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Sanctions and Strategic Autonomy: Course Correcting the US-India Partnership

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

China's economic, political, and military ascent in the 21st century has triggered an unprecedented convergence of Indian and American interests. Since the George W. Bush administration, each American president has sought to maintain and expand its partnership with New Delhi. Members of Congress from both parties are generally favorable to closer economic and military ties with India even as doubts persist regarding India's turn toward Hindu majoritarianism. India's geographic position, population size, and economic potential make it the preeminent power in its neighborhood and a significant actor on the world stage. Furthermore, it is a nuclear power with the world's third largest military budget. For the U.S., these facts make India essential in its strategy of balancing against Chinese influence.¹

When considering the historically variable relationship between the two countries, these advances constitute a significant achievement for American foreign policy in the 21st century. But the bipartisan interest in expanding US-India ties operates on the teleological assumption that the two nations will increasingly share the same strategic outlook on most problems of international concern rather than taking advantage of shared interests on a particular set of issues. Proposals to expand the U.S.-India relationship do not consider substantive differences between the two countries.

A more effective and realistic US-India policy will require greater recognition of India's traditional desire for strategic autonomy. A continuous roadblock to cooperation with India is the impression in New Delhi that Americans do not respect India's status as a great power with its own distinct interests. As I argue, the U.S. can unwind this tension by exempting India from C.A.A.T.S.A. sanctions and committing to waiving energy sanctions, considering India's unique position. Furthermore, it can help wean India off Russian military equipment through Excess Defense Article transfers.

The State of US-India Defense Ties

US-India Relations Have Not Always Been Close

Warm U.S.-India relations have not always been an established fact, and rapprochement has resulted from a long and arduous diplomatic process. Indian leaders fundamentally disagreed with America's containment of the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War, seeing the latter as an essentially benign and defensive power. New Delhi also objected to American military aid to Pakistan, which emboldened the Islamic republic to the detriment of Indian security. The opening of relations with China also created more cause for alarm about American encirclement. Relations came to a nadir in 1971 when President Richard Nixon dispatched the *USS Enterprise* to the Bay of Bengal to prevent an Indian attack on Pakistan, while the latter ruthlessly suppressed the Bangladeshi independence movement. Though little remembered in the U.S., this decision remained fused within Indian strategic memory and inculcated the notion that America resented Indian status as a great power.²

The Development of Interoperability

Despite the end of the Cold War and India's embrace of market capitalism, non-proliferation and Indo-Pakistani rivalry dominated American views of South Asia. Nonetheless, the Clinton and Bush administrations made slow but steady progress in improving relations. In 2006, Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative, which brought India into the global nuclear regime and opened the doorway for an expanded partnership.³ The interests of both nations quickly converged as the implications of growing Chinese military and economic power became manifest.

The P.L.A.N.'s encroachment into the Indian Ocean, Chinese military cooperation with Pakistan, the Belt and Road Initiative, and border provocations in the Himalayas all contributed to a feeling of encirclement and a need for new security partners.⁴ Indian fears about their immediate region have converged with American worries about Chinese hegemony over the wider Indo-Pacific zone.

As a result, the last three presidential administrations, including the Biden administration, all emphasized

the importance of India to American interests and policy in Asia. The Obama Administration's 2015 National Security Strategy identified India as a "regional provider of security" bonded to the U.S. by "inherent values and mutual interests."⁵ Similarly, the Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy stated that the U.S. "welcome[s] India's emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense partner."⁶ Not to be outdone, the Indo-Pacific Strategy commissioned by the Biden White House in March of 2022 reiterates that the U.S. will "Support India's continued rise and regional leadership."⁷

Statements of this kind have been supported by four "foundational defense agreements" formalizing US-India defense cooperation over the last two decades. These four agreements include G.S.O.M.I.A. (General Security of Military Information Agreement), L.E.M.O.A. (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement), which enables and regulates mutual access to supplies and infrastructure; C.O.M.C.A.S.A. (Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement), which establishes secure communication and data transfers; and B.E.C.A. (Basic Exchange Communication Agreement), which allows the sharing of geospatial intelligence.⁸

Similarly, American defense exports to India have dramatically expanded since 2008. Between 2008 and 2020, India purchased \$20 billion in American military hardware.⁹ Additionally, the U.S. overcame Russia as India's largest defense supplier between 2013 and 2017. India's stock of American arms includes the *Apache Guardian* attack helicopters, *Chinook* transport helicopters, C-130J-30 *Hercules* and C-17 *Globe-master* transport aircraft, P-8A *Poseidon* maritime patrol aircraft, MH-60R *Seahawk* maritime helicopter, and M77 howitzers.¹⁰ Specifically, these exports tend to enhance Indian naval and air force capabilities but not the full spectrum needs of the Indian military.

