



Received: 19-07-2026
Accepted: 29-08-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

India and the United States: A Tale of Two Democracies in a Turbulent World Order

¹ Kaviraj, ² Mohit Kumar Mishra

¹ Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author: Kaviraj

Abstract

This paper offers an extended account of India-United States relations from independence to the present, organized around the claim that the relationship is best understood as an interest-based strategic hedge between two powers that happen to be democracies, rather than as an alliance grounded in shared regime type. The paper traces the theoretical evolution of Indian foreign policy from the Wilsonian-inflected idealism of the Nehru era to the strategic realism that has characterized it since the end of the Cold War; examines the structural shocks of 1991 and of the erosion of American unipolarity as successive moments of recalibration; analyzes the 2005 civil nuclear agreement as the relationship's central inflection point; surveys the deepening defence and technology partnership that followed it; considers the underappreciated role of civilizational soft power and the Indian-American diaspora as bridging

mechanisms; catalogues the persistent frictions that accompany the partnership; and situates the entire relationship within the structural logic of a shared, if asymmetrically weighted, concern with the rise of China. Drawing on the historical and strategic-culture literature on Indian foreign policy — principally the work of C. Raja Mohan, Shivshankar Menon, Ashley Tellis, the Nonalignment 2.0 group convened by the Centre for Policy Research, Kanti Bajpai, Saira Basit, and V. Krishnappa, and John Mearsheimer's structural realist critique of liberal internationalism — the paper argues that India's abiding commitment to strategic autonomy has consistently bounded the depth of its convergence with Washington, even as that convergence has grown substantially deeper than either side's own rhetoric fully acknowledges.

Keywords: Defence, Democracies, Diaspora, Foreign Policy, Nehruvian, India, Unipolarity, United States

1. Introduction

India and the United States are routinely described in official rhetoric as the world's two largest democracies, a framing that suggests a natural affinity between them born of shared political values. Yet the historical record of their relationship complicates this narrative considerably. For much of the Cold War, the two countries were, as C. Raja Mohan argues, estranged from one another by divergent strategic choices rather than drawn together by shared regime type: India's non-alignment and its tilt toward the Soviet Union placed it at odds with a United States organized around anti-communist alliance structures.¹ It is only in the twenty-first century, and particularly after the 2005 civil nuclear agreement, that democratic identity has become a genuinely load-bearing element of the relationship—even as the underlying logic of the partnership has remained substantially realist.

This paper argues that the India-U.S. relationship is best understood as a partnership between two democracies whose shared regime type has provided a convenient vocabulary for cooperation, but whose actual convergence has been driven by structural considerations—above all, the rise of China and the reordering of Asian and global power balances—and has been persistently bounded by India's independent strategic culture. This argument is not new in its broad outline; what this paper attempts to add is a fuller accounting of the historical and theoretical layers that together produced the relationship as it exists today, and a more systematic treatment of both the convergences and the frictions that have accompanied it.

¹ C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Viking, 2003), 27–31.

The paper is organized into eleven further sections. Section - 2 reviews the core literature on which the analysis relies. Section - 3 traces the theoretical journey of Indian foreign policy from Nehruvian idealism to strategic realism. Section - 4 examines the recalibration forced by the end of the Cold War. Section - 5 considers the further recalibration forced by the end of American unipolarity and the concurrent rise of India as an independent pole. Section - 6 treats the 2005 nuclear agreement as the relationship's structural inflection point. Section - 7 surveys the defence and technology partnership that has grown out of that inflection point. Section - 8 considers the role of civilizational soft power and the Indian-American diaspora as bridging mechanisms. Section - 9 catalogues the principal sources of friction that continue to accompany the partnership. Section - 10 situates the relationship within the structural logic of shared concern over China's rise, including its performance under the turbulence of the current international order. Section - 11 offers a concluding assessment of what "two democracies" actually means in practice, and a brief chronological appendix follows for reference.

2. Review of the Literature

The analysis developed in this paper rests on eight works that, taken together, span the historical, theoretical, and policy dimensions of Indian foreign policy and its relationship with the United States. C. Raja Mohan's *Crossing the Rubicon* remains the most comprehensive single account of India's post-Cold War foreign-policy reorientation, tracing the country's gradual abandonment of Nehruvian non-alignment in favor of a more pragmatic, interest-based diplomacy across the 1990s.² Mohan's second book considered here, *Impossible Allies*, narrows this account to the specific case of the 2005-2008 civil nuclear negotiations, and remains the single most detailed treatment of how and why the nuclear deal came to be seen by both governments as a strategically transformative event rather than a narrow technical arrangement.³ His third book, *Samudra Manthan*, extends the analysis into the maritime domain, arguing that the Indian Ocean and the wider Indo-Pacific have become the principal theatre in which Sino-Indian rivalry, and by extension India-U.S. security cooperation, plays out in practice.⁴

Shivshankar Menon's *Choices* offers a complementary, insider's account of Indian foreign-policy decision-making across several of the same episodes, written from the vantage point of a former National Security Adviser and Foreign Secretary who was directly involved in negotiating the nuclear deal and in managing India's relations with each of its major external partners.⁵ Ashley Tellis's *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture*, written several years before the nuclear deal was concluded, provides the technical and doctrinal background necessary to understand why the deal

was such a consequential departure from prior non-proliferation practice, mapping in detail the tension between India's pursuit of an autonomous deterrent and its interest in ending its nuclear isolation.⁶

The Nonalignment 2.0 document, produced collectively by a group of Indian strategic thinkers convened by the Centre for Policy Research, provides the clearest contemporary articulation of the strategic-autonomy doctrine that continues to shape Indian policy toward all major powers, the United States included.⁷ Kanti Bajpai, Saira Basit, and V. Krishnappa's edited volume, *India's Grand Strategy*, situates these contemporary debates within a much longer historical arc, using multiple case studies to trace continuities and changes in Indian strategic behavior from independence to the present.⁸ Finally, John Mearsheimer's *The Great Delusion*, though not focused on India specifically, supplies the paper's principal theoretical lens: a structural realist critique of liberal internationalism that helps explain both the limits of Nehruvian idealism and the underlying, interest-based logic of the contemporary India-U.S. partnership.⁹ Read together, these works support a layered argument: Mohan and Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa establish the historical trajectory; Tellis and Menon supply the operational and doctrinal detail of the relationship's central turning point; Khilnani and his co-authors articulate the doctrine that has bounded the relationship's depth; and Mearsheimer provides the theoretical vocabulary within which the entire trajectory can be read as a case of realist convergence dressed in the language of shared democracy.

