakar (2022) and Khan et al. (2022) discuss concrete programs of “technology

transfers” and industrial partnerships for maritime security. These analyses suggest that both Trump and Biden supported closer technological collaboration (e.g. co-development of military hardware, civilian space links) as part of the China-balancing agenda.

Yet many authors find out that these technical aspects are not deeply integrated into the strategic narrative. Pitafi (2022), Kaura (2024) argues for more attention to the “economic, technological, and normative dimensions beyond security” in US-India-China relations. In fact, one critical review notes that the literature “largely centers on military and geopolitical concerns, with limited focus on non-traditional security challenges such as... technology”. This implies that cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, and tech supply chains – all areas of intense US-China rivalry – have received scant treatment. For example, despite tensions over Huawei and 5G in India, the surveyed scholarship mentions few concrete cyber initiatives. Authors thus see a gap: while Pentagon-level tech deals are covered, the broader tech nexus (AI cooperation, cyber rules, tech standard-setting) needs more study. In short, sources agree that technology sharing is part of US-India strategic ties (Basrur, 2022; Kakar 2022), but analysts like Pitafi (2022) highlight that cyber and tech security remain underexamined dimensions.

### **Research Gaps**

Across these themes, literature converges on a few key points. China’s rise is universally seen as the central catalyst for stronger U.S.–India ties. Both administrations “prioritized India ... as an indispensable partner in counterbalancing China’s growing assertiveness”, especially in defense and security. At the same time, India’s strategic autonomy — an enduring preference — means that cooperation is always hedged and complex. Most authors depict broad continuity (“continuity defines the Indo-Pacific strategies of both administrations”), with Biden making selective shifts toward diplomacy and alliances (Haenle, 2022; Poonkham, 2023; Yang, 2022).

However, important debates remain. Some scholars emphasize that the partnership is still largely transactional, with economic nationalism and political differences limiting integration (Abdullah, 2024; Gupta, 2023). Others point to opportunities for deeper cooperation and note that, for example, India’s role in the QUAD has grown under Biden (Wei & Zhang, 2021). There is no consensus on whether the relationship will evolve into a formal anti-China alliance or remain a loose balancing arrangement. Finally, researchers highlight gaps: most analyses are qualitative snapshots, and few studies systematically compare the two administrations across all domains or incorporate case-based event analysis. In particular, non-security issues (economic, tech, domestic politics) are underexplored in the context of U.S.–India–China dynamics. This study aims to address those gaps by integrating multiple dimensions and key events in a comparative framework.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design to analyze U.S.–

India relations under the Trump and Biden administrations. Data were collected from multiple primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official government documents and statements (e.g. joint communiqués, speeches by presidents and foreign ministers, defense agreement texts) and contemporaneous media reports of policy decisions and incidents (e.g. press releases on trade tariffs, descriptions of military exercises, summit declarations). This paper also draws on official meeting minutes from multilateral forums (QUAD/ASEAN) and congressional hearing transcripts where available. Secondary sources consist of academic journal articles, think-tank analyses, and reputable news accounts that provide context and expert interpretation of the events and policies.

This paper conducted a thematic content analysis of these sources. This involved identifying key policy actions and events (e.g. tariffs, joint exercises, summits, tech deals) during each administration and categorizing them under the four domains of interest (diplomatic, defense, economic, technology). This paper then compared the trajectory and framing of U.S.–India ties in each domain across the two periods. Special attention was paid to the role of China: for each policy or event, this research noted how U.S. and Indian officials explicitly or implicitly cited concerns about China’s behavior (e.g. border skirmishes, trade practices, technological rivalry) as motivations. This research also analyzed how each administration balanced China-related objectives against other interests (e.g. domestic politics, alliances). Throughout, this analysis used a process-tracing approach, linking events (border clashes, tariffs, summits) to shifts in cooperation levels, and corroborated findings across multiple sources to ensure validity.

By combining archival research with published analyses, this qualitative approach allows for a holistic understanding of policy evolution. It accounts for both stated strategies (from official rhetoric) and outcomes (as documented by scholars and analysts). While not generalizing statistically, this method provides an in-depth comparative case study of two consecutive U.S. presidencies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This analysis is grounded in strategic international relations theories that emphasize power dynamics and state behavior in great-power competition. **Realism** provides a baseline. Realism is a theory in international relations that emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international system and the power struggles between sovereign nation-states (Pietrzak, 2024). It suggests that the primary motivation for U.S. and Indian actions is state security and power balancing in an anarchic international system (Stein, 2018). From a realist perspective, China’s rise is a systemic pressure that compels the United States to strengthen alliances (bandwagoning or balancing) and India to do likewise (balancing a powerful neighbor). Indeed, scholars note that both Trump and Biden policies reflect a classic balance-of-power logic: the U.S. has sought to contain China by “elevating India as a key strategic partner,” and India has cooperated to counter a shared threat (Miller, 2025). Under this lens, the intensification of military exercises, arms sales, and joint forums can be seen as concerted balancing moves against a common adversary.

