

Defense News Conclave

Stories of U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership

Prime Time: Dialogues on “Deliverables to Deliveries”

July 11-12, 2024, New Delhi

Background and Context

Under the Defence News Conclave Project, supported by the U.S. Department of State through the U.S. Consulate General, Kolkata, CUTS International is organising this project. The project deliverables aim to create a group of informed stakeholders in India for strengthening the U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership by generating the necessary awareness of diverse media professionals and other relevant stakeholders. The project covers sessions focusing on good practices of the U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership in general and its relevance for the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership in the Indo-Pacific region in particular.

This conclave is being held in association with the United Service Institution of India ([USI](#)) and the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum ([USISPF](#)). This conclave will look at the milestones set and achieved, policies and gaps to be filled in to secure a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

Objectives

- Act as a capacity-building initiative for media professionals and other relevant stakeholders
- Facilitate meaningful dialogues between experts and participants for a better understanding of the relevance and nuances of the U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership for the ‘good’ of the world in general and the Indo-Pacific region in particular
- Develop a better understanding of good practices in joint development of advanced defence related technologies for promoting a positive narrative on the U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership, especially in the context of evolving geopolitical, including geo-strategic and geo-economics, developments in the Indo-Pacific region.

Outcomes

- A sustained platform for free-flowing interaction on issues related to U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership
- Act as a capacity-building initiative for young media professionals
- Facilitate a meaningful dialogue to understand how the media stakeholders are thinking about defence-related issues
- More and better information about good practices in U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership - joint production possibilities of equipment and materials, opportunities and challenges for various sectors involved, and overall enhanced capacity to report and write on related issues

Agenda

Over the years, India's designation as a Major Defence Partner of the U.S., signing of foundational defence-related agreements and a large number of joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific region have taken the U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership to new heights. The shift in geopolitical attention to the Indo-Pacific region and associated geo-strategic and geo-economic developments such as the coming together of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. into a Quadrilateral group, the initiation of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, has made this partnership even more robust. This is underlined in the Joint Statement from the U.S. and India following the Official State Visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the U.S. in June 2023.

The future status of this Partnership will be a deciding factor in shaping security dynamics in the world, in general, and the Indo-Pacific region, in particular. Therefore, it is time to highlight that, among other deliverables, the U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership is to secure a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. This will ensure a better exposition of 'deliverables to deliveries' on the U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership.

DAY 1	
14:00-15:00	Registration and Networking with Tea and Coffee
Welcome Session	
15:00-15:10	Maj. Gen. BK Sharma (Retd.), Director General, United Service Institution of India
15:10-15:20	Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International
Inaugural Session	
15:20-15:35	Ambassador Eric Garcetti , Ambassador of the USA to India
15:50-16:00	Dr. Mukesh Aghi, President & Chief Executive Officer, U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum
16:00-17:00	Session I: Celebrating India-U.S. Defence Ties: The Most Consequential 21st Century Partnership - Analysing the historical shift and evolution of mutual strategic interest between U.S.-India, stories of landmark events and agreements between U.S.-India - Ongoing initiatives, joint exercises, and collaborations by evaluating the effectiveness of existing foundational agreements - Strategising ways including the role of media to address mutual challenges and enhance synergy in the face of evolving geopolitics in the West and the East - Discussing potential areas of growth and avenues for strengthening the India-US defence partnership in the coming years - Future of U.S.-India Defence Partnership sustaining a strong, innovative and resilient defence industrial base and step toward defence modernisation and global security Moderator Lt Gen Anil K Ahuja, Founding Co-chair, India-U.S. DTTI Inter-Agency Task Force (DIATF) and Distinguished Fellow, CUTS Global Affairs Panelists Ashley Tellis, Tata Chair for Strategic Affairs and a Senior fellow at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Brig. Arun Sahgal (Retd.), Senior Fellow, Strategic and Regional Security, Delhi Policy Group

	• Capt. Sarabjeet Parmar (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Military History and Conflict Studies, USI • Pramit P Chaudhuri, Head of India Practice, Eurasia Group
17:00-17:15	Networking with Tea/Coffee
17:15-18:30	Session II: Above & Beyond: Bilateral Partnership in Space and the Indo-Pacific • Understanding the scope of this bilateral partnership from sea to space • Possibilities and challenges for space security, importance of the Artemis Accords and cooperation in space domain awareness • Increasing the role of partner countries in the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region. Enhancing ISR Capabilities of India's Armed Forces, and establishing a comprehensive global MRO facility in India • Enhancing maritime security and underwater domain cooperation in the larger Indo-Pacific by conducting joint maritime patrols and exercises, combating piracy and illegal fishing • Exploring information exchange and capacity building for regional partner countries • Tools to promote ocean diplomacy with sustainable development initiatives in the Indo-Pacific, addressing challenges like climate change and fostering economic growth. Moderator • Lt Gen. Anil Kumar Bhatt (Retd.), Director General, Indian Space Association (ISpA) Panelists • Admiral Karambir Singh, Former Chief of the Indian Naval Staff • Air Chief Marshal R.K.S Bhadauria, Former Chief of the Indian Air Staff • Group Captain (Dr.) Ajey Lele (Retd.), Deputy Director General, Manohar Parrikar -Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) • Maj Gen. RS Yadav (Retd.), Director, Centre for Strategic Studies & Simulation, United Service Institution of India • Pooja Bhatt, Independent Researcher and Geopolitics Analyst
18:30-18:45	Tea/Coffee