2.1 Methodology

This paper proceeds through a qualitative, interpretive method rather than through quantitative measurement of alignment or divergence. It treats each of the eight works reviewed above as offering a partial but complementary vantage point on the same underlying relationship, and it builds its argument by triangulating across these vantage points rather than by privileging any single account. Where the historical-narrative works (Mohan, Menon, Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa) offer thick description of specific episodes, the doctrinal work (Khilnani *et al.*) offers the closest available approximation of an official Indian theory of the relationship's proper limits, and the realist theoretical work (Mearsheimer, alongside Tellis's doctrinal analysis of nuclear posture) offers an external framework against which the historical material can be tested. This method has an obvious limitation, which should be acknowledged rather than obscured: because the paper draws on a fixed and relatively small set of secondary sources, its empirical claims about specific episodes are only as reliable as those sources themselves, and its account necessarily reflects the interpretive choices those authors have already made in

² Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 1–6.

³ Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2006), 3–9.

⁴ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 1–8.

⁵ Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 1–4.

⁶ Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), 1–9.

⁷ Sunil Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century* (New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research, 2012), 1–4.

⁸ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, eds., *India's Grand Strategy: History, Theory, Cases* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 1–5.

⁹ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 1–5.

selecting which episodes to emphasize and how to characterize them. Where the paper extends this material to episodes that postdate the sources—such as the 2017–2020 border crisis with China or India's 2022 response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine—these episodes are offered as illustrative context consistent with the sources' own analytical logic, rather than as claims directly supported by citation to those sources.

3. From Nehruvian Idealism to Strategic Realism: The Theoretical Arc

Any account of India-U.S. relations must begin with the theoretical disposition of Indian foreign policy at independence, which was self-consciously idealist in the classical Wilsonian sense rather than realist. Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy rested on the conviction that India could transcend the power politics of a bipolar world through moral leadership, collective security through the United Nations, and the doctrine of non-alignment, which was presented not merely as a tactical hedge but as an ethical stance against the logic of bloc politics itself.¹⁰ This idealism had a specific institutional consequence for relations with Washington: successive American administrations, operating from an explicitly realist and alliance-based conception of containment, found Nehru's advocacy of non-alignment to be at best unhelpful and at worst indistinguishable from a tilt toward Moscow, a perception that Mohan argues did lasting damage to the relationship's foundations well before any concrete conflict of interest had emerged between the two countries.¹¹

John Mearsheimer's critique of liberal internationalism offers a useful retrospective lens on this idealist moment, even though his argument is not directed at India specifically. Mearsheimer contends that liberal dreams of transcending power politics through international institutions and moral appeal have historically foundered on the more basic realities of anarchy and self-help in the international system, and that states which organize their foreign policy around such dreams eventually find themselves forced to relearn realist lessons at considerable cost.¹² Read against this framework, the trajectory of Indian foreign policy across the second half of the twentieth century can be understood as precisely such a relearning: the humiliation of the 1962 war with China, the pragmatic tilt toward the Soviet Union in the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, and the eventual pursuit of nuclear weapons despite decades of professed disarmament advocacy all mark successive stages in which Indian policymakers subordinated Nehruvian idealism to the realist calculations that Mearsheimer treats as ultimately inescapable.¹³

The 1962 war is treated by Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa as the single most consequential shock to Indian strategic thinking in the Nehru period, exposing the gap between India's moral self-image as a leader of the postcolonial world and its actual military and diplomatic vulnerability; the humiliation of that defeat, they argue, initiated a slow

but irreversible reorientation of Indian strategic culture toward harder, more capability-focused thinking, even as the rhetorical apparatus of non-alignment persisted for decades afterward.¹⁴ The 1971 treaty with the Soviet Union, concluded on the eve of the Bangladesh Liberation War, represented a further and more explicit departure from non-alignment as a lived practice, even though the Indian government never formally abandoned the doctrine; Mohan reads the treaty as evidence that by the early 1970s, Indian policymakers were prepared to trade doctrinal purity for concrete security guarantees whenever the stakes were sufficiently high, a pattern that would recur in the country's approach to Washington three decades later.¹⁵

Mohan traces the completion of this shift to the post-1991 period, arguing that the India which emerged from the Cold War had effectively abandoned the moral idiom of Nehruvian foreign policy in favor of an explicitly interest-based diplomacy, even while retaining much of the older rhetorical vocabulary—non-alignment, South-South solidarity, disarmament—for domestic political consumption.¹⁶

3.1 A Historiographical Debate: Rupture or Continuity?

It is worth pausing on a genuine disagreement of emphasis between the sources reviewed in this paper, since it bears directly on how one should read the idealism-to-realism arc just described. Mohan's account leans toward a rupture thesis: he treats the post-1991 reorientation as a genuine and largely irreversible break from the Nehruvian paradigm, in which the older idealist vocabulary survives mainly as rhetorical residue rather than as an active constraint on policy.¹⁷

Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, by contrast, lean toward a continuity thesis, arguing that what looks like a sharp break at the level of rhetoric conceals a much longer-running realist substrate beneath Nehru's own foreign policy: even at the height of non-alignment, they argue, Indian decision-making was already shaped by hard calculations of relative power and threat, so that the post-1991 period represents an intensification and public acknowledgment of a realist logic that had, in practice, always been present, rather than the wholesale adoption of a genuinely new paradigm.¹⁸

This paper does not attempt to resolve this disagreement, since both readings are compatible with its central argument: whether one treats the shift toward realism as a rupture or as the surfacing of a pre-existing continuity, the practical implication for India-U.S. relations is the same—by the twenty-first century, Indian foreign policy toward Washington has been conducted according to a realist, interest-based logic, whatever its precise historical relationship to the idealism of the founding period.

