



**FORGING US-INDIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR “RE-ESTABLISHING
DETERRENCE” IN THE INDO-PACIFIC**

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The advent of the second Trump administration has had a defining impact on Washington’s engagement with the rest of the world. The US-India partnership—often called a “defining relationship of the 21st century”—stands at a critical phase with opportunities to scale amid the rapid shifts in global geopolitics, geo-economics, and the exponential growth in dual-use technologies. In the last two decades, the US-India relationship, particularly [its defense ties](#) have seen greater military-to-military interoperability and bigger turnover in terms of defense trade. The last [one-to-one meeting](#) between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi [in February](#) produced a forward-looking [joint statement](#) that, among many other initiatives, aimed to forge a stronger defense partnership in tune with the demands of the dynamic balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region.

As President Trump, in his second term, recalibrates the US national security and defense strategies amid new

terms of engagement with allies and partners, we argue that the US-India defense partnership has a new opportunity to scale cooperation in interoperability and defense industrial synergy to forge stronger deterrent capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region.

“Re-establishing deterrence” in the Indo-Pacific

In [his remarks](#) at the Shangri-la Dialogue in May, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced that the US’ priority on foreign policy matters would be the reestablishing of deterrence, especially in (but not limited to) the Indo-Pacific region.

It comes as no surprise that the purpose of this deterrence is countering the influence and the threat of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Hegseth stressed this administration’s determination, like that of its predecessors, to remain engaged abroad, noting that the prosperity and security of Americans is linked to that of the rest of the Indo-Pacific. The [2025 Annual Threat Assessment](#) of the US Intelligence Community too contends that “Russia, China, Iran and North Korea—individually and collectively—are challenging US interests in the world by attacking or threatening others in their regions, with both asymmetric and conventional hard power tactics...”

In response to this threat, the US will not, in Hegseth’s telling, “preach” to other countries about how they govern themselves, nor does it seek to encircle China or execute regime change. It instead seeks to prevent war, prevent the PRC from carrying out its plans to annex Taiwan, and to do so via “peace through strength”:

“President Trump has also said that Communist China will not invade Taiwan on his watch. So, our goal is to prevent war, to make the costs too high, and peace the only option. And we will do this with a strong shield of deterrence, forged together with you—America’s great allies and defense partners. Together, we will show what it means to execute peace through strength.”

While framed as a break from a previous administration that, in his telling, allowed deterrence to lapse, in at least

one respect Hegseth build on the momentum of [Trump 2.0's predecessor](#): building bilateral ties with India. Hegseth had his [first call](#) with Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh in February, where they stressed “accelerat[ing] our operational cooperation and defense industrial and technology collaboration to deter aggression in the Indo-Pacific,” along with continuing the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue and concluding the next 10-year [US-India Defense Framework](#) later in 2025.

US-India defense partnership for stronger deterrence

The US-India relationship has seen a number of ups and downs, and the last two decades have been crucial in shaping the current contours. The relationship has the overall support of the major political parties on both sides, and the broader strategic convergence of counteracting China's assertive rise remains broadly intact, which is the mainstay of “re-establishing deterrence.” More than any domain in which the bilateral relationship has grown, the defense sector stands out, through habits of cooperation developed at the tri-service level and the growing defense trade.

Moreover, the two defense industrial conclaves envision greater synergy, with a stronger role from the private sector, by following through on initiatives like the US-India [Roadmap for Defense Industrial Cooperation](#). Private sector partnerships, including between [Lockheed Martin and Tata Advanced Systems](#), [Adani Defence & Aerospace with Spartan \(DeLon Springs LLC\)](#), and between [Mahindra Group and Anduril](#) are examples of how Indian and American firms are coming together to co-produce the necessary goods for meeting the security challenges ahead. Recognizing the disruptive impact of new technologies like artificial intelligence and quantum computing, both sides have also announced the [Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance](#) (ASIA) aimed at scaling “industry partnerships and production in the Indo-Pacific.”

During the last one-to-one meeting between President Trump and Prime Minister Modi, both sides showed intent to push ahead the comprehensive cooperation through the [US-India COMPACT](#) (Catalysing

Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology) for the 21st century. From the Biden-era iCET ([Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies](#)) to the US-India TRUST ([Transforming the Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology](#)), a whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approach is envisioned to leverage technologies for partnership in multiple sectors.

The integration of US-origin defense items into India's inventory in the last two decades appears significant, despite bureaucratic processes of defense sale and purchase that needs fixing from both ends. From heavy-duty transport aircrafts, high-end attack helicopters, complex combat vehicles, missile systems and long endurance unmanned systems, the partnership is growing in sea, land and air based military assets. The partnership will remain extra crucial in developing India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities in the Indian Ocean, along with other surveillance and reconnaissance systems for a more robust maritime domain awareness. Crucial follow-up will be required to realize the benefits of the announcements made to “to streamline defense trade, technology exchange and maintenance, spare supplies and in-country repair and overhaul of US-provided defense systems” and opening negotiations on a reciprocal defense procurement.

The Trump administration sounds bullish on the [prospects of improving](#) “accountability and transparency through the foreign defense sales systems to ensure predictable and reliable delivery of American products to foreign partners and allies in support of US foreign policy objectives.” Therefore, it is imperative for Washington and Delhi to work harder on a better alignment of their strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific region that would, in turn, help streamline their vision of co-development and co-production in defense products and heightened cooperation in “overseas deployments of the US and Indian militaries in the Indo-Pacific, including enhanced logistics and intelligence sharing.”

The US Congress-mandated [Commission on the National Defense Strategy](#) last year, among other things, proposed a US “multi-force theater construct” to enable warfighting in simultaneous conflicts with multiple adversaries, and a pitch for an augmented use of the

private sector in the US defense industrial base. Therefore, for a critical stakeholder and major defense partner like India, how Washington's "re-establishing deterrence" pans out in the next few years will be crucial, for scaling the growing bilateral defense cooperation, and in minilateral groupings, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

India and the United States will likely never be fully aligned on matters of security cooperation, as their differing responses toward Ukraine and Islamic terrorism originating from Pakistan illustrate. However, these differences of opinion should not distract them, as both face a long-term challenge from a PRC that seeks to rewrite the rules of the Indo-Pacific region so crucial to both Delhi and Washington. Furthermore, as major Indo-Pacific powers with large populations and the resources, both countries are well-situated to complement one another's efforts to deter Beijing's revisionism.

The early signs from the Trump administration's interactions with the Modi government are promising and it is imperative that the momentum between them continue.

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