

## Indo-US Defence Cooperation in the age of strategic Relations

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### ABSTRACT

In the changing strategic environment, India-US relations witnessed a significant transformation in recent decades and so. The end of Cold War, with the disintegration of USSR had positively impacted Indo-US relations. In the post Cold-War strategic scenario both the countries have redefine their bilateral ties. Since 2000, India and the US have signed the major agreements like Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) in 2004. Similarly in 2005 and 2008 both the nations signed a New Framework for Defence Cooperation and 123 Civil Nuclear Agreement. In addition to this, India has also supported US policy on “Pivot to Asia or Rebalance Asia” in a meaningful way to counter the rising China. Currently, India-US relations are cooperated in many areas of strategic concerns. In this regard, the paper analyses the defence Cooperation between the two nations which reached new heights and became the major catalyst in India-US relations. The paper also goes through the major areas of defence Cooperation in major domains of Army, Navy and Air-force. Apart from this, the paper also studies how the defence cooperation proves to be a major contributor in their relations.

**Key Words :** Strategic relations, Pivot to Asia, Defence Cooperation, Cold-War

### INTRODUCTION

#### Historical Background of Indo-U.S Relations:

At the moment, India-US strategic partnership and defence and military cooperation are focused on strategic engagement in the most important areas of regional cooperation, such as trade and exercises in defence and the military. The history of India-US relations can be broken up into two main time periods. The first portion, from 1947 to 1991, is about India-US relations during the Cold War. The second portion, from 1990 to the present, is mostly about what happened after the Cold War.

During the Cold War, from 1947 to 1991, relations between India and the US were unstable and mostly tense because of many problems and issues. India got its independence in 1947, and most of its foreign policy is based on the idea that it should stay neutral. After World War II ended in 1945, the world was split into two groups

of power. The US and the USSR each led one of these groups. In 1961, India and a few other countries started their own movement, which was called the Non-Alignment movement. The US was very upset by India’s decision to remain neutral. On top of that, India’s close ties with the USSR in many world issues also made things difficult.

During the period from 1947 to 1971, the United States did everything it could to force India into its corner. In the process, the United States has provided India with substantial economic and food aid in the form of PL-480.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the United States provided moral and military support to India during their 1962 war with China by supplying them with arms. Moreover, despite being Pakistan’s ally, the United States maintained a neutral stance during the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. However, the US did not succeed in bringing India to its side during that time.

1. M.R Kumara Swamy, “India’s Food Problem and US PL480, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 03, Iss. 7, pp. 213-214.

Between 1971 to 1990, the relationship got worse and became increasingly tense. In 1971, the friendship treaty between India and the USSR made the US angry. On top of that, India's nuclear test at Pokhran in 1974 made things even more complicated. However, there were many ups and downs in relations during that time, with the majority of them remaining low until the end of the Cold War. From 1991 onwards, when the Cold War ended, relations between the two countries got better as a whole. Since 1990, the relationship has slowly and steadily grown into a strategic one. But India's Pokhran II explosion in 1998 again strained relations, which led the US and the rest of the world to impose sanctions on India.

Even though the positive turn in relations between India and the US is marked by Clinton's trip to India in 2000, when both countries signed some agreements, including the India-US Science and Technology Forum, this is not the only reason. Some of the sanctions that were put on India have been lifted because of Clinton's visit. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, things between the two countries have gotten much better. At the time, India not only offered help in the fight against terrorism, but in 2001 they also signed the "India-US Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism." India and the United States also signed important agreements in 2005, including the Energy Security Dialogue, the Open Skies Agreement, the New Framework for the India-US Defence Relationship, and the India-US Civil Nuclear Cooperation in 2008.<sup>2</sup> During George W. Bush's presidency, relations between the US and India were at their best ever.

During Obama's time in office, he made two trips to India, in 2010 and 2015. These trips show how close the two countries are. Obama's term as president began in 2009 and ends in 2016. India has made more progress than ever before during his two terms as president. The administration has taken a multilateral approach by working with India and other countries like Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, the Philippines, Taiwan, and others on issues like security and maritime cooperation.

Nonetheless, during the first few months of the Obama administration, the United States lost the

momentum it had gained under the Bush administration. During Hillary Clinton's 2009 visit to India, however, relations significantly improved. Hillary Clinton and S.M. Krishna laid out the five pillars of India-US engagements: 1. Strategic Cooperation; 2. Energy and Climate Change; 3. Economy Trade and Agriculture; 4. Science, Technology, and Innovation.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, when Obama visited India for the first time in 2010, he referred to the relationship between the United States and India as a "defining and indispensable partnership of the twenty-first century." Moreover, he stated that the India-US partnership serves three broad purposes, highlighting the significance of bilateral trade and investment, the prevention of terrorism, and the promotion of democratic government and human rights by India and the United States.

