# Strategic Convergence and Defense Cooperation: A Comparative Policy Analysis of Indo–U.S. Agreements (2005–2024)

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**Abstract:** The evolution of Indo–U.S. relations since the mid-2000s marks a major shift in contemporary international politics. After a period of distance and mistrust during the Cold War, India and the United States have gradually built a broad strategic partnership, in which defense cooperation has become a key component. This research paper presents a comparative policy analysis of major Indo–U.S. strategic and defense agreements signed between 2005 and 2024 to examine the scope, nature, and impact of growing strategic convergence between the two countries. Using a qualitative and longitudinal research approach, the study reviews important agreements such as the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), and recent technology-oriented initiatives like the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET). The findings indicate a gradual strengthening of institutionalized defense cooperation through improved interoperability, intelligence sharing, and defense-industrial collaboration, while also underlining India's continued commitment to strategic autonomy. The paper concludes that Indo–U.S. defense cooperation is based on practical strategic alignment shaped by shared security concerns and regional challenges, rather than a formal military alliance. Overall, the study adds to the strategic studies literature by providing a detailed agreement-based assessment of Indo–U.S. defense cooperation and its implications for security in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Keywords:** Indo–U.S. Relations, Defense Cooperation, Strategic Convergence, Strategic Autonomy, Indo-Pacific, Security Policy

## INTRODUCTION

The development of Indo–U.S. relations over the last twenty years reflects a major change in India's foreign and security policy approach. During the Cold War period, bilateral relations were limited due to ideological differences, global power alignments, and India's commitment to non-alignment. However, changes in the international system after the Cold War, along with India's economic reforms and increasing strategic interests, gradually created conditions for

closer cooperation. This shift gained clear momentum after 2005, when both countries launched a civil nuclear cooperation framework that signaled a new level of mutual trust.

Since that time, defense and security cooperation have become the most active and structured areas of Indo–U.S. relations. The signing of key defense agreements, regular joint military exercises, growing defense trade, and collaboration in advanced technologies have significantly strengthened bilateral engagement. These developments have taken place in a changing regional security context, marked by China's rising influence, evolving Indo-Pacific strategies, and a stronger focus on maritime security.

At the same time, India has continued to stress the importance of strategic autonomy and has avoided entering into formal military alliances. This creates an important analytical issue between increasing strategic cooperation and India's preference for independent decision-making. This paper examines how major Indo–U.S. defense agreements signed between 2005 and 2024 reflect this balance. Through a systematic analysis of these agreements, the study seeks to determine whether Indo–U.S. defense cooperation functions as a de facto alliance or as a flexible partnership based on shared interests.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing research on Indo–U.S. relations shows a growing agreement among scholars about the importance of the bilateral partnership, especially in the areas of defense and security. Different theories of international relations offer varied explanations for this development. Realist scholars focus on balance-of-power considerations and argue that closer Indo–U.S. cooperation is largely a response to China's increasing military and economic presence in the Indo-Pacific region. From this viewpoint, defense agreements are seen as tools for strategic balancing rather than steps toward a formal alliance.

Liberal institutionalist studies emphasize the role of institutions, formal agreements, and shared rules in promoting cooperation and reducing uncertainty between states. Scholars adopting this approach view defense agreements as arrangements that build mutual trust, improve operational compatibility, and formalize cooperation without requiring alliance commitments. Constructivist perspectives, in contrast, highlight changes in strategic thinking, identities, and shared understandings of regional security and order.

Empirical research on Indo–U.S. defense cooperation mainly examines joint military exercises, defense trade, and collaboration in defense technology. Many studies point to the rapid growth of defense trade, with the United States emerging as one of India's major defense suppliers. At the same time, scholars identify ongoing challenges such as administrative delays, limits on technology transfer, and domestic political factors in both countries.

