



Dynamics of India-US Relations during UPA Government's Tenure (2004-2014)

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ABSTRACT

India and the United States, as the world's two largest democracies, share common values and interests that form the basis of their relationship. However, their historical journey towards a closer partnership has been shaped by a range of factors, including political considerations, strategic interests, economic opportunities, and shared challenges on the global stage.

The present article sheds light on dynamics in India – US relations during the two tenures of the UPA government (2004-2009 & 2009-2014). As it is a dynamic subject and a matter of contemporary relevance and importance, India-US relations is still attracting the attention of scholars around the world. Statesmen on both sides have bemoaned this period as ‘the lost half century’ or ‘the fifty wasted years’ during which the world’s largest democracy and the world’s oldest democracy failed to cooperate consistently across a range of issues.

The UPA governments' tenure marked a turning point in the relationship, characterized by strategic initiatives such as the New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship and US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, which paved the way for enhanced defence, nuclear energy, economic and trade cooperation. It provided a comprehensive roadmap for engagement in areas such as joint exercises, defence trade, and research and development collaboration.

Key Words: Comprehensive, Framework, International Relations, Strategic, Statesman,

1. INTRODUCTION

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future”, said John. F. Kennedy. Change is pertinent and natural in International Relations. So is the case with India-US relationship. Since, independence the relationship between India and America was like tides of a sea – sometimes high and sometimes low.

During the early years the chief aim of India’s Foreign policy was anti-imperialism and anti-racism. During the same time, the Americans viewed the world through the prism of anti-Communism. This thinking has produced the axiom of **John Foster Dulles**, **“Those who are not with us are against us”**¹. The rivalry between America and erstwhile Soviet Russia has divided the world into two power blocks. Faced with an increasingly bipolar world, India adopted an idealistic, yet functionally pragmatic philosophy of non- alignment as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. This attitude of India during 1950s made US to view India’s nonalignment as a cover for interests that diverged from its own. As the Cold War gained momentum, America’s frustration with Indian nonalignment multiplied. Failing to get the cooperation from India, and with a communist government in China, Pakistan became an essential element in the United States’ containment of the Soviet Union in Asia. What began as an ideological gulf between India and the US developed into a strategic chasm.

The Sino-Indian border war of 1962 compelled Nehru to seek assistance from the western powers. During this crisis American response was warm yet strategically motivated. It prevailed on Pakistan for an assurance that it would not invade Kashmir so that India could redeploy its northern troops towards the front with China. Throughout the episode Washington adopted a position of strict neutrality, alienating India and driving Pakistan towards China for military sustenance. The expanding Sino-Pakistani relationship did not, however, prompt a change in India-US relations. In 1971, the east Pakistan crisis coincided with American attempts at building a rapprochement with China, which was facilitated largely by Pakistan. Faced with America’s tacit support for Pakistan, India officially turned to the Soviet Union for assistance.

India conducted its first nuclear weapon test at Pokhran in 1974. This major jolt to US made it suspicious towards India. This also has strained the relations between the two democracies. Although India assured the world that its test was a "peaceful" one, the event was a blow not just to American influence in south Asia but also to the emerging global non-proliferation regime. The Afghanistan conflict in 1980s also made India and United States to stand on opposing sides. Later in the decade, as Mikhail Gorbachev instituted changes in Soviet policies, including on Afghanistan, India's relations with the US improved marginally.

US arms supplies to India, unheard of since 1962, resumed on a small scale between 1986 and 1988. In 1988, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made a historic visit to China in an attempt to begin the process of normalizing relations between the two neighbours. India seemed to be experimenting with positive diplomacy as a means for resolving long- running disagreements. This was also reflected in India's spell of logistical support for American military operations in the 1990 Gulf War.

As elsewhere, the Cold War had negatively affected the regional security environment in south Asia. It sustained Pakistan's ability to maintain a strategic balance against India for many years, a south Asian arms race, and tense relations between India and the United States for most of the 1970s and 1980s. This situation might have persisted were it not for two major events that occurred at this juncture - **the end of the Cold War** and **India's economic crisis**.

The collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 has brought to halt the dreadful Cold War between the two super powers. The end of Cold War marked a major shift in world politics and fundamentally restructured a number of relationships around the world, the India-US one being no exception. International Politics, in a stroke, had transformed from bipolar to unipolar situation making America as the sole Super Power. Nonalignment became redundant in the absence of superpower competition. This changed international scenario made India to alter its foreign policy, strategically in favour of US.

The 1990's in retrospect were a period when India gradually shed its anti-imperialist and non-alignment baggage in favour of an approach to foreign policy grounded in realpolitik. Pokhran – II in May 1998, India's rejection of Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 and arriving at partnership with China, Japan, Iran and the United States by 2005 signalled a new paradigm in Indian foreign policy. In this direction, in 2004, India and the United States formulated the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) which laid the foundations for cooperation in civilian nuclear activities and high-technology trade.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study would focus on the changing dynamics in India – US relations during the two tenures of the UPA government (2004-2009 & 2009-2014). As it is a dynamic subject and a matter of contemporary relevance and importance, India-US relations is still attracting the attention of scholars around the world. Statesmen on both sides have bemoaned this period as 'the lost half century' or 'the fifty wasted years' during which the world's largest democracy and the world's oldest democracy failed to cooperate consistently across a range of issues.

After the end of Cold War, the US emerged as the sole super power or 'hyper power', a term first used by Hubert Vedrine, the then French foreign minister. The US saw this as a unique opportunity to refashion the world according to its desire and interests. During the same time, India too took a series of initiatives to adjust to the new scenario in the global power structure. India fine tuned its foreign policy in order to free the Indo-US relationship from the prejudices and stereotypes of the past. Though India made number of gestures towards normalising relations with the US, there were also shades of grey in the relationship between the two nations. US administration made it clear that its objectives was nothing short of capping, rolling back and ultimately eliminating India's nuclear capability. It insisted on India's signing not only the newly negotiated CTBT, but also the discriminatory NPT. The confrontation reached a crescendo after the nuclear explosion by India in Pokhran in May 1998.

Emergence of China in recent past as aspiring economic power parallel to America, Sino-Pakistan entente, role of Indian diaspora in United States and fait accompli of India's emergence as a major economic and military power, reoriented the strategic outlook of India and America towards each other. Former US Under Secretary of State Nicholas R. Burns pointed out that "the big breakthrough in US-India relations was achieved originally by the private sector". Indian policy makers were aware of the precariousness of the domestic economic situation and the need to guide the Indian economy out of crisis carefully. Indo-US relations have undergone a remarkable transformation during the tenure of UPA government. Today, there is close cooperation between the two countries on the issues of far-reaching consequences, such as the **use of nuclear energy, space technology for peaceful purposes, missile defence, environment protection, human rights and fight against terrorism**.

2.1 United Progressive Alliance (UPA)

United Progressive Alliance(UPA) is a centre-left political alliance of predominantly left-leaning political parties in India. It was formed after the 2004 general election. The largest party in UPA is Indian National Congress (INC). It formed a government with support from other left-aligned parties in 2004 after no single party could get the majority.

UPA – 1 (2004–2008)

UPA was formed soon after the 2004 general elections when no party had won a majority. The then ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won 181 seats of 544, as opposed to the UPA's tally of 218 seats.

The Left Front with 59 MPs (excluding the speaker of the Lok Sabha), the Samajwadi Party with 39 MPs and the Bahujan Samaj Party with 19 MPs were other significant blocks that supported UPA at various times. UPA did not achieve a majority, rather it relied on external support, similar to the formula adopted by the previous minority governments of the United Front, the NDA, the Congress government of P. V. Narasimha Rao, and earlier governments of V. P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar.