During his trip to India in 2010, Obama made a famous speech in which he said he supported India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. He also liked the idea of India joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Aside from that, both governments have said they want to work together more on the India-US civil nuclear agreement. They have also talked about how worried they are about human rights issues in Myanmar and Iran's nuclear programme. Aside from this, Obama said in his 2010 National Security Strategy speech that India is a major power on the world stage and an important ally with whom the U.S. has a strategic partnership based on shared values and interests. Obama's second visit to India occurred in 2015 when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited him on Republic Day. Obama's visit was primarily symbolic in nature. During the visit, Obama stated, "Our ties have been strengthened." We have committed to a new alliance between our two countries."

During Obama's presidency, India-US strategic cooperation has been the most important part of cooperation. This cooperation is based on a global strategic partnership with shared democratic values and a growing convergence of interests at the bilateral, regional, and global levels. In this way, it's easy to see and understand how the relationship turned into a strategic partnership after the Cold War ended and the US acknowledged India as a major partner on major global

2. Ganesh Naika, "The EU's Response to the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement," *The Journal of International Issues*, Vol. 21, No.4, October-November, 2017, pp. 138-147.

3. Available at [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India\\_US\\_brief.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_US_brief.pdf)

issues after 9/11. India and the United States signed an important agreement in 2004 called Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP).<sup>4</sup> Aside from that, both countries signed a Defence Cooperation agreement in 2005. They also signed the 123 Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008.

Nevertheless, it is true that the Bush administration laid the groundwork for strategic cooperation, whereas the Obama administration initiated the major strategic dialogues. India and the United States have engaged in strategic dialogues since 2009. The first dialogue began in 2010, the second dialogue in 2011, the third dialogue in 2012, the fourth dialogue in 2013, the fifth dialogue in 2014, and the sixth dialogue in 2015. During the presidency of Barack Obama, the strategic dialogues have provided an excellent series of mutual cooperation, outlining ten major areas of cooperation, including economic and trade relations, education, health, science and technology, global security and terrorism, agriculture, climate change and clean energy, and disarmament and non-proliferation.

The strategic partnership between India and the United States has expanded, with the rebalancing policy in Asia being the nations' primary concern. Obama initiated the strategy in 2011 when he addressed the Australian Parliament and referred to the US policy of "Pivot to Asia," which was later described as "rebalancing the Asian region." The policy is viewed as an effort to address China's challenge in the Asian region and protect U.S. allies by implementing substantial security measures.

In this context, the geopolitical and economic importance of India-US cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region has grown. During the Obama administration, the United States has valued India's expanding role in global affairs and as a provider of stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, the United States has acknowledged and taken into account India's central role in the region, where the United States desires India to transform its look east policy into an act east policy at the regional level. The United States has laid the groundwork for "Trilateral Security Dialogues" with Japan and Australia at the trilateral level. The United States, India, Japan, and Australia have formed the "Quadrilateral Cooperation in 2018" at the multilateral level. Similarly, the United States and India collaborate in the Indo-Pacific region. It

demonstrates how the interaction between sea lanes and maritime security is a crucial aspect of their relationships. In this regard, the significance and significance of the region as well as the US's promotion of the Trans-Pacific partnership with the major countries are discussed, where the promotion of trade and regional security concerns are the primary focus.

During the presidency of Barack Obama, defence and military cooperation between India and the United States was viewed as a pillar of their relationship. In 1984, when the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding, the first interactions in defence relations began (MOU). With the launch of the Kicklighters Proposal in 1991, it was recommended that senior staff engage in strategic conversations, training, and other exchanges. The proposal paves the way for India-US defence cooperation, in which both nations have collaborated on army, navy, and air force issues. In 2005, India and the United States signed the Framework for Defense Cooperation, marking the beginning of a genuine defence partnership. The defence agreement is a research and development collaboration that includes technology transfer, co-development, and co-production. The significance of the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative was the most important aspect of the agreement (DTTI).

During the Obama administration, defence relations between the two countries reached new heights, with major agreements being signed. "Counter Terrorism Cooperation Initiative" was signed in 2009. India and the United States signed a Cybersecurity Memorandum in 2011. Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) was signed in 2012. In 2015, the framework for the defence relationship between India and the United States was renewed for another decade. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) was signed in 2016 on the basis of Obama's designation of India as a "Major Defence Partner" at the conclusion of his administration. During his presidency, defence sales have increased significantly. From 2008 to 2018, India has spent over \$20 billion on military equipment. C-17 transport aircraft, AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, and Harpoon anti-ship missiles are examples of the significant defence equipment acquired during the Obama administration.

India and the United States have conducted

4. See, Joint Press Statement: Next Steps in Strategic Partnership Between India and the United States, September 17, 2004, Washington D.C, available at <https://indianembassyusa.gov.in/ArchivesDetails?id=469>

numerous defence exercises in the fields of the army, navy, and air force over the years, demonstrating their extensive defence cooperation. India and the United States have conducted joint military exercises since 2002 under the names “Yudh Abhyas and Vajra Prahar” India and the United States have begun their annual joint naval exercise dubbed “Malabar” And since 2014, Japan has participated regularly in the Malabar exercise. Similarly, India and the United States conducted Cope-India during joint air force exercises.

