

INDO - U.S. RELATIONS: CHANGE, CONTINUITY & TRANSFORMATION

Organized by
Centre for Public Policy Research, Kochi
with support from
The U.S. Consulate General in Chennai



Conference report prepared by
Centre for Public Policy Research
April 19-20, 2022 | Kochi, Kerala, India

The Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR), Kochi, with the support from the U.S. Consulate General in Chennai organised a two-day conference in Kochi, Kerala on April 19-20, 2022. The two day conference was focused around the **“India - U.S. relations : Change, Continuity and Transformation”**. As the India-U.S. relations continue to develop into a ‘global strategic partnership’, CPPR in collaboration with the U.S. Consulate General, Chennai undertook a project to study the growing relationship between the two countries. The project focused on four areas of cooperation namely, U.S.-India Trade Relations, U.S.-India Science and Technology Cooperation, Indo-Pacific Strategy and U.S. and India as partners in global climate initiatives.

During the course of the project four webinars were organised to discuss and debate on these four areas with experts and scholars from both the countries. However, with the pandemic on the downlow and normalcy returning to its rightful place, CPPR and the U.S. Consulate General, Chennai decided to organise the “Indo-U.S. Relations : Change, Continuity and Transformation Conference”. The Conference was geared towards fostering and enhancing the relationship of the two countries by exploring strategic partnership in the focus areas as mentioned above. This was also the first in-person conference between the two organisations since the pandemic took over the world, which made it all the more important and impactful.

DAY 1

Two-Day Conference Indo-U.S. Relations : Change, Continuity and Transformation

Inaugural Session

Dr. D. Dhanuraj, Chairman, CPPR, Kochi, welcomed the speakers and the audience to the event. He introduced the focus areas of the conference and remarked at how the U.S. looks at India as a major international player. He discussed the importance of the clean and emerging technologies, trade relations, the aim of the U.S. Agency for International Development to expand triangular development relations and the growing strategic partnership between India and the U.S. He concluded his address by reminding everyone that the U.S. and India shall jointly fight conflict from sea to space.



Dr. D Dhanuraj welcoming the audience during the inaugural session

The conference was then inaugurated by **Amb T.P. Sreenivasan, Advisor - CPPR, former Ambassador, Permanent Representative of India to the UN**. In his inaugural address, Amb T.P. Sreenivasan explained the history of U.S. and India relations by 3 Es i.e., estranged, engaged and embracing. He went on to discuss how the two nations' relations at present lie somewhere between engaged and embracing. He also emphasised on India's national interest being its main priority and reinforced India's stand for negotiations and reconciliation in the face of conflicts between other nations.



Delegates lighting the lamp at the inaugural session



Amb. T.P. Sreenivasan giving his inaugural address

Ms. Judith Ravin, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General, Chennai joined the conference virtually and remarked on the perfect timing of the conference as it followed the 2+2 dialogue between the U.S. and India. She discussed the necessity of deepening participation through **Global Strategic Comprehensive Partnership** for peace and security between the two oldest and largest democracies in the world. She also touched upon initiatives signed between the two nations like the BECA and FOIP, and their importance. She concluded by highlighting the potential of Indo Pacific relations to develop by engaging Indian students, scholars, media, entrepreneurs and experts through the Indo Pacific Circle Initiative which the U.S. General Consul plans to inaugurate in July-August 2022 in the Southern part of India.

Shri Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament of India (Rajya Sabha) from Odisha, who joined the conference virtually spoke of the U.S. and India being natural allies since the beginning. He explained the transition of the relationship shared between the two nations with President Biden's administration now strongly embracing the QUAD relations and all that QUAD represents. He talked

about numerous bilateral dialogues with respect to space, cyber security, trade policies, education, maritime growth and supply chain. He also spoke about the Indians residing in the U.S., the millions of Indian students going to the States each year to pursue higher education and how this Indian diaspora could serve as a tool for diplomacy between the two nations.

Panel Discussion on Indo - U.S. Relations

The Panel Discussion was moderated by **Ms. Anne Lee Seshadri, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Consulate General, Chennai** and in conversation with **Mr Michael Kugelman, Deputy Director and Senior Associate for South and Southeast Asia - Woodrow Wilson Centre, USA** and **Amb T.P. Sreenivasan, Advisor - CPPR, former Ambassador, Permanent Representative of India to the UN**. Ms. Seshadri held the discussion on four topics which were - the role of Russia with respect to the U.S. India partnership, India taking up the role of a mediator, the bright spots of 2+2 dialogue and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's remarks on India's growing human rights violation.