18:45-20:15	Session III: CEOs of Bilateral Partnership: Co-design, Co-develop & Co-produce • Discussing strategies to build a modern defence industrial ecosystem, essential pillars for building a roadmap for industrial collaboration • Analysing the pivotal role of MSMEs in both U.S. and Indian defence landscapes, examining the impact of government policies and regulations in both countries, challenges and opportunities for MSMEs to plug into this system • Assessing joint R&D, enhancing skills and capabilities including critical workforce in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and advanced innovation and manufacturing • Exploring initiatives to boost defence exports, buttressing initiatives, such as INDUS-X, iCET and ‘Make in India, Make for World’ • Catalysing defence technology & innovation cooperation and building a resilient supply chain, bridging American OEMs with Indian industry, increasing joint ventures and twinning of MSMEs Moderator • Col. Baljinder Singh (Retd.), Director, Aerospace & Defence, U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) Panellists • Cdr. Pankaj Srivastava (Retd.), National Head Cyber Defence and Forensics, Mahindra Defence Systems Ltd. • Kriti Upadhyay, Founder, IndUS Tech Council • Partha Roy Chowdhury, Commercial Lead, Japan, India & Bangladesh, Lockheed Martin • Praveen P A, Director, Aerospace & Defence, Government of Telangana • Vrinda Kapoor, CEO, 3rdiTech
20:15	Networking with Dinner

HIGHLIGHTS

Day 1



Maj. Gen. BK Sharma (Retd.), Director General, the United Service Institution of India began by highlighting the strategic enhancement of the India-U.S. relationship that is multi-layered and multi-sectoral. Not only this, a result-oriented strategic dialogue has been maintained between the two powers, pillared by the next generation, defence and security partnership.

Addressing major achievements of this flourishing relationship, Sharma chose to highlight INDUS-X, as an important facet of the relationship between both countries in the field of innovation in critical emerging technologies like maritime, AI, outer space, and so on. Another facet of this partnership is the co-development and co-production of advanced technologies within the framework of Atmanirbhar Bharat. Moreover, both countries understood the importance of secure supply chains and thus, started considering the Security of Supply Arrangements (SOSA).

Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General CUTS International addressed the hotspot of the India-U.S. relationship, that is the evolving geo-economic, geo-political, and geo-strategic Indo-Pacific region. The region is marked by plurilateral initiatives like QUAD and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for prosperity which rendered the relationship between the two powers more ‘robust’.

Mehta opined that a strong, resilient, and innovative industrial base is imperative for the security of the world order, in the mid and long terms and this is evident in the U.S.-India ‘dosti’ which is not limited to just a defence partnership but extends to climate change, clean energy, space issues, cyber security, and high education exchanges. Given this, he commented that US-India relations together can determine the security dynamics in the world.

Mehta further added that the U.S. should treat India as a strategic partner by extending all those privileges that it does to 'Treaty allies.' Moreover, in the wake of PM Narendra Modi's visits to Russia, he suggested that the closeness between India and Russia should not cause any discomfort for the U.S. since Russia has been India's long-standing 'all-weather friend'.

Acknowledging the shift in the global balance of power, **Mukesh Aghi**, President and Chief Executive Officer, of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) explained that the U.S.-India partnership is underlined by two-way relations of cooperation. He noted that one first must understand what kind of relationship India and the US have, as it should be a win-win partnership.

Aghi alluded to some of the major achievements of the partnership. One such was that for the first time, the US agreed to transfer 80 per cent of GE technology to India, which would allow India to develop hot jet engines in India itself. He considered that this is important because technology transfer must also come with efficiency.

Moreover, he submitted that this era is marked by public-private partnerships (PPPs) in defence. However, while pointing out the problem of Intellectual Property rights, he suggested that since Indian defence start-ups went to the US and contributed to this sector, the US must also allow the transfer of the same technology to India. Thus, regulations on both sides have to be streamlined and efficient to make the relationship between the countries successful.

Inaugural Keynote Address by Eric Garcetti, Ambassador of the USA to India



In the inaugural keynote address, **Ambassador Eric Garcetti**, the United States Ambassador to India, outlined a compelling vision for the future of U.S.-India relations, emphasising the depth, breadth, and strategic importance of this partnership. Garcetti's speech painted a picture of two nations bound by shared values, common interests, and an increasingly intertwined destiny in the face of global challenges.

The Ambassador began by describing the U.S.-India relationship as "deep, ancient, and increasingly broad." He stressed that the enthusiasm and focus on India in Washington D.C. has not waned since Prime Minister Modi's historic visit, but continues to intensify and accelerate. Garcetti urged listeners to view the Indo-US partnership not as a "bet" but as a commitment – a true partnership based on mutual trust and shared goals.

A significant highlight of Garcetti's speech was the emphasis on the alignment of values between the two nations. He estimated an 80-90 per cent overlap in core principles, emphasising their shared commitment to democracy, peace, and respect for international rules. This alignment, he argued, positions the U.S. and India as natural partners in what he termed an "ideological battle" against extremism and authoritarianism.

The defence partnership between the U.S. and India took centre stage in Garcetti's address. He described it as "among the most consequential in the world," citing joint military exercises, growing defence industry connections, and a dramatic increase in U.S. defence sales to India – from near zero in 2008 to US\$25bn in 2023. However, Garcetti did not just celebrate past achievements; he issued a call to action for accelerated cooperation in defence production and technology.

Peering into the future, the U.S. Ambassador outlined a vision of deeper collaboration in critical areas such as emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. He highlighted initiatives like INDUS-X, designed to foster collaboration between start-ups in both countries, as examples of the innovative approaches being taken to strengthen ties.

