



Trump's foreign policy agenda strong support in India

BY SHEKHAR TIWARI AND SUE GHOSH-STRICKLETT, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS - 03/20/17 07:00 PM EDT

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In his June 2016 remarks to a joint session of the U.S. Congress, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that India and the United States must “convert shared ideals into practical cooperation.” A necessary starting point is the U.S.-India Security Partnership, including an implementation plan for the 2015 Defense Trade and Technology Initiative.

Recent Gallup polls show that India is among the top six countries viewed favorably by Americans. In 2008, after the passage of the U.S.-India Civilian Nuclear Deal, President Bush’s approval rating in India soared to 80 percent.

Yet, even with President Obama’s high-profile visits to India, the previous momentum has flat-lined. A case in point is the U.S.-India Defense Framework, which was inked in 2005 by President Bush and seen as a significant platform for bilateral cooperation.

Despite being expanded and renamed by President Obama in 2015 as the Defense Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI), implementation has

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faltered; the promise of the DTTI is like a Navy depth-charge that has yet to reach its intended hydrostatic depth. Political observers in Washington and New Delhi are optimistic about the chances of a Trump administration foray into closer ties with India.

They point to Modi's victory platform in the 2014 Indian elections — tougher border control measures, stricter vetting of refugees entering the country, government reform against special interest politics — and note its resemblance to the major themes of the Trump campaign.

Of course, that is not an accident. Both the United States and India are multi-religious, multi-ethnic and boisterous democracies. Both are governed by a rule of law, having shared ideals and a common lineage. Most significantly, both countries are in the throes of a popular revolt against a globalist elite who have prospered from crony capitalism.

President Trump's campaign trail misgivings about his predecessors' foreign policy failings deeply resonated in India. The largest donor to post-war Afghan reconstruction, India supported the U.S. war effort to oust the Taliban, but was not included in America's post-war plans.

India, with its significant regional assets, foresaw the re-emergence of radical Islamists, like ISIS, in South and West Asia. It strongly opposed U.S. intervention in Iraq and foresaw the post-war power grab by Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood that led to the destabilization of the Middle East.

India is supportive of President Trump's well-articulated foreign policy agenda, including an American rapprochement with Russia to pursue the shared goal of fighting radical Islamists. A strong American response to the growing number of Chinese port and military bases, particularly in unstable regimes encircling the Indian Ocean trade route, is also very desirable.

American investments in Israel's security that can commensurately tap the sizable India-Israel defense trade is appreciated. Trump's one-two punch of eliminating ISIS while rolling back the regional hegemonies of Saudi Arabia and Iran is also highly favored in India.

Finally, India concurs with President Trump's demand that America's security partners share a proportionate cost burden. Thus, India must fully shoulder its own defense costs in a very rough neighborhood.

Sadly, India remains a vastly underutilized security partner of the United States, particularly in the context of America's "Pivot to Asia" strategy. The pivot to Asia has been narrowly construed as a zero-sum game of either engaging China or containing China vis-à-vis America's cold war treaty partners, but India is not in that cluster of allies.

A blind reliance on existing treaties or cobbling together new ones with little accountability is foolish. In the formulation of a new Asia strategy, a thoughtful reassessment of America's national security interests in the post-cold war era is required.

A durable and effective American security partnership with India, including an implementation plan for the 2015 Defense Trade and Technology Initiative, is a very good place to start.

Shekhar Tiwari is the chairman of the [American Hindu Coalition](#), a nonprofit organization comprised of American Hindus who support limited

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