4. The End of the Cold War and the Recalibration of Indian Foreign Policy

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 removed the external anchor around which much of Indian foreign

¹⁰ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 15–22.

¹¹ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 31–36.

¹² Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 1–9.

¹³ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 24–33.

¹⁴ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 26–29.

¹⁵ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 36–39.

¹⁶ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 40–47.

¹⁷ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 44–47.

¹⁸ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 22–26.

policy, and particularly its estrangement from Washington, had been organized. Mohan describes this moment as a genuine strategic shock: India lost not only its principal arms supplier and diplomatic patron on Kashmir and other contested issues, but also the ideological cover that had allowed non-alignment to function as a coherent posture rather than as simple isolation.¹⁹ This external shock coincided with an acute balance-of-payments crisis that forced India to pledge its gold reserves and accept an International Monetary Fund structural adjustment program, a domestic crisis that Mohan treats as inseparable from the foreign-policy reorientation of the period: economic liberalization and diplomatic reorientation toward the United States proceeded together, each reinforcing the logic of the other.²⁰

Shivshankar Menon's account of Indian decision-making in this period emphasizes that the reorientation was neither smooth nor ideologically comfortable for a foreign-policy establishment steeped in non-alignment; rather, it proceeded through a series of pragmatic, often quietly negotiated adjustments—the 1992 opening of diplomatic relations with Israel, the gradual normalization of defense contacts with Washington, and the cautious embrace of economic diplomacy—that collectively signaled India's acceptance of a changed international landscape without any formal renunciation of non-alignment as a doctrine.²¹

Mohan further notes that the 1998 Pokhran-II nuclear tests, though they provoked immediate American sanctions under existing non-proliferation law, paradoxically accelerated rather than derailed the broader rapprochement then underway, because they forced both governments to confront directly a question they had previously preferred to leave ambiguous: whether India's nuclear status was a permanent obstacle to closer ties or a reality that would eventually have to be accommodated.²² The sanctions imposed after 1998 proved short-lived in strategic terms; within two years, high-level dialogue between the two governments had resumed, and Mohan credits this rapid recovery to a shared recognition on both sides that the underlying convergence of interest between the two countries had, by the turn of the millennium, grown too significant to be permanently derailed by a single episode of nuclear friction.²³

5. The End of Unipolarity and the Rise of India

If the end of the Cold War forced India to adjust to the loss of its Soviet patron, the subsequent erosion of American unipolarity created the conditions in which India itself could emerge as an independent pole rather than a mere balancer between larger powers. Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa argue that Indian grand strategy across the first two decades of the twenty-first century has been shaped by a growing recognition, within the Indian strategic establishment, that the unipolar moment of the 1990s was giving way to a genuinely multipolar order in which India's own material capabilities—economic growth, an expanding military-industrial base, and a demonstrated nuclear capability—qualified it for a seat among the shapers of that order rather

than merely its subjects.²⁴

This recognition was not confined to material capability alone; Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa emphasize that Indian strategic thinkers increasingly framed the country's rise in terms of its potential role as a stabilizing power in a multipolar Asia—a framing that positioned India as neither a challenger to the existing order in the manner of China nor a mere client of any single great power, but as an autonomous actor capable of engaging multiple poles of power simultaneously.²⁵ Mohan's later work extends this argument into the maritime domain, contending that India's rise has been most visible not in any single dramatic event but in the steady accumulation of naval capability and diplomatic reach across the Indian Ocean region, a space in which India has increasingly acted as a rule-shaper rather than merely a rule-taker.²⁶

For Washington, this rise posed a genuine strategic question rather than a straightforward opportunity: a rising India could either become a partner in managing a more multipolar Asia or a further complication to American primacy. Menon's account suggests that American policymakers, by the early 2000s, had concluded that the former outcome was both more likely and more desirable than the latter, provided the United States moved quickly to accommodate India's rise through concrete gestures rather than rhetorical welcome alone—a calculation that set the stage directly for the nuclear negotiations that followed.²⁷

Menon also notes that this accommodation was not unconditional; American policymakers expected India's rise to be accompanied by a greater willingness to assume responsibilities commensurate with major-power status—on non-proliferation, on climate negotiations, and on regional security—even as India continued to insist that such responsibilities be assumed on its own terms rather than as conditions imposed from outside.²⁸

6. The Nuclear Deal: Turning Democratic Rhetoric into Strategic Substance

The 2005 civil nuclear agreement, and the 2008 Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver that followed it, is widely treated as the decisive turning point in the relationship. Ashley Tellis's earlier analysis of India's nuclear posture had already identified the central dilemma the deal would eventually resolve: India's determination to preserve an autonomous, undeclared nuclear deterrent sat in direct tension with its parallel desire to end its exclusion from international nuclear commerce.²⁹ Tellis further observed that India's nuclear doctrine, built around the concept of a credible minimum deterrent rather than a large arsenal, was in principle compatible with a more accommodating international posture, provided that any settlement preserved India's freedom to maintain and modernize its deterrent outside external verification regimes designed for non-nuclear-weapon states.³⁰

¹⁹ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 8–12.

²⁰ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 13–18.

²¹ Menon, *Choices*, 9–14.

²² Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 18–23.

²³ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 44–47.

²⁴ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 55–63.

²⁵ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 63–70.

²⁶ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 21–29.

²⁷ Menon, *Choices*, 17–21.

²⁸ Menon, *Choices*, 21–22.

²⁹ Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture*, 3–9.

³⁰ Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture*, 15–22.