Garcetti also touched on the economic aspects of the relationship, discussing opportunities in maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) for defence equipment, and the potential for job creation in both countries. He noted progress on a Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA), which could further integrate the defence industrial ecosystems, of the two nations.

Throughout his address, the U.S. envoy to India placed the U.S.-India partnership in a global context. Referring to the raging conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, he justified increased defence capacity and industrial planning between the two countries. The Ambassador argued that neither the U.S. nor India can adequately address global threats by looking inward alone – cooperation is essential.

While Garcetti's address was overwhelmingly positive about the potential for closer U.S.-India ties, he did acknowledge India's preference for strategic autonomy. However, he made a compelling case that in times of crisis, true strategic autonomy may be impossible, and nations will need to rely on trusted partners.

SESSION I: CELEBRATING INDIA-U.S.-DEFENCE TIES: THE MOST CONSEQUENTIAL 21ST CENTURY PARTNERSHIP



Lt. Gen. Anil K Ahuja, Founding Co-chair, India-U.S. DTTI, Inter-Agency Taskforce and Distinguished Fellow, CUTS Global Affairs moderating the session emphasised the importance of the defence partnership between the U.S. and India and highlighted the benefits of this collaboration for both nations, particularly in the context of evolving global geopolitical dynamics.

Ahuja pointed out the significance of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), which has elevated and expanded the strategic technology partnership between the two countries, and which aspires to enhance the joint development and production of advanced defence technologies. He stressed the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region and the role of U.S.-India cooperation in promoting a free, open, and resilient Indo-Pacific, reflecting the shared interests and democratic values of both nations.

Discussing the potential for co-production and co-development in the defence sector he noted how this can enhance the defence industrial base of both countries and support the broader strategic partnership.

Lt. Gen. Ahuja highlighted the role of India's young and dynamic population in driving innovation and technological advancement, which can further strengthen the U.S.-India defence partnership and contribute to global security and stability.

Ashley J. Tellis, Tata Chair for Strategic Affairs and Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C. observed the deepening of U.S.-India defence relations and highlighted the exponential growth in military cooperation and strategic policies. He pointed out that bilateral defence ties between the U.S. and India have expanded significantly since the Cold War era.



Tellis discussed the pivotal U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement, which has played a key role in brokering. This agreement marked a turning point in the bilateral relationship, allowing India to maintain its nuclear weapons programme while engaging in civilian nuclear cooperation with the U.S.

Tellis mentioned the unique nature of the U.S.-India relationship, which is not characterised by formal alliances like those the U.S. has with NATO, Japan, or South Korea. Despite this, the diplomatic and strategic engagement between the two countries is extensive and deep. He underscored the importance of easing technology controls and supporting India's nuclear deterrent to further enhance the strategic partnership. The collaboration extends to high-technology sectors, reflecting the broadening of economic ties.

Tellis touched upon the global strategic environment, particularly the challenges posed by China. He emphasised the necessity for the U.S. and India to cooperate closely in addressing these challenges, ensuring regional stability and security.

Brig. Arun Sahgal (Retd.), Senior Fellow, Strategic and Regional Security, Delhi Policy Group stated how China leverages Pakistan to exert control over India and North Korea to influence Northeast Asia. This strategy allows China to pursue its economic, diplomatic, and military objectives across the Eurasian landmass and the Indo-Pacific region.

He said India faces multifaceted threats, including nuclear, conventional armies on its borders, proxy forces in disputed territories, and terrorist attacks from neighbouring countries. This complexity underscores the immediate security challenges India must navigate.

Sahgal emphasised the necessity for democratic regional powers, particularly Japan, Australia, the U.S., and India, to collaborate to manage China's territorial and hegemonic ambitions. This cooperation is vital for ensuring regional stability, he added.

According to Brig. Sahgal, strengthening joint naval exercises and other security collaborations is crucial for reassuring nations in the Indo-Pacific region that trade routes will remain secure and free from coercion. There is a need to explore new security frameworks beyond existing ones like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to effectively address contemporary security challenges in the region, he submitted.

Capt. Sarabjeet Parmar (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Military History and Conflict Studies, USI opined that the strategic significance of maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), pointed to the necessity for a cohesive and comprehensive approach for addressing common security issues such as piracy and freedom of navigation.

Parmar discussed the shifting geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, stressing the importance of understanding the interplay between different regional actors and their strategic interests, particularly in light of China's increasing maritime assertiveness. The USI strategist underscored the value of joint defence initiatives between India and the U.S., noting that these collaborations are crucial for maintaining regional stability and enhancing defence capabilities through shared technology and intelligence.

Parmar highlighted the role of advanced technologies in modern warfare, advocating greater integration of cutting-edge technologies such as AI and quantum computing into defence strategies to stay ahead of emerging threats. Parmar pointed out the long-term benefits of strategic partnerships, particularly between India and the U.S., which are built on mutual interests and shared democratic values. He stressed that these partnerships are essential for addressing the challenges posed by major geopolitical shifts and ensuring a stable Indo-Pacific region.

Pramit P Chaudhuri, Head of India Practice, Eurasia Group underscored the importance of leveraging cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, and quantum computing to enhance defence mechanisms. He highlighted the necessity for India to adopt and integrate these technologies to stay ahead in modern warfare.

Chaudhuri underscored the significance of forging strong international partnerships. Collaborating with global defence players and allies was seen as essential to bolster India's defence infrastructure and technological base. He spoke about the need for India to focus on self-reliance in defence production. Promoting Indigenous manufacturing capabilities and reducing dependency on imports were crucial themes in his remarks.