Ms. Anne Lee Seshadri, Mr. Michael Kugelman, Amb T.P. Sreenivasan during the panel discussion

Mr. Michael Kugelman iterated how India's stand on the Russia-Ukraine conflict did not come as a surprise to anyone in Washington and how the U.S. believes the significance of India's position in this conflict. He stated that India made its stand against Russia clear by calling out aggression as egregious, even though on the flip side the western nations pitched to the countries the need to take a stand (against Russia) to truly be seen as democracies. Mr. Kugelman expressed his views on India being the mediator and believed that India could be successful due to its close ties with both Russia and Ukraine, if it agreed to mediate. He went on to state that if India chose to take up the role of mediator, it would further strengthen the ties with the U.S. On the bright spots of the 2+2 dialogues, he stated how the Russia-Ukraine crisis was not strong enough to derail the U.S.-India relationship because of the regular multifaceted partnerships. In reply to the question on Mr. Blinken's human rights remark, Mr. Kugelman while highlighting the importance of human rights for America's foreign policy stated clearly that this however was not a big concern for the relationship of the two countries.

When the same questions were put forth to **Amb T.P. Sreenivasan**, the Ambassador also shared similar sentiments as that of Mr. Kugelman on deepening of India-U.S. ties. However, when asked about Russia's impact on India and the U.S. relationship, he deliberated on how the Russia-India relationship is being viewed more of an impediment in the present time than it did during the Cold War Era. He was of the opinion that the Biden Administration has been busy focusing more on the Russian problem than the growing Chinese clout including the deepening Russia-China nexus. With regard to India possibly playing a mediating role in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, Amb Sreenivasan clearly outlined why India would not succeed as a mediator, a learning he acquired during his time as an ambassador. He commented that having good relations with both the countries would not

necessarily translate into successful mediation by India. He said the need for both nations i.e. Russian and Ukraine (in this case) is to make concrete decisions, for successful mediation to take place. On the matters concerning the 2+2 dialogue, Amb Sreenivasan highlighted the importance of balancing security in the nation's favour through various initiatives and agreements. He briefly registered his surprise over the human rights remark, that too pertaining to government officials and senior leaders.

Vote of Thanks

The panel discussion concluded by **Mr. Prasant Jena, Senior Officer Operations, CPPR** giving the vote of thanks to the panellists and moderator for their remarks on the U.S. and India's shared values, its growing partnership and riding the crisis and conflict-ridden waves with an understanding of each other's opinions. He appreciated the open discussion held between the panellists on not only the socio-economic aspects but also critical topics which makes academic gatherings like the conference more impactful even if uncomfortable.



A view of the audience during question and answer session at the inaugural

Session 1:

U.S.A and India: Building synergies in the global platforms

The first session of the conference was on the topic “Building synergies in the global platform” chaired by **Prof. Josekutty C A**. The speakers of the session were Prof. **Dr. G Gopakumar, Former Vice Chancellor of Central University of Kerala; Dr. Harinder Sekhon, Strategic and Foreign Policy Analyst; and Mr. Aditya Ramanathan, Associate Fellow with Takshashila Institution, Bengaluru**. Prof. Josekutty opened the session by mentioning how important a role diaspora and civil society organisations play in furthering the bilateral relationship between India and the U.S.

Prof. G Gopakumar deliberated on the essentiality of diasporic linkages to bridge gaps and improve relations between the two countries. He commented that the civil society organisations in both countries have not been utilised to strengthen these relationships. Their ties could help the countries see eye to eye on controversial issues such as human rights violations. He also opined that multiculturalism is something both the nations have in common, and neither of the countries have found solutions to all the human rights issues.

Dr. Harinder Sekhon commented that relation with the U.S. has evolved to be a mature one and PM Modi’s tapping into the diaspora to build influence internationally has been a successful diplomatic move. India gets bipartisan support, which is a testament to the growth of the relationship between the two nations. She opined that the impact of our diaspora in the U.S. is so much so that they drive the Silicon Valley, tech companies, and corporations in the U.S. However, one of the challenges is that we are yet to evolve the strategy of meshing civil society and areas of foreign and domestic policies which show great potential.