An informal alliance had existed prior to the elections as several of the constituent parties had developed seat-sharing agreements in many states. After the election the results of negotiations between parties were announced. The UPA government's policies were initially guided by a common minimum programme that the alliance hammered out with consultations with Jyoti Basu and Harkishan Singh Surjeet of the 59-member Left Front. Hence, government policies were generally perceived as centre-left, reflecting the centrist policies of the INC. During the tenure of Jharkhand Chief Minister Madhu Koda, the constituents of the UPA were, by mutual consent, supporting his government.

On 22 July 2008, the UPA survived a vote of confidence in the parliament brought on by the Left Front withdrawing their support in protest at the India–United States Civil Nuclear Agreement. The Congress party and its leaders along with then SP leader Amar Singh were accused of a "cash for vote" scam as part of the cash-for-votes scandal, in which they were accused of buying votes in Lok Sabha to save the government. During UPA I the economy saw steady economic growth and many people escaped poverty.

UPA – 2 (2009–2014)

In the Indian General Election in 2009, the UPA won 262 seats, of which the INC accounted for 206. During UPA II, the alliance was broiled in scams. This ranged from 2G spectrum to Coalgate scam. These scams impacted UPA's image nationwide and the approval rating for the govt fell. In addition, many members left for YSRCP. This started a domino effect with members leaving to form their own parties and parties such as DMK leaving the alliance altogether. During this time UPA struggled with state election and leadership stability. The alliance suffered a defeat in 2014 Lok Sabha elections as it won only 60 seats. In addition, UPA won only one state election and got wiped out from Andhra Pradesh where they previously had 150+ MLAs.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a mosaic of literature on India's Foreign Policy and India-US relations. Important books on the present topic of study are "India and United States in 21st Century" by Teresita C. Schaffer: "A new triangle: India, China and the US" by Ashutosh Varshney: "Post-Cold War Indian Foreign Policy" by Achin Vanaik, and "Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb" by Strobe Talbott.

Surprisingly little serious academic effort has been expended on a review of the performance and policies of either the UPA I (2004-9) or UPA II governments (2009- 14). Popular or journalistic accounts still dominate the field. While we cannot expect academically rigorous analysis from such accounts, they are influential in establishing the terms in which the UPA governments are discussed, and therefore merit consideration. Thus, Bhambri's *Sonia in Power: UPA Government, 2004-2006* 45 explores the UPA's rise to power and the Left parties' role in coalition formation. Essentially a compilation of press articles, the author examines domestic and foreign issues such as bureaucracy, elections and democracy, federalism, governance, relations with Pakistan and the Kashmir problem. This volume is useful in highlighting the role of Sonia Gandhi in coalition-building, but as the title indicates, it covers a brief period in the tenure of the UPA, and the journalistic nature of this volume, moreover, detracts from its analytical quality.

David M. Malone's *Does the Elephant Dance? Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy* surveys key features of contemporary Indian Foreign Policy. This book identifies relevant aspects of Indian history, examines the role of domestic politics and internal and external security challenges, and of domestic and international economic factors. It analyses the specifics of India's foreign policy within its South Asian neighbourhood, and with respect to China, the USA, West Asia, East Asia, Europe and Russia, as well as multilateral diplomacy.

So also, *Avoiding Armageddon; America, India and Pakistan, to the brink and back* by Bruce Riedel gives a candid review of seven decades of U.S. diplomacy in South Asia. South Asia is the place in the world where a nuclear exchange is most conceivable opined Bruce.

Gaur's *The UPA Government: Achievements, Failures and Challenges* covers a longer time span and offers a more detailed narrative of coalition politics. Although reasonable coverage is provided of key milestones, such as the vote over energy policy, the overall assessment is cursory, with little detailed analysis of policies. Minorities, for instance, are hardly mentioned. For a work aimed at a general audience, the general tone is set by its sensational, racy style.

Similarly, *The Other Side of UPA-II: An Analysis of the Second Innings of the Government of World's Largest Democracy* also falls into the same genre. It concentrates on how the UPA came to power in 2009 and a review of its policies. This assessment, however, is far from comprehensive: it is merely a compilation of government announcements, without critical understanding or analysis. Unsurprisingly, minorities' issues rarely feature in this volume.