During the Obama administration, India-US relations were primarily driven by defence relations. It illustrates the evolution of defence relations during the time when the major agreements and exercises were carried out in their most comprehensive form. India and the United States have conducted more joint exercises than any other country during his tenure. Recently in 2018, during the Trump administration, both countries initiated bilateral 2+2 dialogue. In addition, significant agreements such as the “Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)” were signed in 2018 to bolster relations. In 2020, the “Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement” (BECA) is also signed.

### **Major Areas of Indo-U.S Defence and Military Cooperation :**

The United States and India’s joint military exercise has become a main focus for calculating the strength of their respective partnerships. To address global and regional security concerns, both nations have collaborated on a variety of armed forces, naval forces, and air corps safeguards. The United States and India’s defence cooperation is multifaceted. It is frequently viewed as a result of ordinary-level commitments to safeguards and ties that have improved bilateral relations. In order to have more extensive vital relationships, collaboration protection becomes an essential factor. In general, interactions advance via the standard command of military coordinated effort exercises, innovation, military trade, high-level visits by the political leaders, armed service exchanges, participation in security exploration, and standard direct of joint activities.

### **India-US Joint military exercises :**

The combined armed forces exercises are an integral part of the military cooperation between India and the United States. In volatile regions, the Indian Army has collaborated with the United States Army in low-power conflicts, counter-illegal intimidation, and counter-revolt. In this unusual circumstance, the “Vajra Prahar” and “Yudh Abhyas” are two fundamental activities that played a crucial role in bringing the armed forces of two nations closer together. In 2002, the joint armed forces exercise “Vajra Prahar” was directed in Agra, marking the first significant initiative in this regard. Its primary objective was to adapt the Special Forces of the two countries.<sup>5</sup>

In September 2003, US Special Forces and Indian Special Forces based in Jammu and Kashmir collaborated on a joint exercise in high altitude, dry, rocky terrain similar to that in which Osama bin Laden is assumed to be hiding. This provided US forces with valuable experience in a complex area that they lacked back at home. Since the beginning of the Yudh Abhyas in 2004, it is believed that engagement between the United States and Indian armies has increased significantly. The Indian Army is hosting this exercise.<sup>6</sup> Later, this exercise grew from company-sized field training to battalion-sized training. It was primarily a training exercise for conventional forces focused on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in a variety of terrains.

The Executive Steering Group decided to hold similar exercises between two armies once a year as a result of the improvement in relations that occurred in the aftermath of 9/11. Aside from that, these exercises covered a broad range of topics, with professional exchanges on international issues such as improvised counter-explosive devices being particularly crucial. As a result, the ninth Yudh Abhyas was held in Babina, India, from October 12 to October 29, 2009. This exercise involved approximately 1,000 Indian and American military personnel. Included in the training were armoured vehicles, tanks, and anti-tank missiles.

Also, the 10th Yudh Abhyas, which took place in November 2010, brought the two forces closer together and helped them work better together. This 14-day

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5. Cherian Samuel, “Indo-US Defence Cooperation and the Emerging Strategic Relationship”, (Strategic Analysis, vol.31, no.2), March 2007, pp.2117-220.
  6. “U.S.-Indian Army Exercise Yudh Abhyas underway, largest U.S. Stryker deployment outside Iraq, Afghanistan”, *Embassy of United States*, Press Release, New Delhi, October 19, 2009, available at <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/pr101909.html>

combined training exercise helped US and Indian soldiers learn more about logistics, how to work with people from other cultures, and peacekeeping operations.<sup>7</sup> At Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska, the military held joint drills with specialised airborne activities in temperatures below zero. The US Army says that Yudh Abhyas is hard, different, and a good way to learn how to deal with a language barrier because it involves teaching foreign troops about American operations theories.

However, the 15<sup>th</sup> Yudh Abhyas was carried in September 2015 at Joint Base Lewis McCord in the United States. This was the eleventh edition of the Yudh Abhyas exercise series. The goal of this exercise is to “expand the scope and depth of cooperation and compatibility between militaries of both democratic nations.” It also provided an excellent opportunity for army professionals from both countries to exchange “ideas about their experiences with UN-mandated military operations in urban environments.”<sup>8</sup>

In 2016, India held a Yudh Abhyas training camp with the United States in Chaubattia, Uttarakhand. During the training, experts from both countries hold discussions to share their experiences on a variety of topics. Both nations’ army personnel are undergoing two weeks of training in which they will learn about technical skills such as specialised weapons, surveillance, and counterinsurgency, among other things. During training, the US contingent is represented by the 5th Infantry Battalion, the 7th Infantry Division, the 20th Infantry Regiment, and India by the Infantry Battalion, and so on.