These agreements, purchases, and a growing parade of ministerial formats and joint military exercises highlight the strides made in the interoperability of the American and Indian militaries. The intended effect of these developments in the US-India relationship is two-fold. On the one hand, they serve to strengthen the Indian military's capabilities through cooperation with the world's most sophisticated military. Thus, contributing to the American goal of using India as a strategic balance against China. On the other, they enhance deterrence against Beijing's

aims to expand and eventually hold hegemony over the Indo-Pacific region.¹¹

Strategic Autonomy and Limits to the US-India Partnership

However, it would be a mistake to assume that the recent spate of agreements, purchases, and training exercises are leading inexorably toward India's final integration into the U.S.-led alliance system. This is due primarily to a foundational tenet of Indian foreign policy. The concept of "strategic autonomy" has been the lodestar of Indian foreign policy and political culture since independence in 1947. Remembering their nation's colonial past, Indian leaders place immense and overriding value on preserving their nation's sovereignty and freedom of action in foreign affairs.¹² This idea underwent multiple iterations as the global balance of power shifted from "non-alignment" during the Cold War to "multi-alignment" in the post-Cold War period. The logic of strategic autonomy also motivated India's nuclearization and adoption of an autarkic trade policy.¹³

Strategic autonomy is distinctly pertinent in relation to U.S.-India dynamics. The U.S.'s position as the reigning superpower puts many Indian strategists ill at ease; strong security ties with America could work to undermine Indian independence. Similarly, Indian public opinion chafes at any idea of becoming—or being perceived as—a junior partner to the United States like the United Kingdom.¹⁴ Of course, there are also disagreements among Indian policymakers about what "strategic autonomy" entails regarding India's attachments to foreign powers. To some, closer relations with the U.S. are India's best guarantee for decisional independence, especially if the other option is Chinese regional dominance.¹⁵ Nonetheless, India's residual suspicion continues to plague certain aspects of military cooperation with the US. For instance, various Cold War-era regulations prevent American military officials from easy contact with their Indian counterparts. The Ministry of External Affairs must authorize all meetings.¹⁶

Why a Treaty Alliance and Intelligence-Sharing Agreement Are Infeasible

It is then no surprise that recent calls to formalize the U.S.-India relationship are unlikely to succeed. In October of 2021, the former U.S. Ambassador to

the United Nations, Nikki Haley, and Florida Congressman, Mike Waltz, called for the formation of a US-India alliance. Shared interests in preventing the reappearance of terrorist movements in Afghanistan and balancing China's bid for regional military and economic supremacy would constitute the basis of this formalized partnership.

While the proposal correctly identifies the two nations' shared interests, it leaves the potential terms of this alliance both under-explored and over-stretched. Alliance treaties typically include mutual or collective defense provisions like those within the North Atlantic and US-Japan Mutual Security Treaties. Although Haley and Waltz do not explicitly call for a condition of this kind, they suggest that their proposed treaty "would give China pause before further expanding into Central and Southern Asia." It is difficult to see how the U.S. could hope to achieve pausing a Chinese expansion without mutual defense obligations—at least according to the authors' assumptions. If this is not the case, it is unclear what the authors intend by the word "alliance."¹⁷

Furthermore, the authors do not address several profound implications of their proposed relationship. For instance, it is unclear if the alliance would commit the United States to defend Indian borders against Chinese incursions or Indo-Pakistani border disputes. If that were assumed, it seems possible that instead of using the US-Indian partnership to reduce American defense commitments, an alliance would expand them to unsustainable levels. No consideration is given to India's traditional reluctance to enter entangling alliances. Would India be obligated to assist American military operations in East Asia or the Middle East? Considering India's preoccupation with autonomy and its criticism of American military operations in the past, there is little chance that New Delhi would accept such a proposal.

Similarly, the House Subcommittee on Intelligence and Special Operations requested in 2021 that the Director of National Intelligence examine the question of expanding the so-called "five eyes" intelligence-sharing network to include India and other Asian partners like Japan and South Korea. In particular, the subcommittee wishes to understand the advantages, drawbacks, and technological difficulties of intelligence sharing with India.¹⁸ The full report will be published in late May of 2022.