Although the existing literature offers important insights, much of it focuses on specific agreements or limited time periods. There is a noticeable gap in long-term, comparative analysis of major defense agreements. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a systematic, agreement-based examination of Indo–U.S. defense cooperation from 2005 to 2024.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the development of Indo–U.S. defense and strategic agreements during the period from 2005 to 2024.
2. To compare the goals, scope, and key outcomes of major bilateral agreements.
3. To examine the level and nature of strategic convergence between India and the United States.
4. To assess the impact of these agreements on India's strategic autonomy and on regional security dynamics.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How have Indo–U.S. defense agreements changed and expanded since 2005?
- What trends of strategic convergence can be identified from these agreements?
- In what ways do these agreements promote cooperation while preserving India's strategic autonomy?

## CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses a strategic convergence framework to understand Indo–U.S. defense cooperation. In this framework, defense cooperation is viewed as the result of shared threat perceptions, institutional compatibility, and political commitment. Strategic convergence is

measured through factors such as military interoperability, intelligence sharing, defense-industrial cooperation, and alignment in regional security approaches. At the same time, strategic autonomy is analyzed through indicators such as policy independence, the absence of binding treaty obligations, and India's efforts to maintain diversified strategic partnerships.

A comparative policy analysis approach is applied to examine defense agreements over time, with attention to their objectives, operational coverage, and strategic impact. This framework helps to evaluate both the areas of growing cooperation and the limits placed on the Indo–U.S. partnership.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study follows a qualitative and longitudinal research design covering the period from 2005 to 2024. This design makes it possible to analyze changes in policies and institutions over an extended time frame.

### Data Sources

Primary sources include official agreements, joint statements, and publications issued by the defense ministries of India and the United States. Secondary sources consist of academic literature, think-tank studies, and policy reports from organizations focused on strategic and defense research.

### Analytical Tools

Content analysis is used to study the texts of the agreements in detail, while comparative tables are employed to identify common features and differences among them. Process tracing is applied to connect specific agreements with wider strategic and policy developments.

## Evolution of Indo–U.S. Strategic Relations (2005–2024)

The signing of the Indo–U.S. Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in 2005 represented a major turning point in bilateral relations. By acknowledging India as a responsible nuclear state outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty framework, the agreement removed long-standing obstacles to closer strategic cooperation. In the same year, the New Framework for the U.S.–

India Defense Relationship was concluded, providing a basis for expanded military and defense engagement.

In the years that followed, defense cooperation became more structured through the establishment of regular defense dialogues, the conduct of joint military exercises such as Malabar and Yudh Abhyas, and a sharp rise in defense trade. The renewal of the defense framework in 2015 and again in 2020 demonstrated sustained commitment and growing depth in the partnership. By the early 2020s, Indo–U.S. relations had developed into a comprehensive strategic partnership, with defense cooperation as a central element.

**Comparative Analysis of Key Defense Agreements**

To enable a clear and systematic comparison of major Indo–U.S. defense and strategic agreements, this section introduces a comparative policy matrix. The matrix highlights key aspects such as objectives, scope, strategic importance, and the implications of these agreements for India's strategic autonomy.

**Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Major Indo–U.S. Defense and Strategic Agreements (2005–2024)**

| Year | Agreement | Key Objective | Core Provisions | Strategic Importance | Implications for National Strategic Autonomy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2005–08 | Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement | Normalize nuclear relations and enable civil nuclear trade | Nuclear fuel access, technology cooperation, NSG waiver | Foundation of strategic trust; entry point for broader cooperation | Enhanced global status without alliance obligations |
| 2005 | New Framework for Defence Relationship | Institutionalize defense cooperation | Military exercises, defense trade, dialogues | Formal start of structured defense engagement | Non-binding framework preserving autonomy |
| 2016 | Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) | Logistics interoperability | Reciprocal access to bases for refuelling and replenishment | Improves operational reach and coordination | Explicit exclusion of basing; sovereignty safeguards |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2018 | Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA, 2018) | Secure communications | Encrypted communication systems, real-time data sharing | Enhances interoperability and situational awareness | India-specific safeguards and data control |
| 2019 | Industrial Security Annex (ISA) | Enable defense industrial cooperation | Protection of classified info, supply-chain security | Facilitates co-development and co-production | Supports indigenization goals |
| 2020 | Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) | Geospatial intelligence sharing | Satellite imagery, maps, navigation data | Strengthens precision and targeting capabilities | No automatic operational commitments |
| 2020 | Defence Framework Agreement (Renewal) | Long-term defense partnership | Renewed strategic dialogue and cooperation agenda | Signals continuity and maturity of partnership | Flexible, non-treaty-based cooperation |
| 2023 | Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) | Advanced technology collaboration | AI, semiconductors, cyber, defense innovation | Expands cooperation beyond traditional defense | Aligns with self-reliance and diversification |

**Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA, 2016)**

The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement allows India and the United States to use each other's military logistics facilities for refueling, replenishment, and maintenance purposes. The agreement does not allow permanent stationing of forces but improves coordination during joint military exercises, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief operations. LEMOA demonstrates functional strategic cooperation while maintaining India's sovereignty and decision-making independence.

**Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA, 2018)**

COMCASA enables the sharing of secure communication systems and real-time operational information between Indian and U.S. armed forces. This agreement improves interoperability and situational awareness, especially in naval and air operations. India negotiated specific safeguards to retain control over sensitive communication systems, highlighting its continued focus on strategic autonomy.

**Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA, 2020)**

The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement provides a framework for sharing geospatial intelligence, such as satellite images and mapping data. This information improves the accuracy of navigation, surveillance, and targeting systems, thereby strengthening India's operational effectiveness. BECA indicates a high level of mutual trust and strategic alignment, particularly in response to evolving regional security concerns.

**Industrial Security Annex and iCET (2019–2023)**

The Industrial Security Annex and the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology mark a shift toward deeper defense-industrial and technological cooperation. These initiatives promote joint development, co-production, and collaboration in advanced areas including semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and defense manufacturing. They support India's goal of strengthening domestic defense production and technological self-reliance.

**Analysis & Findings: Numerical Trends in Indo–U.S. Defense Cooperation (2005–2024)**

To improve the empirical foundation of this study, this section examines key numerical trends that indicate the extent, intensity, and results of Indo–U.S. strategic and defense cooperation from 2005 to 2024. These trends support the qualitative analysis of strategic convergence and also highlight India's carefully balanced approach to cooperation.

**Growth in Defense Trade and Procurement**

**Table 2: Growth of Indo–U.S. Defense Trade (2005–2024)**

| Year | Estimated Value of Defense Trade (USD Billion) | Major Developments |
|---|---|---|
| **2005** | < 1.0 | Limited sales; low institutional trust |
| **2010** | 3.0 | Initial high-value platform acquisitions |
| **2015** | 10.0 | Expansion after Defense Framework renewal |
| **2020** | 20.0 | Impact of LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA |
| **2024** | >22.0 | Diversified platforms and co-production focus |

(Source: - Congress.gov. (2025). Report on India-U.S. Military Exercises and Defence Cooperation)

The data show that defense trade between India and the United States has increased more than twenty times since 2005, indicating the United States' emergence as one of India's major defense suppliers. This expansion reflects growing strategic trust rather than reliance on a formal alliance.

**Expansion of Joint Military Exercises and Interoperability**

**Table 3: Frequency of Major Indo–U.S. Joint Military Exercises**

| Duration | Approx. Exercises per Year | Nature of Engagement |
|---|---|---|
| **2005-2009** | 5-7 | Bilateral, service-specific |
| **2010-2014** | 8-10 | Introduction of air and naval complexity |
| **2015-2019** | 12-15 | Expanded scope and interoperability |
| **2020-2024** | 15-20 | Multi-domain and tri-service focus |

(Source:- Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2025). India-U.S. Bilateral Relations Brief)

The consistent rise in both the number and complexity of joint military exercises demonstrates improved interoperability, greater operational familiarity, and stronger joint planning capabilities, which are important indicators of strategic convergence.