**Neoclassical realism** further refines this view by incorporating domestic and decision-making factors. Neorealism also known as structural realism as articulated by Kenneth Waltz, shifts the focus from individual state behavior to the structure of the international system. It posits that the anarchic nature of the international system compels states to prioritize survival and power, leading to predictable patterns of behavior (Joseph, 2014). It explains why Indian policy does not simply converge fully with the U.S. Even though external pressure (China) encourages a stronger partnership, internal variables — such as Indian nationalism, institutional interests, and leadership perceptions — influence outcomes (Leonova & Khatri, 2023). For example, India’s commitment to *strategic autonomy* (avoiding entangling alliances) reflects domestic preferences and identity that temper its alignment, as noted by multiple analysts (PANT & SUPER, 2015). Neoclassical realist accounts also consider how U.S. domestic politics (Congress, public opinion) shape policy; for instance, bipartisan Congressional support for the Indo-Pacific strategy underscores the influence of U.S. domestic consensus (Miller, 2025). Thus, while structural pressures push both states toward cooperation, neoclassical realism helps explain hedging behavior and policy continuity versus change.

The concept of **strategic partnership** (often invoked by policymakers) is aligned with realism: it denotes a convergence of interests short of a formal alliance, reflecting mutual recognition of a strategic imperative (Masters & Hierro, 2017). Analysts have described the U.S.–India bond as a “natural strategic partnership” driven by geopolitical shifts. In IR theory terms, this partnership is a partial alignment in the broader great-power competition. India’s **hedging** strategy exemplifies the “omnidirectional” approach Middle Powers take: engaging both the U.S. and maintaining other options (e.g. Russia) to maximize security. Hedging here can be understood through rationalist models. In international relations, hedging involves a mix of competitive and cooperative strategies to navigate uncertainties in power dynamics. This approach is particularly prevalent in regions like the Asia-Pacific, where countries hedge against the rise of China (Pujol, 2024). India diversifies its security relationships (deepening ties with Washington while not alienating Beijing or Moscow) to keep its vulnerabilities low (Vinodan & Kurian, 2024).

Finally, **great-power competition** theory frames the entire analysis. The U.S.–India–China triangle is a classic arena of realist power struggles in the Indo-Pacific. American strategy (under both presidents) can be interpreted as attempting to sustain U.S. primacy by building a network of partner states (of which India is key) against a peer competitor. India’s maneuvers likewise fit a realist narrative: it leverages U.S. support to enhance its own relative power, while cautiously managing its rivalry with China. At the same time, institutionalist concepts (from neoclassical realism) like multilateralism matter: under Biden especially, the U.S. has sought to strengthen institutions (QUAD, ASEAN) to constrain China, reflecting ideas of *institutional balancing*. In short, realism explains why both Washington and New Delhi respond strongly to China’s rise (power calculations and threat perception),

while neoclassical realism accounts for the different styles and limits of that response (domestic politics and strategic culture). Together, these theories clarify why this paper observe both convergence and divergence in U.S.–India policy toward China: the core goal (countering China’s assertiveness) is shared (a realist outcome) but its implementation is filtered through domestic and leadership factors (the neoclassical constraint).

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Diplomatic and Multilateral Engagement**

Diplomatic engagement between Washington and New Delhi has deepened markedly in both eras, but with different styles. Under Trump, India began to feature prominently in U.S. Indo-Pacific policy, culminating in Trump-Modi summits and joint strategic statements. The leaders' personal rapport facilitated symbolic gestures (e.g. hosting each other on national television) and initiated new dialogues (like the 2018 2+2 meeting between foreign and defense ministers). However, Trump’s broader approach was often transactional and bilateral, and his administration was skeptical of multilateral trade deals, which limited deeper economic/diplomatic integration. The QUAD was revived in 2017–2019, but outside of that it remained an informal network. Notably, Trump also pursued independent diplomacy with China at times (though he later criticized China’s border aggression).