Over the years, joint military exercises between India and the United States have played an important role in their defence relations. Since 2002, India and the United States have engaged in military exercises ranging from Yudhabhyas to Vajra prahar. As the Indian army faces a variety of internal and cross-border security concerns in the South Asian region, the Yudh Abhyas is critical in strengthening India’s regional security capabilities. As a result, the exercises are intended to improve the

compatibility of joint military decision-making processes, develop joint operating skills, and exchange tactics, techniques, and methods.

### **India-US Joint Naval Exercises:**

The collaborative maritime operations between the United States and India have been largely successful since the Cold War ended. In this regard, the two countries marine cooperation appears to be the most powerful in terms of maritime commerce and activity. The increased level of engagement between the two naval forces can be attributed in large part to their shared key interests in sea protection in the Indian Ocean region.

Similarly, the US and Indian navies have a long history of systematic communications at all levels. Both the US and Indian Navies prioritised maritime security, naval aviation, sea piracy, and sea-lane security.

In this respect, Malabar has been the flagship agreement reached naval exercise that has demonstrated both nations maritime strategies, methods, and operations. Over the years, Malabar, a regular bilateral navy field training exercise, has widened the range and reduced the current ambiguity of India-US bilateral relations, strengthening shared interests and technical ties.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it established a framework for continued participation in non-traditional security concerns and expanded bilateral ties to include training exchanges, information exchange, and technology cooperation.

However, during the Cold War, India and the United States had tense defence relations due to India’s support for the Soviet bloc. Because India did not agree with the United States approach of controlling communism, their defence cooperation remained fragile. Meanwhile, the fall of the Soviet Union altered the situation, and Claude Kickleigher took the first move in this direction when he advocated military-to-military engagement in the area of joint military exercises. His plans sparked interest in both of them, resulting in “three rounds of combined naval exercises, 1<sup>st</sup> Malabar in May 1992, 2<sup>nd</sup> Malabar in 1995,

7. Ashley M. Armstrong, “US Army Alaska, Indian Army mark success of Yudh Abhya 2010 at closing ceremony”, November 14, 2010, available at [https://www.army.mil/article/48092/U\\_S\\_Army\\_Alaska\\_Indian\\_Army\\_mark\\_success\\_of\\_Yudh\\_Abhys\\_2010\\_at\\_closing\\_ceremony/](https://www.army.mil/article/48092/U_S_Army_Alaska_Indian_Army_mark_success_of_Yudh_Abhys_2010_at_closing_ceremony/)

8. “YUDHABHYAS 2015, “India-US joint military training exercise will be held in September”, August 16, 2015, available at <http://currentaffairs.gktoday.in/yudh-abhyas-2015-india-us-joint-military-training-exercise-held-september08201525796.html>

9. See, “Indo-US Naval Exercise ‘MALABAR 2013’ Commences”, (*Indian Navy, Press Release*), available at <http://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indo-us-naval-exercise-MALABAR-2013-commences>

and 3<sup>rd</sup> Malabar in 1996.”<sup>10</sup> As a result of these cooperative naval exercises, the navies of both countries were able to work more closely together. Although the first round was tentative and scientific in nature, the second and third rounds involved three-dimensional maritime surveillance planes, naval ships, and submarines. The US navy used nuclear submarines and the P-3C Orion maritime patrol and attack aircraft to emphasise the gravity of the situation. Following these drills, the two navies signed a Letter of Agreement (LOA) for a submarine rescue facility, for which India paid US\$500,000 to the United States in April 1997. Under the terms of the agreement, the Indian navy used the Chukkar Pilotless Target Aircraft (PTA), which was built in the United States.

However, due to disagreements on a variety of issues related to bilateral and global scenarios, these Malabar exercises in the 1990s failed to produce consistent foreign policy objectives. However, after three naval drills, the US suspended all military exercises with India. It is because India’s nuclear test in May 1998 irritated the United States. As a result, the US severed all military ties with India, which remained suspended until 2001.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, due to a lack of unified maritime security objectives in the 1990s, these exercises were unplanned and limited in scope. However, these initiatives have brought the two countries closer together on the battlefield.

Because of the historical misunderstanding in their interaction, events at this time appear to be a tool for investigating each other’s foreign affairs on their own aspects. As a result, these exercises did not prove to be a critical factor in bilateral ties. As a result, these exercises were only a first step toward resolving the cold war connection. However, the events of 9/11 forced the United States to recognise terrorism as a massive worldwide threat. In this regard, the United States restored military ties with India, which later joined President Bush’s global anti-terrorism campaign. As an

outcome, the Malabar exercises, which had been interrupted following India’s nuclear tests, were restarted just after 9/11. This was clearly apparent during the Malabar exercise of 2002, which was promoted at a fairly low level and concentrated on information-sharing drills, underway sustainment, and personnel exchange for the first time.<sup>12</sup>

The Malabar exercise 2003, held off India’s southern coast, brought together hundreds of naval personnel for five days of live artillery firings, flagship air defence, and anti-submarine operations. In 2003, Malabar provides an Indian submarine, INS Shalki, and several other planes engaged in low-intensity anti-submarine warfare techniques for the first time. A number of new initiatives, such as quarterly policy reviews and bilateral visits by top commanders, were also implemented. Furthermore, for the subsequent exercises in 2003 and 2004, the scope of the drills was expanded to include helicopter cross-deck deployments, submarine actions, and anti-submarine warfare.<sup>13</sup> During the first occasion of the 2005 Malabar exercise, it increases the level and complexity of these operations was boosted by the involvement of aircraft carriers from both nations.