Mr. Aditya Ramanathan commented that India and the U.S. have more areas of convergence than divergence and bilateral relations thrive in the long term based on the former. According to him, civil society organisations involvement is necessary to achieve the economic growth between the two nations. They can act as a filter, a moderator and provide an atmosphere of a trial balloon to track policies. He suggested that although arms control was a source of friction between India and the U.S., however, now it is slowly becoming a source of cooperation. In his opinion, the Indian diaspora is useful for India during the times of crisis as witnessed during the pandemic. The diaspora is also beneficial in sharing knowledge to both India and the U.S., acting as a cadre for technology led diplomacy.



Prof. Josukutty C.A, Prof. Dr. G.Gopakumar and Mr. Aditya Ramanathan making their remarks during the first session.



The panel with V.Adm M.P Muralidharan and Dr. D. Dhanuraj



A view of the audience during question and answer session



Session 2:

U.S.A and India: Convergences and Challenges in Clean Energy and Climate Change

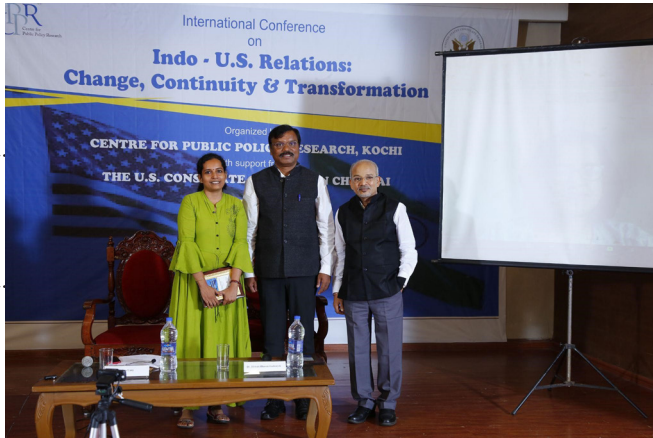
The second session of the Conference was chaired by **Dr. Anu Unny, Associate Professor, University of Kerala**. The speakers of the session were **Dr Bibhuti Bhusan Gadnayak, Senior Technical Advisor, Disaster Risk Management & Emergency - UNDP, Rwanda** and **Dr Dhanasree Jayaram, Research Fellow at Centre Marc Bloch (CMB), Germany**. **Dr. Unny** opened the discussion by commenting on the salience of collaboration between the two nations, both financially and technologically to address the climate change challenges which the world faces.

Dr. Bibhuti Bhusan Gadnayak highlighted the cooperation between India and the U.S. in areas such as clean energy, climate change and technology to combat climate crisis, with significant investments seen in the renewable energy sector. He commended that the impact of climate change is not restricted to the economic sector alone, but extends to loss of tourism, environmental damage, loss of livelihood. He added that Modi and Biden's partnership on 'execution of promises made within Paris Agreement' is a testament to their commitment to combating the issue. He noted that the U.S.-India Clean Energy Partnership is headed in the direction of accelerating production of photovoltaic batteries in India, decarbonisation of Indian railways, empowering Indian states in renewable energy grid integration and enhancing flexibility for integration. However, preference of private vehicles over public transport, stagnant demand of EVs, financing issues, and policy dearth are challenges both countries need to tackle in order to advance deeper cooperation in this sector.

Dr. Dhanasree Jayaram commented that the creation of the International Solar Alliance was a political messaging showing how committed India is to the cause of the climate crisis and a perfect example of how the U.S. and India can engage with one another multilaterally on renewable energy. She emphasised the salience of subnational collaboration between the two countries for diversifying and deepening renewable energy cooperation by citing the example of Colorado and Gujarat collaborating for infrastructure development for E-mobility. With respect to our climate cooperation in QUAD, she commented that although a cornerstone of our relations, the sector is severely underfunded. Balancing China in the region not only has geopolitical imperatives but proves to be a critical juncture in fighting climate change given China's intention to mine rare earth metals. However, there are significant challenges namely, technology and innovation gap, dearth of political will, climate financing, high dependency on coal, and lack of popularity of its alternatives, she added.



Dr. Anu Unny, Dr. Bibhuti Bhusan Gadnayak and Dr. Dhanasree Jayaram making their remarks during the second session.



The panel with Dr.R.P. Pradhan



A view of the audience during the question and answer session.