In contrast, Baru's *The Accidental Prime Minister: The Making and Unmaking of Manmohan Singh* achieved notoriety during the Sixteenth Lok Sabha elections. An insider account, written by Manmohan Singh's former media advisor, this volume covers the period up to 2009. Its main objective, as the author acknowledged, was to demonstrate how Manmohan Singh was both 'made' and 'unmade' as Prime Minister by the machinations of the Gandhi family. As an informed, journalistic account it provides invaluable insights into the working of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the major challenges which faced the UPA (I) administration, and the complex process of managing the coalition. It also offers a welcome revisionist perspective on Manmohan Singh as a reforming, radical Prime Minister who was frustrated by the Congress hierarchy and its coalition partners.

The Accidental Prime Minister is a major advance on previous journalistic accounts, but it also suffers from notable shortcomings. First, notwithstanding its focus on policy, an assessment of UPA's approach to religious minorities is entirely absent. Second, the work's objectivity has been questioned because it was inspired by the refusal of the UPA (I) to extend Baru's tenure as a media advisor, allegedly at the behest of the Congress hierarchy. Finally, Manmohan Singh himself has distanced himself from the work's revelations, thereby casting doubt on some of the major claims, especially those relating to the Gandhi family. Overall, as we shall see below, *The Accidental Prime Minister* sheds new light on the tenure of the UPA (I) but it is far from a comprehensive – or unbiased – account of the government's policy formation process.

Sáez and Singh's *New Dimensions of Politics in India: The United Progressive Alliance in Power*⁶¹ assesses the UPA (I)'s performance on a wide range of fronts – poverty eradication, federalism, education, state secularism, minorities, foreign policy, energy security and anti-terrorism – and reflects on policy formation and implementation, and the continuities and discontinuities with previous administrations. However, despite this broad coverage, the central thesis of the work is that the 'UPA experience suggests that *ideology* matters.

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study shall be both historical, empirical and analytical in its roots and inquiring in its aims. It is rooted in a review of literature, both academic and more general. This study primarily depends on secondary data. In practical operational terms this study follows a historical and analytical method. As the topic is of contemporary relevance, the method of current events analysis in historical perspective shall be adopted. The present research is a case study of UPA tenure between 2004 to 2014. This provides the scope for an in-dept investigation on the topic and for comparative analysis of pre and post UPA governments. Articles written by scholars, leading journalists, political functionaries and policy makers, newspapers and internet shall serve as the basic source of information on the topic.

4.1 Background of India-US relations

The relationship between India and the United States has evolved significantly over the years, shaped by historical, geopolitical, and strategic factors. Understanding the background of India-US relations is crucial to comprehending the changing dynamics during the tenure of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) governments from 2004 to 2014.

Post-Independence Era: India's independence in 1947 marked a critical turning point in its foreign relations, including with the United States. At that time, the US had limited engagement with India, as it viewed the region primarily through the lens of the Cold War and its rivalry with the Soviet Union. India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, pursued a policy of non-alignment, seeking to maintain its autonomy and distance from both the US-led Western bloc and the Soviet-led Eastern bloc.

Cold War Dynamics: During the Cold War period, the relationship between India and the US was influenced by geopolitical considerations. The US perceived India's non-alignment as tilting towards the Soviet Union, which led to some level of mistrust and strained relations between the two countries. Additionally, the US supported Pakistan as a strategic ally, particularly during the conflicts with India, such as the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1947, 1965, and 1971.

Non-Aligned Movement and Beyond: India's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which aimed to foster cooperation among non-aligned nations, further shaped its relationship with the United States. While India maintained a neutral stance during the Cold War, it also sought economic assistance and development partnerships from various countries, including the US.