The United States displayed the “USS Nimitz,” an aircraft carrier capable of carrying more than 100 planes in its belly, as well as the US nuclear submarine “USS Santa Fe,” which worked with the Indian “INS Shankul.” The drills involved approximately around 12,000 people from both sides, with the goal of increasing collaboration assurance in order to address piracy, violent extremism, and rescue and relief complexities in the region and beyond. During these drills, both navies exchanged officers and sailors on ships as well as while flying planes and helicopters.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, in 2005, India and the US negotiated a “ten-year defence cooperation agreement, laying the groundwork for Maritime Security Cooperation, which was eventually signed in 2006.” The latter emphasised the importance of engaging in regular exercises to

10. Harsh V. Pant and Anant Singh Mann, “India’s Malabar Dilemma”, (*Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Issue Brief No.393*), August 2020, available at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/indias-malabar>

11. Ibid.

12. Gurpreet S. Khurana, “Joint Naval Exercises: A Post-MALABAR-2007 Appraisal for India”, (*Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, No.52), September, 2007, pp.2-3.

13. Ravi Tomer, “India-US Relations in a Changing Strategic Environment”, (*Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group*, No.20), June 25, 2002, pp.5-7.

14. See, “Malabar”, (*Global Security*), available at <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/malabar.htm>

improve connectivity and exchange ideas.<sup>15</sup>

The US Expeditionary Strike Group (BOXESG) led a joint international naval exercise for the first time in the 2006 Malabar exercise. The US BOXESG displayed 13 ships, including amphibious assault ships, cruisers, battleships, and the submarine USS Providence (SSN-719), as well as Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU).<sup>16</sup> The Indian Navy, which had never handled a BOXESG vessel before, was given the opportunity to participate in and observe advanced naval exercises in many Indian ports, including Mumbai and Goa. Working with the USS Boxer (Landing Helicopter Dock) provided the Indian side with real experience of the techniques for deploying and recovering multiple helicopters as well as the landing craft transported by the vessel. Malabar exercises are also intended to increase participant countries military-to-military interaction and capabilities to plan and implement special operations in a general form.

The 2007 Malabar was the ninth naval exercise, and it was unlike any other in a number of ways. It is the one that was organised outside of the Indian Ocean, off the coast of Okinawa, Japan. The navies of India, the United States, Singapore, Australia, and Japan participated in the multilateral exercise, which covered a variety of exercise areas.<sup>17</sup> In total, 27 ships (eight from the Indian Navy, two from the US Navy, two each from Japan and Australia, and one from Singapore) ranging in size from a supercarrier to frigates, aircraft, and helicopters from five nations took part in a virtual war-game and battle tactics. The application of new advanced warfare technologies was demonstrated. Three aircraft carriers were piloted for the first time by Indian Navy and IAF pilots, which was an important step in familiarising themselves with these vessels. Mock battles were another exciting aspect of the exercises, with troops of all

nationalities divided into different parties based on their corresponding functionalities.<sup>18</sup> These mock battles revealed a number of shared world-views and points of convergence on security cooperation, as well as a trend toward strategic deterrence against China.

The United States Navy participated in the 2008 Malabar exercise with advanced aircraft carriers such as “the USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), Carrier Air Wing 14, the guided-missile destroyer USS Decatur (DDG 73), the USNS Bridge (T-AOE 10) and the fast-attack submarine USS Springfield (SSN 761).”<sup>19</sup> On display for the Indian Navy, it consists of three guided-missile destroyers, four guided-missile frigates, an underway replenishment ship, and a submarine. When the characteristics of both fleets are combined, they promote collaboration for humanitarian aid, disaster relief, maritime safety, and anti-piracy operations. Furthermore, the exercise was primarily intended to benefit from the experiences of the two major navies that participated. This confidence-building exercise later strengthened compatibility and proved to be quite useful in humanitarian aid and disaster relief activities.

In 2009, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) participated in the Malabar exercise off the coast of Okinawa alongside the Indian Navy and the US Navy. Its objectives were to improve the security of the Pacific region. Previously, Malabar was a bilateral engagement between the United States and India; however, with the addition of the Japanese Navy, a larger number of ships were involved, increasing the intensity of the exercise.<sup>20</sup> Apart from personnel exchanges and technical discussions, nearly 4000 people from the three selected maritime forces took part in anti-submarine warfare, surface warfare, air defence, live-fire artillery training, and VBSS evolutions.<sup>21</sup> These defence strategies were created in response to any threat posed by China.