However, this intelligence-sharing proposal is deeply implausible for the same reasons as the proposed alliance. India already enjoys access to American intelligence collection through C.O.M.C.A.S.A., but only after years of protracted negotiations and stiff resistance from the New Delhi bureaucracy. Full integration of intelligence sharing would constitute a significant departure from the principle of strategic autonomy. Similarly, Indian officials do not wish to appear overly antagonistic to Russia and China.¹⁹ American intelligence officials also have good reason to doubt the reliability of the Indian intelligence community, which can hardly boast a clean track record in anticipating Pakistani and Chinese provocations.²⁰

Indian Reliance on Russian Arms

The Origins and Extent of Dependence

Distinct but related to the issue of strategic autonomy is India's binding ties with Russia. These rest on several factors. As a recent study put it, "a slight ideological preference for the Soviet Union, Washington's support for Pakistan, Moscow's crisis-time political and military support for India, but most importantly, a robust and generous arms sales program that facilitated an enduring military-technical relationship... coalesced to form the logic behind the Indo-Soviet relationship, which has, in many ways, carried over into the present day."²¹ Thus, a history of support and ideological affinity has built up a significant trust reserve. Moreover, with China to the north and Pakistan to the west, Indian strategic elites view Russia as a much-needed partner in balancing the Eurasian continent's geopolitics. On a larger scale, Indian and Russian leaders both desire for a multipolar or polycentric world order in which no single great power or superpower dominates, thus dovetailing with the Indian quest for strategic autonomy.²² However, unlike India, Russia sees the international rules-based order as an obstacle to a genuinely multipolar order—a barrier to challenge by force.²³

This close relationship survived the end of the Cold War even as some of the underlying assumptions lost relevance. Russia left its state communist ideology by the wayside in 1991, and Indian elites soon shed the last of their socialist trappings following the balance of payments crisis in the same year. While strengthened during the War on Terror after 2001, Washington-Islamabad ties soon deteriorated following American frustration with Pakistani double-dealing

in Afghanistan. The flow of arms exports is the last, but still towering, pillar supporting the Moscow-New Delhi relationship even if some residual sense of goodwill remains.²⁴

The Indian military's dependence on Russian military hardware is well known. According to a recent congressional report, Russia has produced 62% of Indian arms imports since 2010.²⁵ Some experts estimate that as high as 85% of India's total military hardware is of Russian origin. Other estimates put it lower at roughly 60%.²⁶ Whatever the exact percentage, this dependence extends over most critical components of Indian military strength. The army's tank force is composed of Russian T-72M1s and T-90Ss. The navy's single aircraft carrier, the *INS Vikramaditya*, was originally constructed by the Soviet Union and bought from the Russian government in 2013. A sizeable number of destroyers and submarines are also of Russian make. The air force, too, is overwhelmingly composed of Russian MiGs and SU-30s.²⁷ Compared to the systems sold by the U.S., Russian exports encompass more significant Indian military capabilities.

The Strategic Implications of Dependence

This means that Indian conventional forces will require Russian manufacturers and expertise for upkeep, spare parts, and repairs for at least the next fifteen years.²⁸ Even as India seeks to diversify its defense hardware, the cumulative weight of Russian equipment will be challenging to shake off in a brief period. Thus, as many have noted, the Indian military cannot operate effectively without a healthy diplomatic relationship between New Delhi and Moscow in the long term. With Indian forces facing off the P.L.A. in the Himalayas, eschewing the Russians is not an option, even as ties between Moscow and Beijing grow closer.

Nonetheless, the problems inherent in dependence on Russian arms are not lost on Indian defense planners. Over the last decade, India has significantly expanded the range of its defense imports. U.S. arms exports to India have swelled from a negligible amount in 2008 to a total of \$20 billion by 2020.²⁹ American allies like France and Israel rank among India's most prominent defense suppliers as well.³⁰ Additionally, there are reasons to believe that India views Russia as an increasingly unreliable defense supplier and partner. International sanctions on Russia in place since 2014 deprived its defense sector of financing, technolog-

ical components, and expertise, leading to a drop in overall quality.³¹ As a result, India has canceled several key arms deals with Russia. In 2018, New Delhi scrapped a Su-57 stealth fighter project, citing cost overruns and sub-standard technical quality.³² More recently, in March of 2022, the Indian government canceled a purchase of forty-eight Mi-17 transport helicopters in favor of a domestic supplier.³³

However, managing complete indigenization or outsourcing would be impossible in a short amount of time.³⁴ Instead, India aims to reduce the Russian share of the import pie and prevent too much dependence on any one supplier. Future deals with Moscow cannot be ruled out either since Russian products tend to be cheaper and less harried by bureaucratic hurdles than American-made weaponry.³⁵ Thus, because of the interlocked nature of the India-Russia partnership, it is crucial to enact safeguards against friction that might impair the relationship's essential purpose.