Post-Cold War Era: The post-Cold War era witnessed a significant shift in India-US relations. India's economic liberalization in the early 1990s, which opened up the Indian economy and attracted foreign investment, played a pivotal role in redefining the relationship. The US recognized India's economic potential and began to view it as an emerging global power.

Nuclear Tests and Sanctions: In 1998, India conducted a series of nuclear tests, which drew international attention and led to sanctions imposed by the US and other countries. The nuclear tests and subsequent sanctions created a setback in India-US relations, as they highlighted differences in non-proliferation priorities and strategic concerns.

Post-Sanctions Era and Growing Cooperation: Following the sanctions, both India and the US embarked on a process of reengagement and building closer ties. The US recognized India as a responsible nuclear power and sought to engage India in various areas, including defence, trade, and technology.

Strategic Convergence and Counterterrorism Cooperation: In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, India and the US found common ground in their fight against terrorism. The shared concern over global terrorism provided an impetus for increased cooperation in intelligence-sharing, counterterrorism efforts, and defence cooperation.

UPA Governments' Tenure and Changing Dynamics: The UPA governments' tenure from 2004 to 2014 witnessed a significant transformation in India-US relations. During this period, several key developments took place, including the signing of the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008. This landmark agreement demonstrated a growing trust and recognition of India as a responsible nuclear power, allowing India access to nuclear technology and fuel for civilian use.

The UPA governments also emphasized economic cooperation, leading to a substantial increase in bilateral trade and investment between India and the US. Defence and security cooperation between the two countries expanded, with the signing of the New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship in 2005 and joint military exercises.

4.2 Findings

The post-1990 story of India-US relations is not just about the end of the Cold War, India's second round of nuclear tests, or economic liberalization. It is also about rediscovering common political values. For most of the 20th century, American policymakers failed to see the potential in India to be a strong (and democratic) partner in Asia. Instead, there was a tendency to see India as "a revisionist power bent on restructuring the international system at the expense of America's global interests."² Since the early 1990s, however, an increasingly influential school of thought in American foreign policy began recognizing the strategic utility of the common political values espoused by both nations.

Over the past decade there has been a phenomenal headway in the relations between India and US. The ideological differences between the two nations were forced to the background to facilitate pragmatic and strategic relationship. The emergence of China as the economic and military power in Asia necessitated US to strengthen India to maintain a balance of power in Asia. Increasingly, it was a value-based approach to India-US relations that prevailed in the aftermath of September 11th, when democracy promotion became a significant item in Americas' agenda. In 2007, Burns wrote that the promotion of democracy and freedom around the world "should be an essential component of the new US-India relationship"³.

4.3 India-US relations during UPA I & II

The UPA government's tenure in New Delhi has been a period of rather momentous geopolitical change in Asia. As the UPA came into power in 2004, geopolitical themes that resonate today—such as the rise of China—were more than palpable. Other themes, such as the United States' global decline and a broader shift to multipolarity or "G-Zero," were less so. Regionally, the seemingly perennial issue of Pakistan persisted, but saw no major breakthroughs.

Although the term never really caught on, the notion of a “Manmohan Doctrine” is helpful in understanding what India’s technocratic professor-prime minister had in mind when he rose to the helm in 2004. His professorial proclivities coloured his perceptions of foreign policy. As an economist, his “doctrine” was that Indian foreign policy should privilege economic goals as the driver of India’s national interest.

India’s relationship with the United States remains important and important and strategic. There were a number of regional and international factors that were also fundamental to the warming of India-US relations. Taken together, a growing India and an increasingly powerful China all combined to spur India-US entente. In fact, China, not Pakistan, has gradually emerged as the new third party in the India-US relationship. Varshney describes this development as "a new triangle" predicated on realist logic: "when the first- and second- ranked powers fight, the first often ardently courts the third."⁴ China is growing rapidly and although its stated philosophy is one of peaceful growth, its defence expenditures have been rising and now rank third in the world behind the US and Russia. It is also a known proliferator of nuclear technology to rogue regimes like Libya, Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea, although today it may regret those earlier actions. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the US gravitated towards India.