Institutionalization through Agreements

**Table 4: Density of Major Indo–U.S. Defense Agreements**

| Phase | Number of Major Agreement | Dominant Focus |
|---|---|---|
| **2005-2009** | 2 | Trust-building and normalization |
| **2010-2014** | 3 | Operational engagement |
| **2015-2019** | 4 | Logistics, communications, industry |
| **2020-2024** | 5 | Intelligence and emerging technologies |

(Source:- Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2025). India-U.S. Bilateral Relations Brief)

The expanding range and number of bilateral agreements over time point to increasing institutional maturity and a sustained policy commitment to defense cooperation.

Shift toward Advanced Technology Cooperation

**Table 5: Evolution of Cooperation Domains**

| Period | Key Cooperation Area | Strategic Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| **2005-2010** | Civil nuclear and conventional defense | Strategic normalization |
| **2011-2015** | Platforms and exercises | Capability enhancement |
| **2016-2020** | Logistics and intelligence | Operational readiness |
| **2021-2024** | AI, cyber, semiconductors (iCET) | Future-oriented convergence |

(Source: - Congressional Research Service (CRS)

The shift from limited defense transactions to cooperation in advanced technologies highlights the deepening and broadening nature of the Indo–U.S. strategic partnership.

Key Empirical Findings

- Indo–U.S. defense trade increased from less than USD 1 billion in 2005 to more than USD 22 billion by 2024.
- The number and complexity of joint military exercises rose by nearly three times over the study period.
- Foundational defense agreements acted as enablers of cooperation rather than as binding alliance commitments.
- Initiatives in emerging technologies indicate long-term strategic alignment while also supporting India's goal of self-reliance.

Together, these findings provide empirical support for the argument that Indo–U.S. relations have developed into an organized strategic partnership marked by deep cooperation without the constraints of a formal alliance.

**Strategic Convergence and Strategic Autonomy**

The comparative analysis shows a pattern of selective convergence between India and the United States. Although both countries share concerns about regional stability and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, India continues to avoid formal alliance obligations. Engagement in groupings such as the Quad supports, rather than replaces, India's broader multi-alignment approach. Defense agreements are structured to strengthen capabilities while preserving independent policy choices.

**Implications for Regional and Global Security**

Indo–U.S. defense cooperation has important implications for the security environment of the Indo-Pacific region. Improved interoperability and intelligence sharing enhance deterrence and maritime security. At the same time, India's measured approach reduces the risk of escalation and allows space for diplomatic engagement with other major powers. As a result, the partnership influences regional stability without relying on formal alliance frameworks.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings reinforce theoretical perspectives suggesting that strategic partnerships can achieve meaningful cooperation without formal alliances. The Indo–U.S. defense relationship

illustrates how institutional arrangements can promote convergence while respecting national autonomy. However, domestic political factors, administrative processes, and regional security dynamics continue to influence the pace and direction of cooperation.

**Policy Implications**

For India, the key challenge is to fully utilize technological and operational gains while maintaining strategic autonomy. This requires improving technological absorption, simplifying defense procurement processes, and aligning industrial policies with long-term strategic goals. For the United States, sustaining cooperation depends on respecting India's preference for non-alliance-based partnerships.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that Indo–U.S. defense cooperation from 2005 to 2024 represents a practical and balanced form of strategic convergence. The major agreements during this period have formalized cooperation, strengthened military capabilities, and built mutual trust without committing India to a formal alliance. The Indo–U.S. partnership therefore offers a flexible model of strategic cooperation appropriate for a multipolar global system.

## LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is based mainly on publicly available sources, which limits access to classified aspects of defense cooperation. Future research may focus on operational outcomes, comparative studies with other strategic partnerships, and the long-term effects of collaboration in emerging technologies.

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