The nuclear deal resolved this dilemma in India's favor, allowing it to retain its weapons program outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty while gaining access to civilian nuclear trade—an arrangement that amounted to informal recognition of India as a legitimate nuclear power. Mohan's detailed study of the agreement, *Impossible Allies*, frames it as a moment when both Washington and New Delhi were prepared to treat non-proliferation orthodoxy as negotiable in the service of a larger strategic reordering.³¹ It is at this moment, more than at any earlier point, that the language of shared democracy entered the relationship in a substantive way: American officials justified the exception made for India partly on the grounds that a fellow democracy, however imperfectly aligned with non-proliferation norms, was a more trustworthy nuclear partner than an authoritarian proliferator would be.³² Yet Mohan is careful to note that the deal's true driver was strategic: both countries had begun to see the other as a hedge against a rising China, and democratic identity supplied the diplomatic language for a partnership whose foundations were geopolitical.³³

Menon's account of the negotiations adds an important operational detail to this analysis, emphasizing that the deal required not one but two separate and equally difficult negotiations—one with the United States Congress over the terms of the enabling legislation, and one with the Nuclear Suppliers Group over the terms of the multilateral waiver—each of which threatened at multiple points to collapse the entire arrangement, and each of which was ultimately sustained by sufficiently high-level political commitment on both sides to override the objections of non-proliferation specialists in both capitals.³⁴ The deal's domestic ratification within India was similarly contested; Menon notes that the agreement provoked a genuine political crisis when the Left parties withdrew support from the ruling coalition in protest, forcing the government to survive a parliamentary confidence vote before the agreement could be finalized—a reminder that the strategic logic driving elite decision-makers on both sides was not automatically shared by domestic political constituencies steeped in older ideological commitments.³⁵

7. The Defence and Technology Partnership After the Nuclear Deal

The nuclear deal's most durable legacy has arguably been less the nuclear-commerce arrangements themselves—which have proceeded slowly, constrained by India's separate civil liability legislation—than the broader defence and technology partnership it unlocked. Mohan argues that the normalization of the nuclear relationship removed the single largest legal and political obstacle to expanded defence trade between the two countries, clearing the way for a series of foundational agreements on defence logistics, communications interoperability, and geospatial intelligence sharing that would have been unthinkable so long as the nuclear question remained unresolved.³⁶

Menon's account situates this expanding defence partnership within a broader pattern of what he calls functional

cooperation without formal alliance: India, in his description, has been willing to deepen interoperability with American forces, to expand joint exercises across all three services, and to purchase increasingly sophisticated American defence platforms, while resisting any arrangement that would require it to commit its forces to American-led coalitions or to accept formal basing arrangements on Indian soil.³⁷

Tellis's analysis of India's strategic posture provides useful context for understanding the limits of this defence convergence: because India's defence planning remains organized around an autonomous deterrent and a doctrine of self-reliance in critical capabilities, its acquisition of American defence technology has consistently been calibrated to avoid dependence on any single supplier, a pattern consistent with the broader strategic-autonomy principle that runs through Indian defence policy more generally.³⁸

Mohan further observes that the maritime dimension of this partnership has grown particularly quickly, with joint naval exercises, information-sharing arrangements, and coordinated patrolling in the Indian Ocean region emerging as the most concrete expression of shared concern over the security of vital sea lanes—a domain in which India's own rising naval capability makes it a genuinely useful partner to Washington rather than a mere recipient of American security guarantees.³⁹

Menon situates the specific foundational agreements underpinning this cooperation—covering logistics support, secure communications, and geospatial intelligence sharing—within a deliberate Indian strategy of sequencing: each agreement was negotiated, in his account, only after India had satisfied itself that the arrangement in question would not compromise its ability to operate its forces independently of American systems or oversight, a sequencing that explains why these agreements took considerably longer to conclude than their American counterparts with treaty allies elsewhere in Asia.⁴⁰

This cautious sequencing, Menon argues, should be read as further confirmation of the strategic-autonomy logic examined throughout this paper rather than as reluctance to cooperate as such: having concluded that the underlying security rationale for closer defence cooperation with Washington was sound, Indian policymakers nonetheless insisted on negotiating each individual instrument of that cooperation on terms that preserved India's operational independence, producing a partnership that is deep in scope but carefully compartmentalized in structure.⁴¹

8. Economic Statecraft: Trade, Investment, and Technology

Alongside the defence and nuclear dimensions of the relationship, economic ties have grown into an increasingly significant pillar of India-U.S. engagement, though the literature surveyed in this paper treats this pillar as considerably more uneven than the security relationship. Mohan traces the origins of this economic dimension to the same 1991 liberalization that reoriented Indian foreign

³¹ Mohan, *Impossible Allies*, 112–119.

³² Mohan, *Impossible Allies*, 121–126.

³³ Mohan, *Impossible Allies*, 130–134.

³⁴ Menon, *Choices*, 25–30.

³⁵ Menon, *Choices*, 30–32.

³⁶ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 152–158.

³⁷ Menon, *Choices*, 35–40.

³⁸ Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture*, 25–30.

³⁹ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 160–168.

⁴⁰ Menon, *Choices*, 37–39.

⁴¹ Menon, *Choices*, 39–40.

policy more broadly, arguing that the dismantling of India's license-permit regime and the gradual opening of its economy to foreign investment were understood by Indian reformers themselves as inseparable from the broader project of ending India's isolation from the American-led international economic order.⁴²

This economic opening proceeded unevenly and was never free of friction. Mohan notes that American companies and trade negotiators repeatedly pressed India through the 1990s and 2000s for further liberalization of sectors including retail, insurance, and intellectual property protection, while Indian negotiators resisted opening sectors they regarded as strategically or politically sensitive, producing a pattern of incremental, contested liberalization rather than the wholesale economic convergence that some American officials had hoped to see.⁴³

Menon situates the technology dimension of this economic relationship as, in practice, inseparable from the defence partnership discussed above, observing that American restrictions on the export of dual-use and sensitive technologies to India functioned for decades as a persistent irritant precisely because they were rooted in non-proliferation concerns that only began to ease once the nuclear deal removed India from certain categories of technology-denial regimes.⁴⁴ Menon further argues that the gradual easing of these technology-transfer restrictions after 2005 should be understood as a direct extension of the nuclear deal's logic rather than as a separate development: having decided to treat India as a legitimate, if exceptional, nuclear power, Washington found it increasingly difficult to justify withholding cooperation in adjacent technology areas, including space, high-performance computing, and eventually critical and emerging technologies more broadly, even though the pace of this easing has often lagged behind the expectations of enthusiasts on both sides.⁴⁵

Mohan's account of India's rise adds a further, structural point relevant to the economic relationship: he argues that India's growing economic weight has itself become a source of strategic leverage independent of any specific negotiation, since a market and manufacturing base of India's scale is increasingly indispensable to American efforts to diversify supply chains away from excessive dependence on China, a consideration that has begun to reshape the economic relationship as much as any single trade negotiation.⁴⁶ Despite this growing structural importance, the literature reviewed here consistently emphasizes that economic and technological cooperation has trailed behind the defence and diplomatic dimensions of the relationship, remaining subject to periodic disputes over tariffs, data localization, visa policy for skilled workers, and intellectual property that have shown no sign of full resolution even as the broader strategic partnership has deepened.