The towering achievement of India-US relations during UPA government is signing of **Civil Nuclear Agreement**. The **123 Agreement** signed between the United States of America and the Republic of India is known as the **U.S.–India Civil Nuclear Agreement** or **Indo-US nuclear deal**. The framework for this agreement was a July 18, 2005, joint statement by then Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and then U.S. President George W. Bush, under which India agreed to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities and to place all its civil nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards and, in exchange, the United States agreed to work toward full civil nuclear cooperation with India. On August 1, 2008, the IAEA approved the safeguards agreement with India, after which the United States approached the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** to grant a waiver to India to commence civilian nuclear trade. The 48-nation NSG granted the waiver to India on September 6, 2008 allowing it to access, civilian nuclear technology and fuel from other countries. The implementation of this waiver made **India the only known country with nuclear weapons which is not a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) but is still allowed to carry out nuclear commerce with the rest of the world.**

The nuclear deal did not obligate India to sign the CTBT or put a moratorium on further production of fissile materials for weapons. These are two key measures of commitment to the global nuclear non-proliferation and arms control agenda favoured by the vast majority of states. This position stemmed from the Bush administration’s ‘antipathy to nuclear arms control’ in Ashley Tellis’s words, and its desire, shared by New Delhi, to see India expand its capacity to balance China’s nuclear weapon capabilities.

Taking advantage of the end of the Cold War and the US need for meaningful partners after September 11th, India sought to capture as much diplomatic space as possible to advance its own interests. It did this by supporting the US on key initiatives, including the war on terrorism and nuclear missile defence, both of which sought to challenge and modify the "global rules of the game" in ways congruent with Indian interests.⁵ It joined hands with the US in the name of democracy promotion and cooperated to a great extent on the nuclear front, placing a number of its nuclear reactors under international safeguards, all of this leading to its almost unconditional entry into the global nuclear club.

Overall, the most reasonable evaluation of India’s foreign policy fortunes under the UPA is that the UPA’s first term in power was significantly better handled than its second. The economic story best affirms this assertion. Under the UPA’s second term, India passed over numerous opportunities to deepen bilateral engagement with the United States after signing the nuclear deal in the first term.

4.4 Regional Power Balances

Besides the bilateral relationship, there are a number of longer-term regional and international factors that were fundamental to the warming of India-USA relations. Taken together, a growing India, a declining Pakistan and an increasingly powerful China all combined to motivate an India-USA entente. Jaswanth Singh, India’s former Foreign Minister stated that Pakistan is a ‘failed state’ while India ‘stays together’ thus making better relations with India the right strategic choice for the United States. Indeed, one of the major features of America’s new South Asia policy was the conceptual decoupling of India and Pakistan. In fact, China, not Pakistan, has gradually emerged as the new third party in the India-US relationship, which is described as ‘a new triangle’ by Ashutosh Varshney. China is also a known proliferator of nuclear technology to rogue regimes such as Libya, Pakistan, Iran and North Korea. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the USA gravitated towards India.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of the UPA governments' tenure (2004-2014) provides valuable insights into the key policies, initiatives, challenges, and outcomes that shaped the bilateral relationship during that period. The UPA governments made significant strides in deepening strategic partnerships, expanding economic cooperation, advancing diplomatic engagements, and promoting people-to-people exchanges. These efforts contributed to the overall strengthening of the India-US relationship and laid a solid foundation for future collaboration.

The UPA governments' tenure marked a transformative period in India-US relations, characterized by notable shifts and advancements in various spheres. This period witnessed the establishment of a strong strategic partnership, expansion of economic cooperation, advancements in defence and security collaboration, and active diplomatic engagements. The UPA governments implemented significant policies and initiatives that had a profound impact on India-US relations. The US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement and the New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship were instrumental in deepening strategic cooperation. Bilateral trade dialogues, economic reforms, and initiatives to attract foreign investment contributed to the expansion of economic ties.

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