15. See, “India Defence Consultants, “What’s Hot?-Analysis of Recent Happenings: Military Exercises-Feb to Nov. 2008”, November 17, 2008, available at <http://www.indiadefence.com/MilEx.htm>

16. Gurpreet S. Khurana, “India–US Combined Defence Exercises: An Appraisal”, (*Strategic Analysis*, vol.32, no.6), November 2008, p.1040-1050.

17. Sandeep Dikshit, “Japan to take Part in India-U.S. Naval Exercises again”, (*The Hindu*), New Delhi, February 16, 2011.

18. See, “Malabar (Naval Exercises)”, (*Fandom*), available at [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Malabar\\_\(Naval\\_Exercise\)](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Malabar_(Naval_Exercise))

19. Ibid.

20. Adarsh Verma, “The Malabar Exercises: An Appraisal”, (*Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis*), July 18, 2017, available at [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/the-malabar-exercises\\_averma\\_180717](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/the-malabar-exercises_averma_180717)

21. See, “Malabar (Naval Exercises)”, (*Fandom*), available at [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Malabar\\_\(Naval\\_Exercise\)](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Malabar_(Naval_Exercise))

The 2010 Malabar exercise, on the other hand, lacked the ferocity of previous seasons. The programme included surface and antisubmarine operations, air defence and visits, synchronised artillery exercises, and board, search, and seizure drills. Sailors from both forces engaged in professional exchanges and conversations. The cruiser USS Shiloh, destroyers USS Chafee and USS Lassen, and frigate USS Curtis are part of the task force of the US 7th fleet both on land and at sea which is based in Yokosuka, Japan. During their port visit to Goa, US Navy personnel participated in a volunteer work project. India displayed three frigates, the INS Godavari, INS Brahmaputra, and INS Tabar, as well as the guided-missile destroyer INS Mysore. As a result, the 2010 Malabar exercise focused on anti-submarine warfare, surface firings, and maritime barrier activities for collective gain, in addition to humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts.

However, the 2011 Malabar exercise, a series of drills aimed at strengthening transnational maritime cooperation and addressing bilateral safety concerns, was actively participated in by naval forces from India and the United States. The sea segments were conducted in the Western Pacific Ocean, east of the Luzon Strait and east of Okinawa. The region corresponded to the presence of the Indian Navy in the western Pacific. The exercise aimed to improve military-to-military interaction and the ability of the US and India to execute tactical plans. Professional exchanges and embarkations of liaison officers; information and communication exercises; ground action group exercise procedures; formation strategizing; helicopter cross-board evolutions; underway replenishments; emergency relief and humanitarian aid; artillery exercises; visit, board, search, and seizure; maritime attack; air defence; screen exercise; and anti-submarine processes.

The 16th annual Malabar drill, which began on April 7, 2012, in Chennai, Tamil Nadu's capital city, saw Indian and American warships complete their operations. The programme included seminars, air defence, integrated

anti-submarine warfare operations, counter-piracy operations, and carrier aviation operations.<sup>22</sup> The USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) and the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier refuelled at sea (RAS) with the Indian Navy replenishment oiler INS Shakti (A57). In this exercise, a RAS exercise was conducted for the first time between a US aircraft carrier and an Indian INS oiler.<sup>23</sup> The 450-nautical-mile-long exercise allowed the US and Indian navy services to conduct communication drills, helicopter cross-deck evolutions, and gunnery drills. The Carl Vinson and CVW-17 provided support for the exercise.

In 2013, the Malabar exercise included Surface Action Group operations, professional exchanges and embarkations, leapfrogs, helicopter cross-deck evolutions, communications drills, VBSS, and anti-submarine warfare (ASW).<sup>24</sup> The US Navy was represented by the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS McCampbell (DDG 85) and a P-3 Orion aircraft. The Indian Navy is participating with the Frigate INS Shivalik (F47), the Guided Missile Destroyer INS Ranvijay (D55), and the Tupolev Tu-142 Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft.