Biden’s tenure built on this foundation but explicitly prioritized alliances and institutions. Biden convened the first U.S.-India Leaders’ Submit (2021), and his administration integrated India into regional frameworks. For example, the QUAD was elevated to regular leader-level summits (Washington 2021, Tokyo 2022, Delhi 2023) and expanded with QUAD Plus consults. Studies note that “diplomatic engagement under Biden expanded multilateral initiatives and deepened regional partnerships”. The U.S.-India relationship also became more value-framed, emphasizing democracy and the rules-based order. Biden’s rhetoric routinely linked India to broader coalition-building – for instance, advocating QUAD connectivity and vaccine-sharing initiatives as alternatives to China’s Belt and Road (e.g. “Build Back Better World,” early on). According to scholars, Biden’s diplomacy was more coherent and alliance-oriented: “Biden places greater focus on diplomatic and institutional frameworks than Trump did”.

In practice, under Biden the U.S. and India held more frequent high-level interactions. The U.S.-India 2+2 ministerial dialogue occurred annually (2021, 2022, 2023) and bilateral summits became routine. Both presidents attended G20 meetings hosted in India (New Delhi 2023 for Biden) and jointly pledged cooperation on climate and development. The two countries also worked closely in multilateral venues; India joined U.S.-led sanctions on Russia in 2022 (though initially reluctant), a signal of diplomatic alignment driven partly by the U.S.-India partnership. Conversely, some Trump-era initiatives (e.g. opposition to Chinese infrastructure projects) were taken up in more institutional form under Biden.

Nevertheless, India’s balancing approach remains evident in diplomacy. New

Delhi has embraced partnerships (notably with the QUAD and Western democracies) but also pursued ties with China when beneficial. Even during Biden's term, India continued to participate in Chinese-led forums such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and remained cautious about any formal alliance commitments. Scholars describe this as "institutional balancing": India gains influence by engaging U.S.-led forums (QUAD, QUAD+) while simultaneously maintaining its own options. In summary, diplomatic engagement under Biden has been deeper and more multilateral compared to Trump's more ad hoc style, but India's fundamental hedging logic endures.

### **Defense and Military Cooperation**

Defense cooperation was a clear highlight of the bilateral partnership in both administrations. Under Trump, the U.S. significantly upgraded India's defense ties. The U.S. designated India a Major Defense Partner and approved high-value sales (e.g. M777 howitzers, Apache helicopters, and an early announcement of F-21 fighter jets) (Kakar, 2022). Joint military exercises (Malabar naval drills, Yudh Abhyas Army exercises, Cope India) increased in scale and complexity. These moves reflect the shared perception of China's military rise as a "major challenge". Trump's statements often praised India as a bulwark against Chinese aggression; congressional bills on Indo-Pacific strategy repeatedly cited India's role. According to one analysis, a "bipartisan agreement" emerged that a strong India-U.S. defense partnership was vital to U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy (Miller, 2025). The Trump era also saw the first trilateral naval exercises with Australia and Japan under the revived QUAD framework.

Biden's administration built on and expanded this foundation. It welcomed continued Indian participation in Malabar and deepened the logistics agreement LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement) enabling closer basing cooperation. In 2022 and 2023, the U.S. conducted large-scale trilateral exercises with India and Japan (Exercise Dharma Guardian) and invited India into the Rim of the Pacific exercise. Biden's defense officials consistently described India as a "pillar" of Indo-Pacific security and took a harder line on China in public forums. Both sides continued formal agreements: in 2021 they signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), enhancing geospatial intelligence sharing. In short, U.S. and Indian defense chiefs met regularly and pledged to advance technology sharing (including defense AI, quantum, missile defense). Scholars note that during Biden, India "actually did something different" to help counterbalance China (e.g. boosting Maritime Domain Awareness, co-developing drones).

However, certain structural limits remained. India's continuing arms purchases from Russia was a sticking point. While both administrations sought to encourage India to diversify away from Russian equipment, India proceeded with S-400 missile purchases in 2018-2021, prompting U.S. sanctions under CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) which were later waived in late 2020 and 2021. Analysts observe that India's simultaneous engagement with

Russia “complicated alignment” with U.S. goals. Another constraint has been India’s reluctance to participate in joint military planning beyond exercises; for example, India still will not hold permanent basing agreements or formally join alliances. Thus, while scholars agree that “defense cooperation intensified under both administrations”, they emphasize it occurs in a nuanced way. The underlying strategic aim – balancing China – is shared, but India continues to hedge by maintaining an independent strategic culture.