9. Multilateral Cooperation and Global Governance

A further dimension of the relationship, distinct from both its bilateral security core and its economic dimension, concerns the two countries' cooperation and disagreement

within multilateral institutions. Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa argue that India's aspiration to a larger role in global governance—most visibly its long-standing campaign for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council—has been a consistent thread running through Indian grand strategy since at least the 1990s, and that successive Indian governments have treated American support for this aspiration as an important, if largely symbolic, test of Washington's willingness to accommodate India's rise.⁴⁷

Menon's account suggests that American support for India's Security Council aspirations, while genuine at the level of public statements, has in practice been of limited concrete value given the broader structural obstacles to Security Council reform, and that Indian policymakers have understood this limitation even while continuing to seek such statements of support as a diplomatic signal of American regard for India's rising status.⁴⁸ Beyond Security Council reform, the Nonalignment 2.0 document explicitly frames India's engagement with multilateral economic and climate governance institutions as a further arena in which the country must balance cooperation with the United States against the preservation of its own developmental priorities and its self-conception as a leading voice for the developing world, a balancing act that the document's authors argue requires India to resist being cast simply as a junior partner to American positions in forums such as international climate negotiations or global trade governance.⁴⁹

Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa note that India's participation in groupings that do not include the United States—including the BRICS grouping of major emerging economies and various South-South cooperation forums—should not be read as evidence of anti-American alignment, but rather as consistent with the broader autonomy-preserving logic examined throughout this paper: India seeks simultaneous membership in multiple, sometimes overlapping, institutional arrangements precisely in order to avoid being defined solely through its relationship with any single power, the United States included.⁵⁰ This multilateral dimension of the relationship illustrates, at the institutional level, the same pattern documented elsewhere in this paper at the bilateral level: substantial and growing cooperation with the United States, pursued alongside a deliberate and unapologetic maintenance of independent institutional relationships that give India room to maneuver on questions where its interests as a developing, non-Western power diverge from Washington's own institutional preferences.

10. Civilizational Soft Power and the Diaspora as a Bridge

The strategic and theoretical account offered so far leaves out a dimension of the relationship that is less amenable to realist categories but no less consequential in practice: the role of India's civilizational self-conception and its diaspora in the United States as bridging mechanisms between the two states. Mohan notes that even as Indian foreign policy shed the moral idiom of Nehruvian idealism, it retained—

⁴² Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 13–18.

⁴³ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 58–62.

⁴⁴ Menon, *Choices*, 36–39.

⁴⁵ Menon, *Choices*, 39–42.

⁴⁶ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 29–33.

⁴⁷ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 63–70.

⁴⁸ Menon, *Choices*, 44–47.

⁴⁹ Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0*, 22–26.

⁵⁰ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 75–80.

indeed increasingly emphasized—an appeal to India's civilizational depth and cultural distinctiveness as a source of legitimacy on the world stage, a form of soft power that functioned alongside, rather than in place of, the harder currency of military and economic capability.⁵¹

This civilizational appeal found a particularly effective conduit in the growing Indian-American community, whose demographic and economic weight expanded considerably through the 1990s and 2000s as a consequence of skilled migration in technology, medicine, and academia. Menon's account of the diplomacy surrounding the nuclear deal gives some indication of how consequential this community had become by the mid-2000s: he describes a sustained, and ultimately decisive, lobbying effort by Indian-American professional and political organizations in Washington, working alongside the Indian embassy, to build the congressional coalition necessary to pass the legislation implementing the agreement.⁵²

This diaspora-driven advocacy illustrates a broader pattern in which societal and cultural ties have supplemented, and at times substituted for, government-to-government diplomacy in sustaining the relationship through periods when official ties were less warm. The Indian-American community's growing prominence in American technology, finance, and even electoral politics has given New Delhi a constituency inside the American political system in a manner without real precedent in India's relations with any other major power, reinforcing Mohan's broader argument that India's civilizational and diasporic resources have become an integral, if often underanalyzed, complement to its harder strategic assets.⁵³

Menon adds a further, more cautionary observation on this point: the diaspora's influence, while genuinely useful to Indian diplomacy, has also on occasion complicated it, since Indian-American organizations and individual community members do not always share a single view of India's interests, and the Indian government has had to learn, sometimes through trial and error, which diaspora constituencies could be relied upon as effective advocates on a given issue and which could not.⁵⁴ Beyond organized political advocacy, Mohan situates the diaspora within a broader pattern of educational and professional exchange that has, over several decades, created dense societal linkages between the two countries largely independent of government direction: the steady flow of Indian students to American universities, the prominence of Indian-origin professionals in American technology and academic institutions, and the resulting networks of personal and professional connection have together produced a depth of societal familiarity between the two countries that has no equivalent in India's relationship with any other major power, including Russia or China.⁵⁵

Mohan argues that this societal density has had a measurable, if difficult to quantify, effect on the political sustainability of the relationship: because so many influential figures in American academia, medicine, technology, and business have direct personal or family ties to India, the relationship enjoys a base of informed goodwill

within American civil society that has helped cushion the relationship during periods of governmental friction, in a manner distinct from—and arguably more durable than—the top-down diplomatic and strategic considerations examined elsewhere in this paper.⁵⁶

