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Closer US-India Relations Benefit the United States and Mississippi

BY SENATOR ROGER WICKER

The dynamic and productive US-India relationship continues to grow from strength to strength, and there is no doubt that this partnership will play a major role in US foreign policy in the years ahead. This is good news for the United States and the State of Mississippi. Many have already noted India's growing importance on the world stage, in particular its influence as an anchor of democracy and stability in Asia. Speaking in New Delhi earlier this year, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta described the potential for India and the United States to forge even closer bonds when he said, "We have built a strong foundation, and we will enhance this partnership over time in the spirit of equality, common interest, and mutual respect."

Senator Roger Wicker, who represents Mississippi in the US Senate, explains that "The dynamic and productive US-India relationship continues to grow from strength to strength, and there is no doubt that this partnership will play a major role in US foreign policy in the years ahead. This is good news for the United States and for the State of Mississippi."

Record of Success If the last few years are any indication, the United States and India are moving together in the right direction. The 10-year New Framework Agreement signed by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2005 put a solid roadmap in place for greater bilateral cooperation. The vision was for India and the United States to strengthen their defense ties through military exercises, information sharing, technology development, and responses to security and humanitarian issues. Encouraging progress has been made since that milestone. Military sales between the United States and India have grown exponentially—to more than \$8 billion—and joint military exercises have increased dramatically in scale and frequency. India now conducts more than 50 military exercises a year with the United States—more than any other country.

As Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Seapower, I note that some of the most robust collaboration occurs between our navies. Among the exercises is the high-profile naval training codenamed "Malabar," demonstrating both countries' solid commitment to preparing for future defense operations. There are also signs of military-to-military engagement in my home state of Mississippi where Columbus Air Force Base has a T-38/Kiran instructor pilot exchange with AFS Hakimpet in Hyderabad, India.

Maritime Challenges Looking ahead, maritime challenges are important. The 2006 US-India Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation signaled a mutual interest in fighting transnational crimes like piracy, smuggling, and trafficking, in addition to addressing the maritime proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The agreement also recognized the benefits of working together to ensure navigation safety, disaster relief, and international law. Likewise, the US-India Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative signed in 2010 demonstrates an even greater maritime commitment to combating terrorism and piracy.

The East-West Center promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the US Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options.

Allies and strategic alliances are the best force multipliers as the United States confronts the emerging threats of the 21st century. In addition to common principles of democracy

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and rule of law, India and the United States share many security concerns. The scourge of transnational terrorism, the necessity of a stable and secure Afghanistan, the uncertainties of an increasingly belligerent Iran, along with a Chinese military eager to expand its influence, are some of the diverse and complex challenges both nations face.

Afghanistan India’s leadership in helping Afghanistan rebuild, including the training of Afghan soldiers and more than \$2 billion investment in infrastructure like highways and hospitals is extremely encouraging. These investments and partnerships are critical to Afghanistan’s future and ultimately the fight against terrorism. India has been a longtime champion of counterterrorism efforts and stopping al-Qaeda. As US troops withdraw from Afghanistan, continued vigilance is essential to keeping terrorist networks from finding a haven there, and no doubt India will continue to be a major player in promoting regional and global security.

Economy It is a well known fact that India is the world’s most populous democracy with a rapidly growing economy. A large labor force and strong base for high-tech industry have made that country a key US partner for trade in goods and services valued at almost \$100 billion—up from only \$18 billion in 2001, over a five-fold increase in a decade. Furthermore, the importance of the Indian Ocean for global trade and commerce will only continue to grow, which will require maritime strength and preparedness in maintaining open Sea Lanes of Communication, another shared US-India goal.

Looming Sequestration As America addresses tough budget realities, it is increasingly clear that national security and the long-term vitality of our defense industrial base will depend on the capabilities of our partners, friends, and allies around the world. The stakes are especially high in the coming weeks as Washington works to fix the unprecedented debt crisis. At more than \$16 trillion, the federal debt is unsustainable and current policy, as established by the Budget Control Act last year, dictates for drastic, across-the-board cuts to fall heavily on our military. Known as sequestration, another half a trillion dollars in defense cuts would cripple the ability of our Armed Forces to fulfill its strategic priorities, including maintaining a strong maritime presence in pivotal areas like the Indian Ocean.

Future Collaboration Planning for the long-term is part of the process, and US future defense strategy should recognize the power of collaborating with proven and steady allies like India. As Deputy Secretary of State William Burns said in a speech recently, “The essence of the vital partnership that we’re building lies in a simple truth. For the first time, for both of us, our individual success at home and abroad depends significantly on our cooperation.”

Obviously, there is still plenty of work to do. A cooperative defense trade relationship requires a serious commitment from the United States to the modernization of our Cold War-era export control system. In turn, India must be committed to a fair and open defense acquisition process that upholds transparency and interoperability with friends and partners. A vibrant defense trade that supports national security and economic vitality is an aim that is well understood in Mississippi.

In Forest, Raytheon manufactures an export compliant radar system for global F-16 customers. In Moss Point, Northrop Grumman manufactures UAVs under consideration by major foreign partners. And in Pascagoula, Huntington Ingalls and VT Halter are in contention for international sales of next generation blue water and coastal maritime vessels. Therefore, it is exciting that the relationship between the United States and India has become a partnership of growing confidence. I sincerely hope and expect that our economic, diplomatic, and military cooperation will continue to flourish and prove successful in ensuring regional stability and security, and am confident that our interests will continue to converge and align in meaningful and productive ways.

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