Addressing the rising cybersecurity threats, the Eurasia Group Head of Practice stressed the importance of developing robust cybersecurity frameworks. This includes both defensive and offensive capabilities to protect critical infrastructure and national security interests.

SESSION II: ABOVE & BEYOND: BILATERAL PARTNERSHIP IN SPACE AND THE INDO-PACIFIC



Lt. Gen. Anil Kumar Bhatt, Director General, ISpA serving as the session moderator, outlined key topics focusing in particular on the burgeoning Indo-US partnership, particularly in the domains of sea and space. He emphasised the significance of the Artemis Accord, signed by India, and highlighted potential collaborations in the domain of space awareness. The Director General was appreciative of the exponential growth of the Indian-U.S. partnership over the last 25 years, evolving from traditional defence cooperation to pioneering collaborations in space technology.

Bhatt noted the transformative impact of private sector investments in space, citing reusable rockets, AI, and LEO constellations as examples. He pointed out the shift in India's space sector dynamics, where private companies are now active participants following the government's 2020 policy to open up the sector.

Additionally, Bhatt discussed the strategic implications for the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, focusing on enhancing ISR capabilities and establishing a comprehensive Global MRO facility in India. He outlined ISpA's increasing commercialisation and global participation, alongside future potentials in space tourism, resource mining, and space colonisation.



Admiral Karambir Singh, Former Chief of the Indian Naval Staff speaking on maritime cooperation between India and the U.S., emphasised the critical role of the Indo-Pacific in fostering strategic collaboration. He underscored the necessity for both nations to counterbalance China's influence, promote an open Indo-Pacific environment, and enhance collective maritime capabilities. Singh highlighted the robust operational cooperation between

the Indian Navy and the U.S. Navy, citing frequent joint exercises and exchanges across various levels and disciplines.

The recent deployment of Indian Liaison officers in U.S. Indo PACOM, SOCOM and CMF was noted as a significant step to deepen operational synergy. The former Chief of Indian Naval Staff advocated leveraging India's strategic geographical position in the Indian Ocean for reciprocal basing, access agreements, and logistics support, emphasising mutual benefits for the navies of both countries.

Admiral Singh called for greater ambition in bilateral maritime engagements, suggesting enhanced cooperation through the QUAD Maritime Security Working Group for logistics and maritime patrol operations. Singh stressed the need to build on foundational agreements to facilitate smoother technology sharing and joint development, addressing concerns such as ITAR relaxations and technology seepage.

Emphasising the importance of maritime domain awareness, the former CNS proposed closer collaboration in underwater domain awareness and integration of networks for seamless interoperability. Singh concluded by advocating collective maritime engagements with like-minded nations to provide credible alternatives to Chinese initiatives like the BRI and GSI, anchored on principles of credibility, customisation, and continuous dialogue. The discussion highlighted strategic imperatives and opportunities for deeper Indo-U.S. maritime cooperation, emphasising mutual security interests and technological integration.

Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria, Former Chief of Indian Air Staff started by highlighting the key aspects from the previous session, focusing on defence industrial cooperation and combined/cooperative operations with the U.S. Bhadauria stressed the urgency to accelerate technology transfer and convert agreements into tangible deliveries, underscoring the importance of combined development efforts.

The Former Chief of Indian Air Staff emphasised that India's strategic interests align closely with the U.S., predicting mutual reliance on technology and support. Addressing space and ISR capabilities, he emphasised the need for enhanced networking, cyber security, and space domain awareness, advocating transparent information sharing with the U.S. despite potential technology constraints.

Bhadauria outlined the necessity to achieve true interoperability and data-linking capabilities with advanced technologies like Quantum, stressing the importance of cooperative efforts in cyber security and space situational awareness. He concluded by highlighting the imperative for deep and high-tech industrial cooperation. Bhadauria underscored the need for transformative advancements in defence technology collaboration and operational integration between India and the U.S. to effectively address regional security challenges.

Group Captain (Dr.) Ajey Lele (Retd.), Deputy Director General, Manohar Parrikar-Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) in his address, highlighted critical aspects of Indo-U.S. space collaboration. He began by acknowledging historical advancements since India's early rocket launches supported by the U.S. in the 1960s, contrasting them with contemporary challenges and opportunities.

Lele emphasised space security amidst rising concerns such as space debris and counter-space technologies, advocating enhanced Space Situational Awareness (SSA) through joint initiatives between India and the U.S. He stressed the need for global collaboration in space meteorology alongside SSA to mitigate risks like geomagnetic storms that impact satellite operations.

Lele proposed that Indo-U.S. cooperation extends to developing technologies for satellite hardening against cyber-attacks and for on-orbit servicing and debris mitigation. He underscored the significance of a rule-based framework for space governance, referencing NASA's Artemis programme as a potential model for lunar exploration cooperation. Lele also outlined areas of emerging technology collaboration, including human space missions, quantum computing, and advanced satellite technologies, highlighting opportunities for joint efforts between Indian start-ups, private industries, NASA, and other stakeholders.

The Deputy Director General concluded with an emphasis on a holistic ecosystem in Indo-U.S. space collaboration that integrates governmental, private, and entrepreneurial sectors to propel future advancements in space exploration and technology.

Maj. Gen. R.S Yadav, Director, Centre for Strategic Studies & Simulation, USI focused exclusively on the defence and security aspects of the U.S.-India partnership in the Indo-Pacific region. Emphasising trust as a foundational element, Yadav traced the evolution of bilateral relations from the Civil Nuclear Agreement to recent defence agreements like iCET and INDUS-X.