In 2014, the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) was asked to participate in the 18th Malabar exercise, at Japan's Sasebo Naval Base. The Japanese navy's subsequent participation in the 2014 Malabar exercise signalled an improvement in security ties between India, the United States, and Japan. The drill was attended by three Indian warships, two Japanese destroyers, and five US ships, including the aircraft carrier USS George Washington.<sup>25</sup> The inclusion of Japan in this exercise, on the other hand, suggested that India should no longer be alarmed by Chinese clouds. The Malabar series has provided significant strategic advantages to India, particularly when it is hosted in a multilateral configuration.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Malabar exercise, took place in the Bay of Bengal from October 14 to 19, 2015. It encouraged a broader range of professional exchanges during the Harbour Phase, and it encouraged a diverse range of operational tasks at sea during the Sea Phase. On this

22. Zachary Keck, "India's Navy Good U.S. Option", (*The Diplomat*), April 10, 2012.

23. See, "Indo US Joint Naval exercise Malabar 2012", (*The Economic Times*), April 17, 2012, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nation-world/indo-us-joint-naval-exercise-malabar-2012/slideshow/12701912.cms>

24. See, "Malabar 2014: A Multilateral Naval exercise starts" (*Indian Navy, Press Release*), 2014, available at <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/malabar-2014-multilateral-naval-exercise-starts>

25. Ibid;

occasion, Japan became a permanent participant in the Malabar exercise.<sup>26</sup>

During the exercise, the Japanese Navy sent the destroyer JS Fuyuzuki to participate in this drill with the Indian Navy and the US Naval Forces. During the time, the Indian Navy was joined by INS Shivalik, an indigenous warship, INS Betwa, an indigenous battleship, INS Ranvijay, a guided-missile destroyer, and INS Shakti, a Fleet Support Ship. Aside from that, an Indian Sindhughosh class submarine, INS Sindhudhvaj, a long-range Maritime Patrol Aircraft P8I, and several rotary-wing helicopters participated in the trilateral drill. Additionally, ships from the USN 7th Fleet's Carrier Task Force (CTF) 70, headquartered in Yokosuka, Japan, participated in the 2015 Malabar exercise to support the US Navy. In addition to the Los Angeles class nuclear-powered submarine USS City of Corpus Christi, the CTF also included the Nimitz class aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, the Ticonderoga class cruiser USS Normandy, and the Freedom-class Littoral Combat Ship USS Fort Worth. It also included F18 aircraft from the Carrier Air Wing and P8A long-range maritime patrol aircraft.

In 2016, US, India, and Japan took part in Malabar over the Philippine Sea. While Japan sends its SH 60 K integral helicopters, JS Hyuga helicopter carrier, and long-range maritime patrol aircraft, the US has sent its guided-missile cruiser USS Mobile Bay (CG 53), a P-8A Poseidon aircraft, Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), and guided-missile destroyer USS Stockdale (DDG 106). However, India sent its three largest warships, the INS Kirch, INS Satpura, and INS Sahyadri, in that order.<sup>27</sup> According to the Indian Ministry of Defence stated that the joint training between the three countries enhances their mutual trust and interoperability in a proper way.

There are several significant events that occurred in the 1990s that cannot be overlooked. In this regard, the post-9/11 Malabar exercises proved to be a game-changer for India-US defence ties, as they successfully and consistently expanded the scope and nature of their bilateral cooperation.

Furthermore, these exercises served as a platform for both countries regional and international collective defence goals. Thus, the Malabar naval drills have served

as a regular opportunity to advance India and the United States military-to-military relations in the regional and international arenas. With each successive series, the annual Malabar exercise has become a spectacle for their improved military strength and defence relations.

It was notable that since 2014, Japan also participates regularly in Malabar Exercises. During these exercises, the nations scope of high-end naval combat is tested, including comprehensive air and missile defence, anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, and naval special warfare. These exercises are critical for fostering professional connections and understanding between the three navies.

However, the Malabar exercises were part of a broader US initiative in the Asia-Pacific region, including transmitting information to China on concerns about freedom of passage in shipping lanes. According to reports, the US intends to send warships beyond 12 nautical miles of Chinese-claimed objects in the South China Sea as part of Freedom of Navigation exercises.

To maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States and India have become natural allies in the twenty-first century. A routine exercise like Malabar strengthens their defence connections. One important outcome of this engagement has been the two countries' increased ability to prevent piracy and ensure maritime security, as well as the deployment of Indian navy escorts for US ships transiting the Malacca Strait.

In short, the Malabar exercises improved strategic and functional operations in a changing geostrategic environment, and they contributed to better military-to-military coordination between the two navies. The Naval engagement has primarily served to strengthen military capability, combat terrorism and piracy, maintain maritime freedom, and contribute to the security of international trade. It was concluded with the goal of improving communication and creating a shared understanding of maritime security operations between the two fleets as well as gaining mutual trust and exchanging best practices between the two countries.

### **India-US Joint Air Force Exercises:**

In 2002 alone, the two countries held six major joint military exercises. Indian and US Special Forces

26. Pranav Kulkarni, "Significance of the India-US-Japan MALABAR Naval Exercise", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, 21 October 2015.