The Biden Administration's Incoherent Approach to India

Such friction is now clearly visible. Since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War in February 2022, the Biden administration has attempted, without success, to convince India to join its sanctions policy and denounce the Russian invasion on the world stage. In contrast, India abstained from UN Security Council and General Assembly votes condemning the attack while refusing to implement sanctions on the Russian economy. On the one hand, the Biden administration's response to India's choices in this matter has been a series of criticism and threats. White House officials have censured and threatened to coerce India to take a harder line against Moscow. On a visit to New Delhi, Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh warned India against increasing imports of cheaper Russian oil, referring to unspecified "consequences."³⁶ Similarly, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki urged the Indian government to "think about where you want to stand when the history books are written in this moment in time."³⁷ Most significantly, President Biden announced that he was considering imposing C.A.A.T.S.A. sanctions on India due to its continued arms imports from Russia.³⁸

On the other hand, the Biden administration has not forgotten the importance of US-India ties to its Indo-Pacific strategy. Donald Lu, the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs,

stated in an interview with an Indian newspaper that it was "no secret" that the two countries have different views on Ukraine. But he concluded that this was "all the more reason that we, as strategic partners, should have good communication and good discussions at every level to both explain our positions, but also to look for places of convergence where we can work together."³⁹ Furthermore, the April 11th "2+2" meeting of the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, External Affairs Minister, and Defense Minister reaffirmed the importance of defense ties.⁴⁰

Yet, the disjunction of rhetoric and the sanctions threats from the administration will leave India confused. Does the U.S. recognize India's traditional policy of strategic autonomy, or does it expect adherence to Washington's directives? Of course, statements such as those cited above will not automatically undo the progress made in military cooperation over the last two decades. Furthermore, the Biden administration has at least rhetorically committed itself to strengthening engagement with India. Nevertheless, if this incoherence is not rectified in future cases of disagreement between the two powers, US-India relations will suffer in one way or another since it reinforces the impression that the U.S. imagines India as a subordinate power.

CAATSA's Threat to US-India Relations

Sanctions May Increase Indian Dependence on Russia

The administration's incoherence on this issue is most apparent in President Biden's decision to raise the question of imposing C.A.A.T.S.A. Sanctions on India. The "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act" (C.A.A.T.S.A.) punishes and isolates American adversaries (namely Russia and Iran) with sanctions and dissuades other countries from acquiring their weapons. Considering the nature of the India-Russia bond, the law constitutes an impending threat to US-India relations.

India's purchase of the Russian-produced S-400 Triumf air defense system in 2018 brought this issue to the surface. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, Senator Bob Menendez, supported imposing C.A.A.T.S.A. sanctions. In a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Menendez wrote, "If India

chooses to go forward with its purchase of the S-400, that act will constitute a significant and therefore sanctionable transaction with the Russian defense sector under section 231 of C.A.A.T.S.A.” He further advised Austin to mention these concerns with his Indian counterparts in future meetings.⁴¹

Imposing C.A.A.T.S.A. sanctions on India would mean a variety of immediate outcomes. The law lists twelve types of sanctions. The president must impose at least five measures on a single entity that buys from Russian defense manufacturers. For instance, the U.S. could prevent India from using American currency to purchase Russian equipment. It could block export licenses and debt-equity restrictions, effectively quashing arms exports from the US.⁴² This is a major pillar of U.S.-India defense cooperation and toppling it would reverse American success in integrating with India’s military. If India cannot buy sophisticated military technology from the US, its armed forces may grow more rather than less dependent on Russian imports. The imposition of sanctions on Turkey for its purchase of the S-400 led to a similar outcome, with Ankara exploring the purchase of Russian Su-35 fighter jets.⁴³ In that sense, C.A.A.T.S.A. could prove counterproductive to its purpose. Similarly, preventing dollar exchanges would not effectively stop future purchases from Moscow, considering New Delhi’s urgent defense needs.