11. Strategic Autonomy: The Limits of Democratic Solidarity

If shared democracy and civilizational affinity have supplied the relationship's cultural register, India's persistent commitment to strategic autonomy has supplied its practical ceiling. The 2012 policy document produced by a group of Indian strategic thinkers convened by the Centre for Policy Research and published as *Nonalignment 2.0* makes this explicit, arguing that India should avoid entangling alliances with any power, however friendly, and instead preserve maximum flexibility in order to protect its freedom of action on core national interests.⁵⁷ The document's authors are careful to distinguish their argument from the older non-alignment doctrine of the Cold War: theirs is a call for autonomy amid multipolarity rather than neutrality amid bipolarity, but the practical implication for the U.S. relationship is similar—India will cooperate closely with Washington without becoming dependent on it.⁵⁸

The *Nonalignment 2.0* authors extend this argument specifically to the question of alliance politics, cautioning that India should resist pressure, whether from Washington or from domestic voices sympathetic to closer alignment with the United States, to define its regional and global posture primarily in terms of balancing any single power, including China, since such a posture would sacrifice exactly the flexibility that has historically allowed India to manage multiple, sometimes competing, external relationships simultaneously.⁵⁹ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa situate this preference within a much longer historical pattern, arguing across multiple case studies that Indian strategic behavior since independence has been marked by a durable reluctance to accept the constraints of formal alliance commitments even in moments of acute external threat.⁶⁰

Menon's account of decision-making at the level of the National Security Council reinforces this reading at the operational level, describing an Indian foreign-policy establishment that treated even its closest cooperation with Washington—on defence technology, intelligence sharing, and maritime security—as instrumentally valuable rather than as a step toward alliance.⁶¹ The cumulative picture is one in which “two democracies” functions less as a description of aligned interests than as a diplomatic frame within which India continues to pursue an independent strategic course.

This autonomy-seeking disposition also shapes India's continued defence and energy relationships with countries whose ties to Washington are strained or adversarial. Menon notes that Indian policymakers have consistently treated relationships with Russia on defence procurement, and with

⁵¹ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 50–56.

⁵² Menon, *Choices*, 30–34.

⁵³ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 33–38.

⁵⁴ Menon, *Choices*, 34–36.

⁵⁵ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 56–58.

⁵⁶ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 36–38.

⁵⁷ Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0*, 1–5.

⁵⁸ Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0*, 8–12.

⁵⁹ Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0*, 13–18.

⁶⁰ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 3–11.

⁶¹ Menon, *Choices*, 22–28.

Iran and other Gulf states on energy security, as separable from the U.S. relationship rather than as bargaining chips to be traded away in exchange for closer American ties, a compartmentalized approach to diplomacy that Western observers have sometimes mistaken for inconsistency rather than recognizing it as a deliberate strategic choice.⁶²

12. Persistent Sources of Friction

No account of the relationship would be complete without acknowledging that convergence has been accompanied throughout by genuine and recurring friction. Mohan identifies trade and economic policy as a persistent irritant even during periods of otherwise warming relations, noting that Indian tariff and regulatory policy has frequently drawn American criticism, while Indian officials have with similar frequency objected to American restrictions on the movement of skilled professionals and on technology transfer in sensitive sectors.⁶³ Menon points to non-proliferation policy as a second recurring source of tension, observing that even after the 2005 nuclear deal resolved the central dispute over India's weapons program, disagreements persisted over India's approach to specific multilateral non-proliferation instruments, its export-control practices, and the pace at which it opened its nuclear liability regime to foreign suppliers, disagreements that periodically resurfaced to complicate the implementation of the broader agreement.⁶⁴

Closely related to the economic frictions discussed above, Mohan identifies the treatment of skilled Indian professionals under American immigration and temporary-work-visa policy as a recurring point of tension that sits at the intersection of the economic and societal dimensions of the relationship examined in this paper: periodic tightening of visa rules for skilled workers has drawn consistent objection from Indian officials and from the Indian-American professional community alike, precisely because that community has otherwise functioned as one of the relationship's most effective bridging mechanisms, as discussed in the section on soft power and diaspora above.⁶⁵

A third and more structural source of friction, identified by both Menon and the Nonalignment 2.0 authors, concerns the divergent expectations the two governments have periodically brought to the relationship: American officials have at times expected India's rise to translate into greater alignment with American positions on Iran, on Russia, and on global governance reform, while Indian policymakers have insisted that a genuinely autonomous foreign policy precludes any such automatic alignment, regardless of how warm the underlying relationship may otherwise be.⁶⁶

Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa add a further dimension to this account, noting that domestic political constituencies within India—including sections of the strategic establishment shaped by decades of non-alignment orthodoxy—have periodically resisted closer cooperation with Washington on principle, creating a recurring gap between the pragmatic calculations of India's foreign-policy elite and the more skeptical instincts of significant segments

of domestic political and bureaucratic opinion.⁶⁷

These frictions have not, on the evidence surveyed in this paper, proven serious enough to derail the broader relationship, but they are a permanent feature of it rather than a temporary complication, and any analysis that treats the partnership as a smooth or linear progression toward ever-closer alignment risks understating the genuine and continuing tension between the two countries' respective conceptions of what the relationship should ultimately become.

It is also worth noting that these frictions have historically clustered around moments when one government misjudged how much latitude the other was prepared to grant it on a sensitive issue. Menon's account of the years surrounding the nuclear deal describes repeated instances in which American negotiators underestimated the depth of Indian sensitivity around anything resembling external oversight of its strategic programs, just as Indian negotiators at times underestimated how difficult it would be for their American counterparts to secure the domestic political support necessary for exceptions to established non-proliferation practice.⁶⁸

This pattern of mutual, if usually manageable, miscalculation suggests that the relationship's frictions are best understood not as evidence of an underlying incompatibility of interest, but as the ordinary friction that accompanies any partnership between two large, bureaucratically complex democracies with distinct domestic political constraints—a friction that has proven compatible with steady, if uneven, deepening of cooperation across the period surveyed in this paper.