Maj. Gen. Yadav stressed the need for tangible outcomes on the ground rather than just framework agreements, highlighting India's urgent real-time security needs amidst regional threats. He acknowledged China's assertive stance and noted the differing perspectives between the U.S. and India regarding global dominance and regional security. He pointed out that while the U.S. emphasises global dominance and defence industry benefits, India prioritises territorial integrity, regional stability, and real-time security challenges.

The USI Director drew attention to India's immediate need for capability enhancements for maintaining credible deterrence and contrasted it with the U.S.'s longer-term strategic planning. He called for expedited support from the U.S., suggesting a relaxation of export control laws to facilitate faster capability acquisitions.

Regarding partner countries in the Indo-Pacific, Yadav recognised the needs of Japan, South Korea, and others to align their capability enhancements with US plans, while India focuses on securing its frontiers independently in the region. Conclusively, he highlighted the criticality of timely support from the U.S. to bolster India's defence capabilities for effective regional deterrence and stability.

Pooja Bhatt, Independent Researcher and Geopolitical Analyst in her address, articulated a forward-looking perspective on the trajectory of relations and the strategic partnership between the U.S. and India within the Indo-Pacific region, with a particular emphasis on ocean diplomacy. She acknowledged the Indo-Pacific's dual role as a hub of democratic values, demographic diversity, and economic promise, while also confronting a spectrum of security threats, both conventional and emerging. Bhatt critiqued the prevalent security discourse centred on threats, advocating a shift towards cooperative frameworks instead.

The geopolitical analyst outlined several key areas for Indo-U.S. collaboration- first, the necessity of cultivating a cohesive Indo-Pacific maritime identity to foster unity and reduce conflict; second, recognising the complex layers of the region beyond its physical boundaries, encompassing cultural and technological dimensions; and third, enhancing capacity-building efforts with an inclusive approach that benefits all stakeholders.

She underscored the critical role of technology cooperation and governance in managing undersea infrastructure owned by the private sector, urging balanced regulatory frameworks that safeguard public interests.

Bhatt concluded by highlighting the geopolitical tensions that limit strategic manoeuvrability in the region, stressing the importance of fair and equitable information-sharing mechanisms to mitigate conflict and promote shared prosperity. She underscored the urgency for comprehensive ocean governance strategies to effectively navigate future Indo-Pacific challenges.

SESSION III: CEOs OF BILATERAL PARTNERSHIP: CO-DESIGN, CO-DEVELOP & CO-PRODUCE



Colonel Baljinder Singh (Retd.), Director, Aerospace & Defence, USISPF reiterated the importance of the U.S. and India working together on developing and producing defence systems. He highlighted the significance and past challenges of the DTTI, a key framework for fostering bilateral defence collaboration.

Pankaj Srivastava, National Head of Cyber Defence and Forensics, Mahindra Defence Systems stressed the importance of collaboration and coexistence in defence partnerships between India and the U.S. He highlighted India's growing defence market and the government's focus on self-reliance as creating opportunities for U.S. defence industry collaboration.

Srivastava emphasised the potential for Indian MSMEs to work with U.S. companies, increasing cost-effectiveness and quality in the defence supply chain. He also remarked that India has become an attractive market for defence manufacturers and exporters. He stressed the growth and development of the aerospace industry in India.

He highlighted the initiatives aimed at boosting domestic production for global markets. The National Head of Cyber Defence and Forensics at Mahindra expressed faith that U.S. and Indian companies have the potential to cater to worldwide needs and demands. He stressed the importance of maintaining high standards and quality in defence equipment by both nations. He called for the need to move from component-level manufacturing to developing core technologies.

Kriti Upadhyay, Founder, IndUS Tech Council contended that India's defence sector is yet to reach its full potential. She discussed the importance of U.S. and Indian entrepreneurs and start-ups working together, suggesting collaborations between DARPA and DRDO. She acknowledged that while the U.S. has a technological edge, it needs allies like India to sustain this advantage.

Upadhyay suggested that the U.S. could offer more cost-efficient defence systems to India and other countries by leveraging domestic production and learning from past experiences. This approach could enhance the competitiveness of U.S. offerings in the global defence market. According to Upadhyay recent wars demonstrate the increasing need for reliable allies in the contemporary world. In conclusion, she emphasised the need to revolutionise defence technology in India.

Praveen P A, Director, Aerospace & Defence, Government of Telangana outlined the notable advancements and contributions from Telangana in the defence sector. He discussed the dynamics of the bilateral relationship and its policy implications.

Praveen provided insights into regional developments, noting that in Telangana, over 1000 SMEs are working exclusively in the aerospace and defence sectors. He highlighted the state's strong innovation policy, including pioneering drone and space policies, which have led to significant growth in start-ups and MSMEs in these sectors.

Focusing on the significant growth and development trends in Telangana's automobile sector, Praveen emphasised this initiative's global production capabilities and successes. He noted the rapid growth and emergence of innovative start-ups in Hyderabad.

He praised the Telangana Aerospace industry for its cost-effectiveness and competitive edge in the aerospace sector.

Vrinda Kapoor, CEO, 3rdiTech stressed the importance of strengthening self-reliance from the grassroots level. She highlighted the critical role of technology in diplomatic relations. Kapoor focused on the need for collaborative innovation and development, particularly in the context of Indo-U.S. partnerships.



Kapoor emphasised the critical role of technology in modern diplomacy, stating that it is "the most critical diplomatic currency of our time." She stressed the urgency of capitalising on the current opportunities, warning that there is a 20-year window for India and the U.S. to build on their groundwork, after which the Indo-Pacific landscape may significantly change.