U.S. interests would be better served by India not purchasing the S-400 air defense system in favor of an American or allied alternative. However, since New Delhi began receiving the shipment of the S-400, there is no point in punishing India for a *fait accompli*. In any case, the S-400 system in Indian hands is not as terrible a problem as it may seem. Defense officials worry that Indian use of it could prevent the use of American products in time. But this is already a structural, unavoidable problem considering India’s bloated stock of Russian weaponry. Compatibility issues and technological transfers would have to be managed together with or without sanctions. Additionally, the S-400 fits Indian security needs in a way that matches American interests. The platform allows India to devote more air force missions to offensive rather than solely defensive missions over its contested border with China, thereby improving deterrence.⁴⁴

Sanctions Will Not Change Indian Behavior

Historically, American attempts to coerce India into compliance with American objectives have proved unsuccessful and counterproductive. In the wake of the Second Indo-Pakistan War in 1965, the U.S. suspended arms shipments to both countries. In response, India bolstered its supply of Soviet arms, contributing to the present situation.⁴⁵ Moreover, the suspension did not contribute to the peace agreement, which the Soviet Union brokered a month after the outbreak of hostilities.⁴⁶ Similarly, President Lyndon Johnson cut food aid to India in 1967 to force the Indian government to reform agricultural laws. The act, which went into force just as parts of the country were experiencing famine-like conditions, did not affect government policy and severely strained relations between Washington and New Delhi. True to Indian tradition, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi considered Johnson’s scheme to be a direct affront to Indian autonomy.⁴⁷ Both decisions contributed to Indian perceptions of American unreliability and compelled the search for an alternative defense partner—Russia.

The ineffectiveness of American sanctions is most apparent when examining the case of the Indian nuclear program. Following nuclear weapons tests in 1998, the Clinton administration halted military and economic assistance to punish India’s disregard for non-proliferation norms. However, India refused to budge on the matter, and the U.S. later repealed the sanctions without significant concessions. As the scholar of Indian power Stephen Cohen concluded, when “applied to what many Indians regarded as a vital national interest—the maintenance of the nuclear option—they [the sanctions] proved to be ineffective and counterproductive.”⁴⁸ These examples should be instructive for any future attempt to coerce India.

U.S. officials have floated another solution: imposing only the mildest sanctions offered by the law. In that case, US-India relations would be minimally affected while still upholding the American commitment to stopping the spread of the S-400 system. However, In the same way, even light or symbolic sanctions will naturally remind Indian policymakers of this history and could still prove diplomatically inflammatory even if they are substantively light.⁴⁹

Exempting India from CAATSA

Fortunately, C.A.A.T.S.A. provides the president authority to waive or delay sanctions in the interests of national security on a case-by-case basis. However, this can only occur if the president certifies that the country in question is taking “demonstrable steps to reduce their defense dependence on Russia and that they are cooperating with the United States in advancing critical strategic interest.”⁵⁰ Considering its critical dependence, whether India can meet this standard is far from clear. As demonstrated above, India is in no hurry to completely cease purchasing equipment from Russia. Moreover, even if the president waived sanctions on the S-400 deal, the possibility of sanctions on future arms purchases from Russia would remain.

Thus, the U.S. and India will find themselves in the same position again soon. To prevent more needless friction and objectively recognize India’s position, the best solution is to provide a special exemption to the law’s provisions. Senators Cruz, Young, and Marshall introduced the “Circumspectly Reducing Unintended Consequences Impairing Alliances and Leadership Act” (C.R.U.C.I.A.L. Act) to the Senate in 2021. The amendment would specifically discharge nations belonging to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue from the C.A.A.T.S.A. provisions, including Australia, India, and Japan.⁵¹ Since Australia and Japan do not rely on Russian arms sales, the Act would effectively apply exclusively to India.

Exempting India from applying the law would sweep away the threat of sanctions from looming over the US-India relationship for the next decade. As former American Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster explained, “Continuing to kick the sanctions can down the road, however, has a corrosive effect on the U.S.-Indian relationship. It undermines the hard work of the past 21 years that overcame a lack of trust and, for India, a lingering concern about the reliability of the United States as a defense partner.”⁵² If India is simultaneously concerned about American reliability and perceived encroachment on sovereignty, ending C.A.A.T.S.A. sanctions would go a long way to assuage New Delhi’s worries.