In summary, defense relations grew substantially from 2017 to 2025, demonstrating one of the clearest continuities across administrations. The U.S. steadily boosted India’s capabilities, and India deepened its interoperability with U.S. forces, reflecting bipartisan consensus on the China threat. The main differences lie in emphasis: Trump’s outreach was driven by personal diplomacy and large-ticket sales, whereas Biden’s approach has institutionalized those ties (annual 2+2 talks, trilateral exercises) and framed them in the broader security alliance context. A shared thesis in the literature is that the partnership is “deepening particularly in defense and security sectors” due to China, even as India’s autonomous streak keeps it from a full formal alliance.

### **Economic, Trade, and Investment Relations**

Economic ties have seen less dramatic change and remain a persistent challenge. During the Trump administration, bilateral trade disputes peaked. In 2018–2019, the U.S. imposed tariffs on Indian steel/aluminum and India retaliated with tariffs on American goods. Trump also withdrew India’s GSP trade preferences in 2019 over market access issues. These moves created friction that scholars say “dominated the agenda” and signaled a transactional tilt: India viewed U.S. actions as ideological/political rather than purely economic. Despite these conflicts, total trade volumes actually grew. In 2017, U.S. exports of goods to India totaled \$25.7 billion, an 18.7% (\$4.0 billion) increase from 2016; U.S. imports of goods from India totaled \$48.6 billion, a 5.6% (\$2.6 billion) increase; and the trade deficit was \$22.9 billion, a 5.9% (\$1.4 billion) decrease from 2016 (U.S. Trade with India Overall Trends, 2017). While In 2021, U.S. exports to India totaled \$40.1 billion, a 48.2% (\$13.0 billion) increase from 2020; U.S. imports from India totaled \$73.3 billion, a 43.1% (\$22.0 billion) increase; and the trade deficit was \$33.1 billion, a 37.3% (\$9.0 billion) increase from a deficit of \$24.1 billion in 2020 (U.S. Trade with India, 2021). Still, analysts note that during 2017–2020 economic cooperation was “often secondary to defense and security priorities”. Trump did negotiate one new economic framework – the QUAD Economic Connectivity agenda – but it had no concrete outcomes before his term ended.

Under Biden, some efforts were made to stabilize and expand economic engagement, but major issues remained unresolved. Early in his term Biden maintained the 2019 tariff actions, and India reciprocated with its own tariffs on U.S. products (pharmaceuticals, agriculture). Discussions in 2022–2024 addressed market access and investment protection, but without breakthroughs. The Biden administration introduced the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in 2022 as

an alternative regional arrangement, aiming to include India. However, India ultimately did not join IPEF and the framework's future is uncertain. Economists point out that political hurdles – U.S. concerns about job losses and India's protective policies – continue to limit trade and investment growth. For instance, despite high-level agreements, Indian pharmaceutical imports remain subject to price controls and many U.S. firms lobby for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTAs), which has not materialized.

A few positive trends merit note. Both administrations have sought to integrate supply chains to reduce dependence on China. Under Trump, India began diversifying away from Chinese suppliers (in part spurred by U.S. lobbying); under Biden, partnerships emerged on semiconductors and critical minerals (e.g. exploration projects for electric vehicle batteries). Additionally, India's exit from China-led trade deals notably Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was seen as aligning with U.S. interests. According to one review, India's strategic choices to lessen economic dependence on China reflect coordination with U.S. aims. Nonetheless, analysts agree these measures have not translated into deep U.S.-India trade integration yet. Trade negotiations have proceeded more slowly than defense coordination. In summary, the literature characterizes U.S.-India economic relations in Trump and Biden years as “complex” and “marked by trade disputes”. Biden's era did introduce new frameworks (IPEF, QUAD initiatives) aimed at deeper engagement, but so far with incomplete implementation. The overarching view is that economic ties lag behind security ties and are sensitive to domestic politics on both sides.

### **Technology and Security Collaboration**

Technology cooperation has expanded modestly but unevenly. Both administrations recognized technology as a strategic domain in the competition with China. Under Trump, the U.S. pressed India to adopt Western standards in telecommunications (encouraging bans on Huawei and ZTE equipment) and began initiatives like the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (launched in 2020) to promote trustworthy tech in India (Campion, 2020; Moore, 2023). Significant defense tech deals also advanced: the U.S. approved the sale of advanced missiles and target acquisition systems. These moves reinforced the view that high-technology sharing (military drones, satellites, secure communications) is part of balancing China.