According to the CEO, of 3rdi Tech, India is a privileged beneficiary of high-tech military equipment from the U.S. Road Map for India-U.S. Defence Industrial Cooperation, the tie-up between GE Aerospace-HAL and ISRO-NASA being the other high point of our collaboration.

DAY 2	
08:30-09:30	Registration and Networking with Tea and Coffee
09:30-09:35	Opening Remarks • Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International
09:35-09:45	Welcome Remarks • Rear Admiral Michael Baker, Defence Attaché, U.S. Embassy, New Delhi
09:45-10:00	• Shri Vishwesh Negi, Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) Ministry of Defence, Government of India
10:00-11:30	Session IV: The Fourth Pillar of Democracy: Informed View of U.S.-India Defence Relations • Role of media and journalism in forming the right views of the general public, turn of the century and welcoming the new partnership of the century • Detecting and countering misinformation and disinformation on U.S.-India Defence and Security Partnership • The success story of the F414 jet engine, P-81 Poseidon, and sharing experiences of field visits to bilateral exercises, joint-production plants • Tools to combat new-age fake and deep fake news and misinformation. Understanding disinformation in the digital age, new-age journalism and information warfare • Sharing good practices among the regional media journalists, dissemination process of informed news and constant need for innovation in social media Moderator • Maj. Namrata Dhasmana (Retd), Geopolitics Analyst Panellists • Dinakar Peri, Senior Assistant Editor, The Hindu • Manu Pubby, Senior Editor, Economic Times • Nayanima Basu, Editor, Diplomacy and Defence, ABP LIVE (ABP Network) • Rahesha Sehgal, Foreign Affairs Anchor, The World is One News (WION) • Snehesh A Philip, Defence and Strategic Affairs Editor, The Print
11:30-11:45	Networking with Tea/Coffee

11:45-13:15	Session V: The Road Ahead: Indo-U.S. for the ‘Global Good’ • Next Steps within the U.S.-India defence partnership, overcoming potential challenges, promoting shared interests, and mutually addressing frameworks of ITAR export controls, and IPR-related concerns • Promoting incentives for joint production for access to high technology and developing a joint technology & innovation collaboration mechanism • Taking things forward within the Quad framework, and securing free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific, and Indian Ocean regions, including maritime and underwater domains. Working together on multilateral and plurilateral frameworks and complimenting • Comprehensive Global & Strategic Partnership • Roadmap for mid-to-long-term policy options, sustaining political will and long-term commitment to the partnership by building bipartisan support, institutionalising partnership mechanisms, and regular high-level engagements among others • Recommendations and policy interventions for further strengthening the U.S.-India defence and security partnership Moderator • Lt Gen Subrata Saha, Former Deputy Chief of the Army Staff and Member, the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) Panellists • Ashley Tellis, Tata Chair for Strategic Affairs and Senior Fellow Carnegie Endowment for International Peace • Harinder Sekhon, Former Intelligence and Strategic Analyst, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) and Distinguished Fellow, CUTS Global Affairs • KP Vijaya Lakshmi, Professor & Head of Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal. • Lt. Gen. Vinod Khandare (Retd.) Principal Adviser, Ministry of Defence, Government of India
13:15-13:25	Closing Remarks • Gloria Berbena, Minister Counselor for Public Diplomacy, U.S. Embassy, New Delhi
13:25-13:45	Vote of Thanks • Purushendra Singh, Assistant Director, CUTS International
13:45	Networking with lunch

Highlights

Day 2

On Day Two in his Opening Remarks, Pradeep S. Mehta, Secretary General of CUTS International, reflected on the organisation's 40th anniversary and its role in global affairs. He highlighted noted economist Martin Wolf's recent lecture on India's aspirational goal to become a developed country by 2047, potentially emerging as the world's second-largest economy on a purchasing power parity basis.

Mehta highlighted CUTS International's involvement in Indo-Pacific affairs and its collaboration with civil society groups across the region. He also touched on India's naval contributions to international security efforts.



Mehta summarised key points from a recent conference on the U.S.-India defence partnership, covering strategic interests, potential growth areas, and the integration of small enterprises in the defence ecosystem.

Welcome Remarks by Rear Admiral Michael Baker, Defence Attaché, U.S. Embassy, New Delhi

Rear Admiral Michael Baker provided a comprehensive overview of the evolving U.S.-India defence partnership. Baker began by acknowledging the mentorship he has received from various Indian military leaders during his two-year tenure in India, highlighting the strong personal relationships underpinning the bilateral cooperation.

The U.S. Defence Attache lauded the significant progress made in the U.S.-India major defence partnership, citing various high-level dialogues and agreements that have shaped the relationship. He appreciated in particular the rapid acceleration of cooperation in outer space across defence, scientific, and commercial sectors.



Rear Admiral Baker then outlined the mission of the United States Defence Group India, which he leads. The primary objective of the Group is to transform the strategic promise of the partnership into operational reality, Baker stressed that the ultimate goal is to deter war and major conflicts while enabling security that promotes free, fair, and secure prosperity throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Baker described two key methods employed to achieve these objectives. First, delivering technical capability through acquisition, national development, and procurement. Second, building mission capability through human interoperability, facilitated by military education exchanges and joint exercises.

The U.S. Defence Attache highlighted recent achievements in the partnership, including technology transfers and co-production initiatives involving various defence systems. Baker clarified that these efforts are not just about delivering hardware but about creating options for political leaders to operate together effectively.

Welcome Remarks by Shri Vishwesh Negi, Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) Ministry of Defence, Government of India

Shri Negi provided a comprehensive overview of the evolving India-U.S. defence partnership. Negi characterised this relationship as "the most consequential 21st-century partnership," underlined by mutual strategic interests, security convergences, and foundational defence agreements.