27. Prashant Parmeswaran, "US Japan and India Kick off 2016 Malabar Exercise", (*The Diplomat*), June 12, 2016.

participated in the airborne combined exercises “Balance Iroquois” in Agra in May 2002 and “Geronimo Thrust” in Alaska in September-October 2002. “Cope India,” a cooperative air force exercise, was held in Agra in October 2002 to improve communication between the two air forces. During Cope India-02, the US Air Force members on board and Indian aircraft witnessed the deployment of Indian paratroopers and heavy equipment. The two air forces exchanged formation flying techniques. The Indians were impressed by the US use of drag parachutes to drop freight and the way they set up drop zones. At the end of the exercise, Indian paratroopers descended from US C-130 Hercules transporters.<sup>28</sup>

The Indian Air Force (IAF) and the United States Air Force (USAF) have been collaborating on the Cope India series of exercises since 2002. However, the Cope India-04 exercise, held in Gwalior in February 2004, was the first India-US fighter plane operation. This exercise provided excellent training for aircrew and maintenance personnel, as well as improved military-to-military interaction between the Indian and US Air Forces.

The Indian Air Force was supported by Su-30Ks, Mirage 2000s, MiG-27s, and MiG-21s, while the US Air Force was backed by F-15Cs (upgraded). The exercises primarily offered a solid basis and deep knowledge for the future extension of the Indian and US Air Forces partnership.<sup>29</sup>

In November 2005, a further big exercise, Cope India-05, was placed in Kalaikunda (India). In an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) scenario, 12 F-16s flew among 26 Indian fighters, including the Sukhoi 30 MKI. In 2004, India took part in the Cope Thunder series of exercises in Alaska, and in 2007 and 2008, it was invited to observe and participate in the Red Flag-Alaska Exercises, consecutively.

In October 2009, the Cope India-09 series was held in Agra for five days. The US Ambassador to India, Timothy J. Roemer, stated that “the two countries

relationship had advanced significantly, and their defence relationship would be no different from their collaboration in the fields of energy, science, technology, education, and trade.”<sup>30</sup>

The 2009 season focused primarily on transport operations, the deployment and withdrawal of Special Forces from hostile environments, and the rescue of pilots who may have broken down in hostile areas. During the training operation between the IAF and the US Air Force the USAF C-130J and an Indian Air Force (IAF) IL-76 drop Garud troops started at the beginning of the exercise, which is also performed by American paratroopers, a further step was taken to solidify the bond between the two nations. Later, the USAF sent a C-17 Globemaster-III, a C-130J Super Hercules, and a C-130H transport plane, while the IAF sent IL-76, An-32, and Mi-17 helicopters. Finally, the exercise served as a practice for providing humanitarian assistance.<sup>31</sup>

After a ten-year-long break, the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the United States Air Force (USAF) has begun a 12-day bilateral combined air exercise called Cope India-19 in 2019. Both countries’ transport planes and fighter jets had participated in the exercise. Cope India-19 is being held at two Indian air bases in West Bengal’s Kalaikunda and Panagarh. The Exercise is a field training exercise supported by the United States Pacific Air Forces with the goal of strengthening bilateral ties.

During the exercise, the USAF sends its F15 C/D and C-130 military aircraft, while the IAF sends its Su-30 MKI, Jaguar, Mirage 2000, C-130J, and airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft. In addition to this, the US has sent approximately 200 airmen from the 18th Wing at Kadena Air Base in Japan and the 182nd Airlift Wing of the Illinois Air National Guard.<sup>32</sup>

Despite regular communication and drills between the various armies and air forces, it appears that the strategic and operational requirements for ensuring tighter collaboration in the land and air domains have yet to be

28. Robert D. Blackwill, “The Quality and Durability of the US-India Relationship”, November 27, 2002, available at <http://www.rupe-india.org/34/app1.html>

29. See, “Exercise Cope India 04”, (*Indian Air Force*), [http://indianairforce.nic.in/show\\_page.php?pg\\_id=144](http://indianairforce.nic.in/show_page.php?pg_id=144) (Accessed on 22 February 2016).

30. Sangeeta Saxena, “Indo-US Excercise-Cope India 2009”, *Sp’s Aviation*, 2009, available at <https://www.sps-aviation.com/story/?id=361&lang=en>

31. *Ibid.*

32. See, “US and India airforces begin exercise Cope India 2019”, *Airforce Technology*, December 03, 2018, available at <https://www.airforce-technology.com/news/iaf-usaf-exercise-cope-india->

determined to everyone's satisfaction. As a result, the nature, scope, and frequency of the preceding joint military exercises differ from the Malabar naval exercises. If both countries give equal weight to exercises like Malabar, India and the US could become natural partners in terms of defence cooperation.

**Conclusion :**

The political will of both India and the US has led to a big improvement in the relationship between the two countries. This has made sure that the relationship between India and the US continues to grow and get

deeper since 2000. Currently, India and the US both want to help each other through fight against terrorism, improve maritime security coopeartion, stop the spread of weapons, keeping the Asian region stable, and do other things that are related to these goals. India is now on the same level as its closest allies after the US named it a "Major Defense Partner," a title that only India has. This has made it possible for India to buy sensitive defence technologies. This has opened up a new way for India and the US to work together, such as by signing the Defence Technologies and Trade Initiative (DTTI), BECA, COMCASA, LEMOA, etc.

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