

U.S.-India Relations

Breaking New Ground with India

Build a Valuable Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership

Background

Five centuries ago, the lure of doing business in India was so powerful that a generation of bold Portuguese navigators and sailors changed the map of the world just to get there. We are now at the cusp of another great Western adventure with India. Americans have become “India struck”—and we are not the only ones. No two other major countries in the world are more natural partners in democracy and freedom than are India and the United States.

Recommendations

To assure that Indo-U.S. relations better benefit both countries, the next President should embark on a course that can fairly be labeled “policy continuity-plus” and should include several progressions. In the area of nuclear energy, it should include:

- cooperation in greatly reducing the nuclear arms threat and proliferation, based on the joint pro-disarmament legacy of President Reagan and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, which has been taken up by a quartet of American statesmen led by former Secretary of State George Shultz.

In the use of hard power and related measures, the next administration’s course of policy continuity-plus should include:

- coordination with the Indian military especially the Navy, including expanding joint naval exercises and planning, sharing more information on deployments, and rotating responsibility for patrol duties in sea lanes—thereby establishing a force-multiplier for stability
- designation of India as a major non-NATO ally, a privilege accorded Pakistan in 2004, to enhance technology and arms transfers
- development of much stronger security ties involving counter-terrorism, an area of now-inexcusable lapses on the part of the United States.
- coordination to promote stability in Afghanistan (where India already has provided considerable support), plus Nepal, Sri Lanka, Burma and Bangladesh
- quiet but effective steps toward an Indo-Pakistani rapprochement over Kashmir, the greatest continuing threat to stability in the subcontinent

In the use of soft power, the next administration should engage in:

- support for a permanent Indian seat on the UN Security Council—a step that would acknowledge India's global status and reflect the geopolitical realities of the 21st century
- begin the process of negotiation of a free-trade agreement with India, which would be of benefit to both countries, but would require strong presidential leadership with protectionists in Congress and elsewhere
- academic partnerships, including encouraging more U.S. students to study in India and promoting education exchanges and joint research activity in science, health care and public health, and information technology, and
- cooperation with both India and China in energy security and other areas, rather than vainly and unwisely attempting to use India as a hedge against China.

Pursuing this agenda will realize the advantages of a natural alliance between two of the world's great, multi-ethnic democracies.

Key Facts

- India has more than a billion citizens—one-sixth of the world's population—more than half of whom are under 25.
- India's economy is now the world's third-largest in terms of purchasing power parity, and it has enjoyed economic growth rates of nine percent in each of the last two fiscal years.
- India is the world's largest democracy

A full version of this proposal, as well as supporting background material, is available at www.opportunity08.org.

About the Author and the Project

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