Negi highlighted the significant momentum gained in defence cooperation over the past two years, particularly following the implementation of key agreements such as LEMOA, COMCASA, GOMIA, and BECA. He emphasised the robust military-to-military engagement framework, noting that India conducts its largest range of global exercises with the United States, spanning CENTCOM, AFRICOM, and INDOPACOM.

The Joint Secretary underscored the importance of operational integration, facilitated by the use of similar defence platforms like C-17s, C-130s, Apache's, and P-8s. He also pointed out the close cooperation between Indian and U.S. navies in the Indo-Pacific region, mentioning India's recent joining of the U.S.-led Combined Maritime Force.

Discussing the evolving defence industry partnership, Negi described a shift from a buyer-seller relationship to an equal-stakes partnership centred on co-manufacturing and co-development under India's Make in India policy.

Negi mentioned the Defence Industrial Roadmap as a vision statement for long-term collaboration and highlighted initiatives such as the SOSA and the Master Ship Repair Agreement.

He referred to the success of the India-U.S. Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDEX), launched in 2023, which facilitates partnerships between defence companies, start-ups, investors, and universities from both countries. He noted emerging areas of cooperation, including space, artificial intelligence, and cyber defence.

While celebrating these achievements, Negi acknowledged areas for improvement, such as increasing co-development between defence industry primes and removing regulatory barriers and export controls.

Looking ahead, Negi outlined plans for a summit-level meeting between the two countries' leaders and a 2+2 ministerial meeting later in the year. He expressed confidence that these engagements would reinforce ongoing projects and provide guidance for future defence targets.

SESSION IV: THE FOURTH PILLAR OF DEMOCRACY: INFORMED VIEW OF U.S.-INDIA DEFENCE RELATIONS



Maj. Namrata Dhasmana (Retd.), a Geopolitics Analyst moderating the session highlighted the collaborative efforts of India and the U.S. in Africa, emphasising maritime security in the Horn of Africa. She lauded India's extensive engagements in various sectors, including education, healthcare, and infrastructure, appreciated by African countries. The India-U.S. strategic dialogue aims to develop technical and bilateral synergies, especially after the African Union joined the G20 during India's presidency.

Dhasmana raised significant concern about the high incidence of disinformation related to U.S. scepticism and war-related narratives. She emphasised the mission to counter cognitive warfare and critiqued Western media's role in spreading disinformation.

Dinakar Peri, Senior Assistant Editor at The Hindu, highlighted the importance of technology transfer between India and the U.S., emphasising India's need for self-reliance while acknowledging the benefits of collaboration. He noted the complementary capabilities that India and the U.S. bring to their partnership, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region and Africa.

Peri drew attention to the damaging role of Western media in sometimes propagating disinformation that does not accurately reflect ground realities. He emphasised the critical responsibility of Indian media to counter-narratives from China and Russia that might portray India as losing its autonomy due to increased engagement with the U.S.

Manu Pubby, Senior Editor, The Economic Times addressed the issue of disinformation and its potential impact on the India-U.S. relationship. He identified European sources as primary originators of disinformation, rather than China or Pakistan directly. Pubby stressed the importance of leveraging democratic values and free media to counter these efforts.

Pubby provided a stark assessment of Russia's position as a defence partner, noting its technological shortcomings compared to global standards and even China. He cautioned against an increase in disinformation from Russian sources as a result. Pubby also underscored the importance of professional journalism, stating, "We are the credibility, when we put our names to any information, it becomes credible which is not the case with social media."

Nayanima Basu, Editor of Diplomacy and Defence, ABP LIVE (ABP Network) emphasised the role of social media in spreading disinformation and the increasing reliance of journalists on these platforms rather than primary sources. She advocated ground reporting and dialogue with neighbouring countries to resolve conflicts and counter misinformation.

Basu reflected on the changing landscape of journalism and expressed concern about the diminishing emphasis on primary sources and ground reporting in the era of internet-dominated news. She characterised the India-U.S. relationship as delicate but poised on an upward trajectory since the 2008 civil nuclear deal, despite undulations through history.

Rahesha Sehgal, Foreign Affairs Anchor, WION discussed the media's critical role in shaping public perception of the India-U.S. relationship. She highlighted the impact of 'Twitter diplomacy' and detailed media coverage of diplomatic events in influencing public opinion. Sehgal also noted the double-edged nature of social media in enhancing soft power while also being a source of misinformation.



Sehgal contextualised the India-U.S. relationship against the backdrop of ongoing global conflicts, highlighting how both nations have emphasised their democratic foundations in their cooperation. She noted the growing influence of social media in diplomatic communication and public perception, citing examples, such as Prime Minister Modi's presence at the G20 Summit. Sehgal also pointed out how mutual appreciation, such as America's recognition of India's space achievements, reinforces bilateral ties.

Snehesh A Philip, Defence and Strategic Affairs Editor, The Print provided an overview of the growing India-U.S. defence partnership, noting significant collaboration on defence equipment and technology transfer. However, he observed a lack of in-depth media coverage and public understanding of the strategic aspects of the partnership beyond transactional deals. Philip emphasised the need to address the trust deficit and improve communication between the two countries.

Snehesh addressed the nuances of diplomatic communication, noting how ambassadorial remarks intended as constructive feedback are often perceived as criticisms due to underlying tensions. He advocated for more frequent and transparent interactions between the two countries to prevent misunderstandings. Snehesh emphasised the need for the U.S. Embassy and Government to engage

more deeply through conferences, briefings, and interactions to elevate the relationship beyond mere transactional perceptions.