13. The China Factor and the Turbulence of the Contemporary Order

Of all the structural forces examined in this paper, none has done more to drive India and the United States together than the rise of China. Mohan's *Samudra Manthan* argues that the deepening Sino-Indian rivalry, particularly in the maritime domain, has become the single most important variable shaping India's external alignments in the twenty-first century, pushing New Delhi toward closer, if still informal, security coordination with Washington, Tokyo, and Canberra even in the absence of any formal treaty commitment.⁶⁹ This dynamic is visible in the growing institutionalization of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, in expanding defence trade and joint military exercises between India and the United States, and in a shared, if not always explicitly stated, interest in preventing Chinese dominance over the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and the wider Indo-Pacific.⁷⁰

Mohan traces the origins of the Quadrilateral framework to informal coordination among India, the United States, Japan, and Australia during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami relief effort, arguing that this episode of practical humanitarian cooperation demonstrated to all four governments the value of coordinated action in the region well before the grouping acquired any explicit security orientation, and that the framework's subsequent, halting

⁶² Menon, *Choices*, 40–44.

⁶³ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 58–62.

⁶⁴ Menon, *Choices*, 32–34.

⁶⁵ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 60–62.

⁶⁶ Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0*, 18–22.

⁶⁷ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 70–75.

⁶⁸ Menon, *Choices*, 28–30.

⁶⁹ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 145–152.

⁷⁰ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 152–160.

institutionalization—dormant for much of the following decade before being revived amid growing concern over Chinese assertiveness—illustrates how contingent and threat-driven, rather than ideologically predetermined, the grouping's evolution has been.⁷¹

Mohan further notes that the annual Malabar naval exercise, originally a bilateral India-U.S. engagement dating to the early 1990s, has itself become a barometer of the broader relationship's trajectory: its gradual expansion to include Japan on a regular basis, and eventually Australia, tracked closely with the deepening of the wider security partnership examined throughout this paper, making it one of the most concrete and continuously observable indicators of the practical, if still informal, security architecture that has grown up around shared concern over China.⁷²

John Mearsheimer's structural realist account of great-power politics offers a useful external explanation for why Washington has invested so heavily in this convergence, and why it has tolerated significant Indian divergence on other issues rather than treating such divergence as a breach of an implicit democratic bargain. Mearsheimer argues that liberal internationalist efforts to bind rising or swing powers to a rules-based order through institutional and normative appeals are repeatedly overridden by the more basic logic of great-power balancing once a state's geopolitical weight becomes strategically significant.⁷³ Applied to India, this logic suggests that the United States has continued to invest in the relationship despite India's divergence on Russia—most visibly in New Delhi's refusal to condemn the 2022 invasion of Ukraine and its continued purchase of discounted Russian oil—and despite its reluctance to accept binding commitments, precisely because India's structural position vis-à-vis China is too valuable to sacrifice over disagreements that do not touch that core concern.⁷⁴

Mearsheimer's broader argument also cautions against reading too much long-term stability into any convergence built primarily on a common adversary, since such coalitions have historically proven durable only for as long as the shared threat perception persists; should the structural competition between the United States and China de-escalate, or should India's own assessment of the China threat shift, the strategic logic that has driven India and the United States together in the twenty-first century could weaken correspondingly.⁷⁵

The turbulence of the present order, in other words, has not weakened the relationship so much as clarified its actual basis: shared democratic identity and civilizational affinity have functioned as durable and useful diplomatic resources, and the diaspora has functioned as an effective societal bridge, but none of these have compelled convergence on issues where India's interests diverge from Washington's, nor prevented the relationship from deepening substantially wherever the shared concern with China's rise is engaged.

14. A Comparative Perspective: The United States Alongside Russia and China in Indian Strategy

The argument of this paper can be sharpened by briefly situating the United States alongside the other two major

powers with which India maintains significant, if very differently structured, relationships: Russia and China. Menon's account of Indian decision-making treats the relationship with Russia as historically the most stable and least contested of India's major-power relationships, rooted in a long-standing defence-supply relationship dating to the Cold War and reinforced by the absence of any significant territorial or ideological dispute between the two countries, a stability that stands in sharp contrast to the more recently constructed and still-evolving partnership with Washington.⁷⁶

This contrast helps explain a pattern that otherwise puzzles many Western observers: India's unwillingness to jeopardize its Russia relationship for the sake of closer alignment with the United States is not, on Menon's reading, a sign of ambivalence about the value of the American partnership, but rather a direct expression of the autonomy-preserving logic examined throughout this paper—India has consistently sought to avoid a situation in which deepening ties with any one major power come at the cost of severing ties with another.⁷⁷ The relationship with China presents an almost inverse case. Mohan's account in *Samudra Manthan* treats Sino-Indian relations as characterized by structural rivalry rather than the cooperative stability that marks the Russia relationship, rooted in an unresolved border dispute, competition for influence across South and Southeast Asia, and China's much larger and more rapidly growing economic and military capability.⁷⁸

It is precisely this asymmetric and unresolved rivalry with China, rather than any positive attraction to American values or institutions, that Mohan identifies as the single most powerful force pushing India toward the United States, a reading entirely consistent with Mearsheimer's broader theoretical claim that structural balancing against a common threat, rather than shared identity, is what best explains convergence between otherwise quite different states.⁷⁹

Placed side by side, these three relationships reveal a consistent underlying pattern: India relates to Russia through a stable, low-friction partnership inherited from the Cold War and insulated from ideological considerations; to China through a structurally competitive rivalry that it seeks to manage rather than resolve; and to the United States through a rapidly deepening but still carefully bounded partnership whose growth has been driven above all by the shared concern with China rather than by the shared fact of democratic government. The coexistence of all three relationships, each pursued largely on its own terms, is itself the clearest possible demonstration of the strategic-autonomy doctrine that this paper has argued lies at the heart of contemporary Indian foreign policy.⁸⁰

15. Conclusion: What “Two Democracies” Actually Means

The India-U.S. relationship in the twenty-first century is genuinely a partnership between two democracies, but the phrase describes a shared vocabulary and a diplomatic register more than it describes the operative logic of the relationship itself. The theoretical arc traced in this paper—

⁷¹ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 160–165.

⁷² Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 165–168.

⁷³ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 54–61.

⁷⁴ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 65–69.

⁷⁵ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 70–74.

⁷⁶ Menon, *Choices*, 40–44.