India would buy more time to reduce its disproportionate reliance on Russian arms. As international sanctions take effect, Russian defense technology will gradually lose viability. India will continue expanding the range of its purchases not only from the U.S.

but also from Israel, France, South Korea, and South Africa.⁵³ In addition, it is likely to invest more in its indigenous defense sector, keeping in line with the ideals of strategic autonomy.⁵⁴

Criticism of the CRUCIAL Act notes that it will allow further diffusion of weapons systems produced by American adversaries.⁵⁵ In addition, exempting India would pose political problems at the current moment. A presidential waiver would complicate the White House’s efforts to maintain an across-the-board tough-on-Russia policy. A legislative exemption amendment to C.A.A.T.S.A. would certainly attract criticism for appearing to aid Russian arms sales when Moscow is waging a war of aggression. However, a C.A.A.T.S.A.-sanctioned India would be more dependent on Russia and less trusting of the U.S. The argument against the exemption faces the futility of its alternative. There is no conceivable benefit in forcing the appearance of a united front against Russia while alienating a key partner.

Energy Sanctions

The same detrimental logic applies to sanctions on Indian imports of Russian energy. Like its military, the Indian economy cannot rely on domestic oil production and remains dependent on imports from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.⁵⁶ Though it is not historically reliant on Russian energy, Moscow has recently offered New Delhi tempting discounts on crude oil. As a result, India now imports 17% of its oil from Russia.⁵⁷ However, considering its proximity to the Middle East, it is unlikely to become overwhelmingly dependent on Russian energy in the way Germany is. With rising global energy prices, India does not have the luxury to turn down a deal of this kind without imperiling its own economic growth—growth necessary for expanding Indian hard power in its competition with China.

Sanctioning Indian energy policy would lead to a similar outcome as sanctioning Indian defense policy, namely a cooling of relations and stirring old Indian fears about American unreliability. These exact worries surfaced in 2019 when the Trump administration refused to waive sanctions on India’s oil imports from Iran.⁵⁸ While this decision did not lead to a diplomatic rupture, it would be prudent to avoid the impression that the U.S. systematically undercuts New Delhi’s sovereignty over energy policy. The sense of humiliation would deepen if the U.S. were to fail to sanction

European imports of Russian energy in a similar fashion. Double standards on European and Indian energy choices incontrovertibly create the impression that the U.S. does not value India as a strategic partner on par with Europe.

Excess Defense Articles

In addition to removing sanction threats, there are means by which the U.S. can help India reduce its chronic Russian arms dependence. Excess defense article transfers (E.D.A.s) offer foreign governments unused military equipment at a discounted price or even a grant. These transfers are intended to bolster military modernization. As a recent dialogue hosted by the Stimson Center recommended, the U.S. should use this program to provide India with cost-effective equipment that matches Indian needs, such as “the RQ-4 Global Hawk for border security, the E-8 JSTARS for battle management, A-10’s for close-air support, minesweeper ships, and helicopters.”⁵⁹

Previously, the program paid little attention to India. According to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency database, New Delhi only received a single MH60R maritime helicopter between 2010 and 2020. Nevertheless, the program allocated over \$500 million worth of equipment to Pakistan over the same period. The articles issued to the Islamic Republic included a wide range of equipment from the army, navy, and air force, notably MRAP (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected) vehicles, armored personnel carriers, patrol, and boats.⁶⁰ Similarly, countries like Morocco, Moldova, Argentina, Djibouti, and Sierra Leone receive a disproportionate amount of E.D.A.s in relation to their strategic importance.⁶¹ Except for Indian bureaucratic inertia, there is no reason the U.S. should not provide India with surplus weaponry. Prioritizing E.D.A. allocation could help gradually reduce the share of Russian-produced arms and give India access to lower-cost models that it can afford.

Conclusion

The events following the Russian invasion of Ukraine have placed India at the intersection of American policy toward punishing Russia and deterring China. On the one hand, this situation demonstrates the implausibility of India’s voluntary integration into an American-led alliance system through a treaty or joint intelligence sharing. On the other, it shows the futility of coercing India into fulfilling American

policy goals. C.A.A.T.S.A., as written, would do little to punish Russia while harming the strategic partnership with India necessary to compete with China. Sanctions would be a manifestly counterproductive course of action and would likely deepen Indian arms dependence on Russia and significantly degrade New Delhi’s trust in Washington.

A realistic American policy toward India should factor in the nation’s unique interests and strategic culture if its goal is to maintain and enhance the strategic partnership. In this case, the view that the U.S. can and should coerce its partners to adopt positions against their long-held inclinations is illusory and detrimental to American interests. Washington must instead treat India as an equal and sovereign partner with its interests, history, and strategic culture.

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