Biden accelerated these efforts and broadened cooperation into civilian research. The two countries signed agreements on artificial intelligence, quantum technology, and critical minerals under the US-India Technology and Finance Partnership. Biden's team actively promoted involvement in multilateral tech initiatives – for example, coordinating on semiconductor supply chains (CHIPS Act) and 5G security (though India's private sector moved slower on 5G bans than Washington hoped). Scholars note that Biden's administration fostered “multilateral scientific and industrial alliances” with India in cybersecurity and critical technology sectors. In particular, U.S. policymakers praised Indian contributions to space

collaboration (working together on Gaganyaan experiment satellites) and joint R&D projects (defense electronics co-development).

However, India's approach remained cautious. Analysts point out that while cooperative frameworks like the QUAD working groups now include tech topics, India's emphasis on "strategic autonomy" often limited the depth of sharing. For instance, India welcomed U.S. discussions on cybersecurity capacity-building, but retained firm control over its data policies and sovereign cyber commands, reflecting domestic security priorities. Under Trump, technology cooperation was more transactional (focused on specific hardware deals), whereas under Biden it became somewhat more institutional (e.g. the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative revamp). Yet scholars argue that broad technology collaboration still mainly follows the defense agenda; partnerships in civilian high-tech areas (AI regulation, digital infrastructure) remain less developed. According to the literature, technology cooperation is gradually growing (especially in dual-use and emerging tech) but is often framed as part of the security partnership. Analysts like Ollapally and Verma (2023) specifically note that India's insistence on autonomy limited technology transfers under Trump, though cooperation expanded under Biden.

In short, both administrations have intensified U.S.–India tech ties, particularly in cybersecurity and defense-related fields. The Biden administration further integrated technology into its Indo-Pacific strategy (e.g. QUAD Telecom Ministers' meetings, IPEF digital pillars). Still, the literature suggests this domain is less mature and less transparent than others. Experts call for more structured cooperation on civilian tech standards and cyber norms in the U.S.–India–China triangle. The prevailing assessment is that tech collaboration remains an important but somewhat underutilized axis of the partnership, with scope to grow as strategic trust deepens.

### **Impact of Key Events**

Both administrations have had to navigate crises and summits that influenced the relationship in real time. During the Trump years, significant events included cross-border crises like the Doklam standoff (2017) and the Galwan clash (June 2020). The Galwan incident, in particular, was a shock to U.S. policy: the killing of Indian soldiers by Chinese forces led Washington to publicly condemn China and prompted immediate U.S. offers of military support (night-vision devices, satellite reconnaissance support) (Kaura, 2020). Scholars emphasize that such border clashes acted as "catalysts for deeper defense cooperation and diplomatic alignment". Another key event was the 2020 virtual summit (September 2020) between Trump and Modi, where they unveiled seven agreements, including defense logistics (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement). These gestures, alongside Trump's early outreach (2017 Houston summit), illustrate how summits reinforced the narrative of convergence. Trade decisions also played out: Trump's tariffs were implemented in summer 2019, causing immediate economic retaliation from India, yet did not derail ongoing security ties.

Under Biden, major events continued to shape policy. The Russian invasion

of Ukraine (2022) tested U.S.–India trust: India’s abstention on a UN vote and continued Russian oil purchases raised eyebrows in Washington (Edgar, 2023). Nevertheless, India did participate in some Western sanctions and collaborated on intelligence. Notably, Biden used high-profile visits to reaffirm the partnership: he visited India in 2023 for the G20 summit, jointly announcing new joint action for example, a Global Biofuels Partnership (Chandel et al., 2024). Conversely, Chinese actions also loomed: for instance, a series of Chinese incursions in late 2022 near Ladakh triggered public U.S. statements in support of India’s sovereignty. Analysts note that summits under Biden (e.g. first-ever U.S.–India 2+2 dialogue in 2018 under Trump was followed by annual meetings under Biden) were used to reinforce “alliances and economic frameworks” against common challenges. The pattern is consistent: both administrations responded to high-profile events by tightening cooperation. Border tensions in particular “catalyzed deeper defense cooperation and diplomatic alignment”.