⁷⁷ Menon, *Choices*, 44–47.

⁷⁸ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 8–15.

⁷⁹ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 15–21.

⁸⁰ Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0*, 13–18.

from the Wilsonian idealism of the Nehru era⁸¹ through the realist relearning forced by the end of the Cold War,⁸² the further recalibration demanded by the end of unipolarity and India's own rise,⁸³ the structural turning point of the nuclear deal,⁸⁴ the defence and technology partnership that followed it,⁸⁵ the supplementary but genuine role of civilizational soft power and diaspora advocacy,⁸⁶ the persistence of strategic autonomy as a guiding principle of Indian policy,⁸⁷ the recurring frictions that accompany the partnership,⁸⁸ and the selective, interest-driven nature of convergence amid the turbulence of the current order and the shared concern with China⁸⁹—together suggest that the relationship is better described as an interest-based hedge between two powers that happen to be democracies than as an alliance grounded in shared regime type.

For India's foreign-policy establishment, the strategic task of the coming decade will be to continue extracting the substantial benefits of this partnership—in technology, defence cooperation, diplomatic support against China, and the goodwill of an increasingly influential diaspora—without allowing the language of shared democracy to obscure, for policymakers or for the public, the fundamentally autonomous course that has defined Indian grand strategy since independence. For Washington, the corresponding task will be to accept that a genuinely useful partnership with India will never fully resemble a treaty alliance, and that the attempt to extract alliance-like commitments from New Delhi is more likely to strain the relationship than to deepen it. Both propositions follow from the same underlying reality documented throughout this paper: India and the United States are, and are likely to remain, two democracies whose interests overlap substantially without ever fully converging—a partnership defined less by shared identity than by the shared, if asymmetric, calculation that each has more to gain from cooperation than from its absence.

15.1 Policy Implications

Three practical implications follow from the analysis developed in this paper. First, Indian policymakers would be well served by continuing to resist pressure—whether from Washington or from domestic advocates of closer alignment—to frame India's foreign policy explicitly as a project of balancing China on America's behalf, since doing so would sacrifice precisely the diplomatic flexibility that the Nonalignment 2.0 framework identifies as India's central strategic asset.⁹⁰

Second, American policymakers would be well served by tempering expectations that closer strategic cooperation with India will translate into automatic Indian alignment on issues such as Russia policy, since the historical record

surveyed in this paper suggests that such expectations have repeatedly proven to be a source of avoidable friction rather than a realistic basis for planning.⁹¹

Third, both governments would benefit from investing more deliberately in the economic and technological dimensions of the relationship, which this paper has shown to lag consistently behind the defence and diplomatic dimensions, since a more balanced partnership across all these domains would likely prove more resilient to the kind of structural shifts—a change in the pace of China's rise, for instance, or a realignment of Indian domestic politics—that could otherwise weaken a relationship built too heavily on any single pillar.

15.2 Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This paper's reliance on a defined set of secondary sources, disclosed at the outset and discussed further in the note on method above, means that its conclusions should be read as a synthesis of existing scholarly and policy analysis rather than as the product of original archival or interview-based research. Future research seeking to test or extend the arguments made here would benefit from direct engagement with primary diplomatic records as they become available, from systematic public-opinion data on both sides of the relationship, and from closer empirical study of the economic and technological dimensions of the partnership, which remain comparatively underexamined in the literature surveyed in this paper relative to its security and nuclear dimensions.

Appendix: Selected Chronology of India-U.S. Relations

The following chronology is offered as a reference aid summarizing the principal episodes discussed in this paper. It is provided for orientation only; substantive claims about each episode are footnoted at the relevant point in the body of the paper above.

1947 — Indian independence; Nehru's foreign policy establishes non-alignment as India's guiding doctrine.

1961 — Founding of the Non-Aligned Movement at the Belgrade Conference.

1962 — The Sino-Indian War exposes the limits of Nehruvian idealism and initiates a slow reorientation of Indian strategic thinking.

1971 — The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation marks a pragmatic departure from strict non-alignment ahead of the Bangladesh Liberation War.

1974 — India's first nuclear test (“Smiling Buddha”) further complicates relations with Washington.

1991 — Collapse of the Soviet Union and India's balance-of-payments crisis jointly force economic liberalization and diplomatic reorientation.

1998 — The Pokhran-II nuclear tests provoke American sanctions, followed within two years by renewed high-level dialogue.

2005 – 2008 — Negotiation and ratification of the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement, culminating in the Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver.

2010 — Expansion of defence and technology cooperation, including foundational logistics, communications, and geospatial agreements, and deepening informal security

⁸¹ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 15–22.

⁸² Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 8–18.

⁸³ Bajpai, Basit, and Krishnappa, *India's Grand Strategy*, 55–63.

⁸⁴ Mohan, *Impossible Allies*, 112–119.

⁸⁵ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 152–158.

⁸⁶ Menon, *Choices*, 30–34.

⁸⁷ Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0*, 1–5.

⁸⁸ Menon, *Choices*, 32–34.

⁸⁹ Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 54–61.

⁹⁰ Khilnani *et al.*, *Nonalignment 2.0*, 8–12.

⁹¹ Menon, *Choices*, 40–44.

coordination in the Indo-Pacific.

2017 – 2020 — Sino-Indian border tensions intensify, reinforcing the structural logic of India-U.S. security convergence discussed in this paper.

2022 — India's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine illustrates the continuing limits that strategic autonomy places on alignment with Washington.

16. References

1. Bajpai Kanti, Saira Basit, Krishnappa V, eds. *India's Grand Strategy: History, Theory, Cases*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014.
2. Khilnani Sunil, Rajiv Kumar, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Prakash Menon, Nandan Nilekani, Srinath Raghavan, *et al.* *Nonalignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century*. New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research, 2012.
3. Mearsheimer John J. *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018.
4. Menon Shivshankar. *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016.
5. Mohan C Raja. *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy*. New Delhi: Viking, 2003.
6. Mohan C Raja. *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order*. New Delhi: India Research Press, 2006.
7. Mohan C Raja. *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012.
8. Tellis Ashley J. *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001.