

UNITY IN DIFFERENCE: OVERCOMING THE U.S.-INDIA DIVIDE

ASHLEY J. TELLIS

U.S. President Barack Obama's return to India in January 2015 carries the hope that Washington and New Delhi may succeed in placing their cooperation on firmer foundations. Achieving this objective will require reconciling American expectations of exchange-based relations with the Indian desire for a no-obligations partnership. This challenge is best handled through a set of complementary policies in Washington and New Delhi that together are most aptly characterized as "unity in difference."

Key Themes

- India and the United States are still some distance away from realizing their objective of cementing a strong geopolitical affiliation that advances each other's vital interests.
- Bilateral ties were at their best during the Cold War when Washington pursued unstinting policies toward New Delhi despite the latter's inability or unwillingness to reciprocate.
- In the post-Cold War period, the willingness of a few American presidents to extend exceptional support to India and the appreciation in New Delhi of the durable strategic partnership with Washington opened the door to transformed bilateral relations.
- Achieving a genuine strategic partnership between the United States and India is challenging, but it will be a worthwhile investment in the long-term security and relative power positions of both India and the United States.

Recommendations for the United States and India

Washington should return to the best of its past practices toward New Delhi: acting to deepen the relationship by strengthening India's capabilities without any expectations of clear quid pro quos. It is in U.S. interests to bolster Indian power even if no repayment is forthcoming because doing so will help limit the rise of a Chinese hegemon in Asia that could undermine the enduring strategic interests of the United States. The president and his senior subordinates must resist the demands both of pressure groups in American society and of narrow bureaucratic interests in the U.S. government that push for transactional policies that subvert the nation's larger goals.

New Delhi should articulate a geopolitical vision that preserves a special priority for the United States and look for creative ways to demonstrate strategic solidarity with Washington. If India is to enjoy the kind of preferential support that the United States usually extends only to its closest allies, its leaders must offer their American counterparts a vision of strategic partnership that they find both appealing and consistent with their own conceptions of the national interest. Such a vision should be reinforced by increasing cooperation with the United States across the widest possible range of issues.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashley J. Tellis is a senior associate in the South Asia Program, specializing in international security, defense, and Asian strategic issues. Tellis was formerly senior adviser to the undersecretary of state for political affairs.

CONTACT

Christopher Dockrey
Government Affairs Manager
+1 202 939-2307
cdockrey@ceip.org

Clara Hogan
Media Manager
+1 202 939-2241
chogan@ceip.org

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a unique global network of policy research centers in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. Our mission, dating back more than a century, is to advance the cause of peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decisionmakers in government, business, and civil society. Working together, our centers bring the inestimable benefit of multiple national viewpoints to bilateral, regional, and global issues.

© 2015 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. All rights reserved.

The Carnegie Endowment does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Carnegie, its staff, or its trustees.

CarnegieEndowment.org

 [@CarnegieEndow](https://twitter.com/CarnegieEndow)

 [facebook.com/
CarnegieEndowment](https://facebook.com/CarnegieEndowment)