Another recurring event type is multilateral summits. QUAD leaders’ meetings (Washington 2021; Tokyo 2022; New Delhi 2023) significantly influenced policy. In the Biden era, the QUAD summits were explicitly framed as counterweights to China’s security and economic influence (Jaffery & Shoaib Pervez, 2023; Shekhar, 2022). The literature highlights that these forums, along with other regional engagements (ASEAN summits, the 2019 G20 Osaka where Trump and Modi met), helped institutionalize the partnership. “Summits and border incidents... have played a significant role” in shaping the trajectory of U.S.–India relations. Even trade policy announcements (such as Biden’s tariff exclusions for Indian steel in 2021) were interpreted in the context of sustaining the partnership. Overall, the comparative evidence shows that, despite occasional friction, key events and crises have generally led to policy convergence. Trade disputes under Trump created some short-term friction but “did not derail the strategic partnership,” and summits under Biden were deliberately used to project alignment and coordinate policies.

### **Comparative Trends and Shifts**

From Trump to Biden, this paper observes both shifts and continuities. Continuity is evident in the steadfast growth of defense ties, the framing of India as a counterweight to China, and mutual strategic priority. In both eras, the U.S.–India partnership has been guided by the China factor. India, for its part, has consistently pursued closer ties with the U.S. alongside its own multipolar strategy.

Key differences center on style and emphasis. Diplomatically, Biden’s administration placed more effort on coalitions and norms; analytically, he is seen as “institutionalizing alliances more effectively than Trump”. Economically, Trump’s administration took a more confrontational line (tariffs, trade pressure) while Biden attempted to reframe economic engagement through multilateral proposals (albeit with mixed success). In technology, Biden pushed new initiatives, whereas Trump’s tech cooperation was less visible in civilian domains. In defense, Biden deepened and regularized ties but started from the strong foundation built under Trump.

Importantly, U.S. rhetoric has remained consistent in praising India’s role,

but the Biden team was more explicit about values (democracy, human rights) as part of diplomacy. Meanwhile, India's calculus has not drastically changed: it continues to solicit U.S. support (e.g. for its maritime security concerns) while engaging economically with China on select issues (e.g. remaining part of BRICS). This consistency is in line with neoclassical realist expectations: structural pressures (China's threat) produce similar strategic outcomes, even as administrations change.

The evidence thus suggests that Biden did not break with Trump's overall strategic alignment; rather, he refined it (as noted in the literature). The China factor continues to "drive U.S.–India cooperation" (Curtis et al., 2024), but under Biden it is pursued within larger multilateral frameworks, whereas under Trump it was pursued more through bilateral and personal channels. Both paths have deepened security ties. Trade and technology remain areas where policy continues to evolve slowly and often behind the security agenda.

## CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis finds that U.S.–India relations have steadily deepened from 2017 to 2025, primarily due to the shared impetus of countering China. Both the Trump and Biden administrations strengthened strategic ties with India, particularly in defense and security, reflecting the common threat perception. However, Biden's strategy has generally placed greater emphasis on diplomacy and alliances, in contrast to Trump's more transactional approach. Biden expanded multilateral initiatives (QUAD, IPEF) and institutionalized cooperation, whereas Trump leveraged personal rapport and major arms deals. In defense, both presidents pushed India's military to the center of U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, though India's continued arms purchase from Russia and insistence on autonomy kept cooperation nuanced. Economically, some progress under Biden (new dialogues, supply-chain projects) was offset by ongoing trade disputes and regulatory barriers; the literature agrees that economic integration remains secondary to security cooperation. Technology ties have grown, especially in cybersecurity and defense tech, but scholars note that civilian tech collaboration and cyber norms need much greater attention.

Key events such as the 2020 Galwan clash and 2022 Russia–Ukraine crisis had ripple effects: they reinforced U.S.–India alignment even if they did not fundamentally alter India's policies. Summits and military exercises continued to serve as focal points for signaling the partnership. As one critical review observes, these findings "underscore a nuanced, multifaceted partnership shaped by strategic competition and balancing acts". In practice, U.S.–India coordination has outpaced rhetoric in some domains (defense) but lagged in others (economics, tech). The overall picture from 2017–2025 is one of both continuity and subtle change: the China factor remains the glue of the relationship, but the tactics have shifted towards greater multilateralism and alliance-building under Biden.

This research highlights that while policy has evolved, India's strategic autonomy continues to influence outcomes. Whether U.S.–India ties will transform

into a formal alliance remains unclear; the literature posits both possibilities. For now, both countries appear committed to deepening cooperation to uphold the regional order in the face of China's rise. Future research should further explore the long-term economic and technological dimensions of the partnership, and how domestic factors might affect this alignment. If China's assertiveness continues, it is likely to see even closer U.S.–India collaboration, albeit within the careful balance India maintains. The implications are profound: a sustained U.S.–India counterweight could significantly influence Indo-Pacific stability and global power balances, as these policies play out in the coming years.

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