He concluded with a crucial point about the future of U.S.-India relations, stating, "For the relationship between the U.S. and India to flourish in the long run, it needs to move beyond transactional perceptions. This means countering the view that the U.S. sees India merely as a means to counter China, and instead fostering a true partnership."

SESSION V: THE ROAD AHEAD: INDO-U.S. FOR THE 'GLOBAL GOOD'



Lt. Gen. Subrata Saha (Retd.), Former Deputy Chief of Army Staff and member of the NSAB, who moderated the session drew attention to the transformative nature of modern warfare, highlighting the shift from traditional force manoeuvres to technology-driven strategies.

He advocated for deepened cooperation in defence-industrial sectors and stressed the importance of integrating contemporary operational partnerships and investing in emerging defence domains.

Lt Gen Saha underscored the mutual benefits of U.S.-India collaboration in defence technology, trade, and operational strategies, particularly in enhancing global peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Dr. Ashley J. Tellis, Tata Chair for Strategic Affairs at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, provided a comprehensive overview of the evolution of Indo-U.S. relations. He highlighted the significant transformation since the end of the Cold War, particularly post-1991, and identified the civilian nuclear agreement as a pivotal moment in the relationship.

Dr. Tellis discussed the exponential growth in defence and strategic cooperation, as well as the mutual benefits of economic and technological collaboration. While acknowledging challenges, he expressed optimism about the future of this unique strategic partnership.

Harinder Sekhon, Former Intelligence and Strategic Analyst, NSCS and Distinguished Fellow, CUTS Global Affairs, focused on the continued progress in bilateral relations despite occasional disagreements in multilateral forums. She emphasised the necessity for democratic collaboration in addressing global issues, particularly in light of rising authoritarianism across the world.

Sekhon highlighted unprecedented PPPs in advanced technologies and stressed the strategic importance of Indo-U.S. relations in the context of current geopolitical dynamics.

KP Vijaya Lakshmi Professor and Head of the Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal provided the historical context of India's partnership with the U.S., tracing its roots to the post-independence era. She discussed the various dimensions of the strategic partnership, including defence, security, and economic collaborations.

Lakshmi emphasised the indispensability of joint efforts in addressing global challenges such as climate change and health crises and called for enhanced educational and cultural exchanges to foster mutual understanding.

Lt. Gen. Vinod Khandare (Retd.), Principal Advisor to the Ministry of Defence, focused on the evolving nature of Indo-U.S. military collaboration and the critical role of technology in modern defence strategies. He discussed the importance of self-reliance in defence manufacturing while fostering international partnerships. Lt. Gen. Khandare also highlighted initiatives like Project Udbhav, which aims to integrate ancient Indian strategic thought with modern military practices.

Gloria Berbena, Minister Counsellor for Public Diplomacy, U.S. Embassy, New Delhi commenced her closing remarks by providing context on the programme's inception during the pandemic in 2021. She highlighted the progress made since those challenging times, celebrating the return to in-person meetings that facilitate the personal connections essential for successful diplomatic exchanges. She emphasised the importance of effective communication and leadership within the U.S. mission, particularly concerning the evolving priorities of the U.S.-India relationship.



Berbena identified the core pillar of the bilateral relationship as the evolving military and security partnership. She stressed the importance of demystifying this partnership for the average citizen, ensuring transparency, and fostering a strong journalistic understanding. She underscored that transparency and open discussion are vital for public trust and accountability in democratic nations.

Berbena discussed the necessity of an informed citizenry amidst rapidly shifting geopolitical realities. She acknowledged the significant role of journalists in achieving this goal. Given the extensive information already shared through the conference, she sought to reiterate the key takeaways in concluding the discussions.

Berbena highlighted the remarkable growth of the U.S.-India defence relationship over the past 16 years. She emphasised the increasing number of joint military exercises, which build trust, interoperability, and professionalism, essential for protecting both nations and ensuring preparedness for any threat or disaster.

Berbena elaborated on the noteworthy aspects of bilateral trade within the defence sector. India's defence exports to the U.S. account for over 50 per cent of its total exports, reaching US\$2.8bn in the last five years. She appreciated the reciprocity in the relationship, with the U.S. becoming a significant supplier of defence equipment to India and its largest military exercise partner. American aerospace companies have formed strong partnerships with Indian counterparts, facilitating technology transfers and enhancing India's domestic defence production capabilities. This collaboration has created over 28,000 jobs in India and fostered advances in various sectors such as STEM, education, health, and sustainability.

Berbena clarified that while the defence relationship brings economic benefits, it is not the defining aspect of the U.S.-India relationship. At its core lies a value synthesis, it is about a shared commitment to protecting people, working through differences as friends and partners, and focusing on shared priorities rooted in democratic norms. She emphasised the importance of a rules-based and stable region and world, particularly in the Indo-Pacific.

Presenting the Vote of Thanks, **Purushendra Singh**, Assistant Director, CUTS International emphasised the importance of continuing the insights and collaborations fostered during the conclave. He called for a collective effort towards strengthening the U.S.-India defence and security partnership.

Singh highlighted the shared goal of achieving a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

(The report is prepared by Mihir Shekhar Bhonsale, Assistant Policy Analyst, CUTS, and edited by Indranil Bose, Consultant, CUTS. It has received inputs from student rapporteurs for the conclave- Aman Kakkar, Anshika Gupta, Ashmita Saha, Kamakshi Rautela, Neha Singh, Prabhnoor Kaur, Prateek Aggarwal, Sakshi Devaguptapu and Shriansh Pateriya).