DAY 2

Continuation of the Conference

Session 3:

U.S.A and India: Trade, Connectivity and Economic Cooperation: Opportunities and Challenges

The discussion for the third session of the Conference was on “Trade and economic partnership between the US and India”. This session was **chaired by Mr. Deepak L. Aswani, Chairman & MD, Aswani Lachmandas Group. Mr. Dustin Bickel Economic Officer, U.S. Consulate General, Chennai** opened the session with his views on how the bilateral relationship between U.S.-India is growing momentum in the current times. Renewable energy, agriculture, health care being the important paradigm’s for the same. The other speakers of the panel were **Dr. R.P. Pradhan, Distinguished Fellow (Political Economy), CPPR, Associate Professor, BITS Pilani, Goa** and **Mr. Kapil Kaul, National President, IACC, Mumbai.**

The chair of the session **Mr. Deepak L. Aswani** started the deliberation by giving a brief on India’s current position in trade by citing some figures to show how the move towards partnership, particularly the U.S could help in improving the country’s financial and economic growth. He emphasised on the fact that out of the \$500 billion target set for foreign trade from India, we have only been able to reach \$145 billion till 2020, despite the pandemic. These figures showed the growing relations on the trade side with the U.S. He also listed out some important products being imported and exported from the country. India’s largest imports from the U.S. as iterated by him are crude oil and aeroplanes along with other petroleum products, paper, gold, pearls, etc. This trade relation makes the US an essential partner to India. He concluded by stressing on the fact that the highways, waterways, railway infrastructure in India should continue being built in the country. This expansion would indirectly help in increasing the trade growth in India.

To throw some more light on the topic, the first panellist **Dr. R P Pradhan** gave a presentation showing a detailed study on the economic trends between India – U.S. trade over the years. He pointed out that “India runs a trade surplus with only one country, the U.S.” Last year figures showed that India had 71 billion exports and 41 billion imports. Another important aspect in trade highlighted by him was the International Student exchange in the U.S of Indians which has facilitated the export of a \$27 billion education sector from the Indian market to the U.S. He quoted a line in reference to the same i.e., “The trade must move beyond borders. If trade does not move then the soldiers will move”. He made some interesting points on how to improve the market and India’s need to be sensitive with its tariff rates which is around 12-15%, the largest in the world. Mr. Pradhan concluded by listing out some major concerns that India might face in the future. First concern was to strengthen India’s agricultural sector since its labour market in agriculture is much larger when compared to other countries, especially the U.S. A few other concerns were focused around data security, data equalisation in e-Commerce, creating smart ports, etc.

Mr. Kapil Kaul, gave a fresh perspective to the discussion by bringing in the Big E concept. He stressed that we are still focusing on the Big Economic change, more focused on balance sheets, share valuation, profits rather than focusing on the global change. So, he suggested that instead of focusing on the Big E, we should focus on the 3 E’s i.e, Conservation of Energy, Ecology and Environment. It should also be a change in the way of life, a transformation in economic thinking and continuity in becoming environmentally responsible. He further elaborated on the 3 C’s that need to be controlled and made sense of. These are Crude oil, Consumerism and Corruption. He also stretched on the waste driven consumerism with relation to e-commerce where U.S. - India could step forward to take action on. He further conveyed his vision for the future of drone mobility which could possibly transform Indo-U.S. relations, since this can save billions of dollars of resources for India.



Mr. Kapil Kaul, Mr. Deepal L. Aswani and
Dr. RP Pradhan making their remarks
during session 3.





The panel with Prof. K.C. Abraham



A view of the audience during question and answer session.



Session 4

The U.S.A. and India in the Indo-Pacific (including emerging technologies, maritime trade and maritime security)

Session 4 was a panel discussion which was moderated by **Ms. Sharon Koshy, Research Associate, CPPR**, in conversation with **Mr. Vikram Singh, Senior Advisor, Asia Program at USIP, U.S.A.**; **VAdm M P Muralidharan (reted), Hon. Distinguished Fellow (Maritime & Defence Studies) CPPR, Director General of the Indian Coast Guard (reted.)** and **Dr Uma Purushothaman, Assistant Professor, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod**. The area of focus for the discussion was “Indo-Pacific - emerging technologies, maritime trade and maritime security”. It also included deliberations on ranges of issues like the growing Chinese thread, QUAD, supply chains, etc.

The discussion was initiated by **Mr. Vikram Singh** who shared his views on the transition of India-U.S. ties in the moment of great flux. He reiterated Amb T.P. Sreenivasan’s views on India-U.S. relationship currently placed between engaged and embracing. He said that there is no question that the U.S. would want to be allies with India but the relations between the two nations would be defined based on the transitioning of them both. He highlighted the similarities in sentiments between India and the U.S.’s outlook towards the conflicts brewing between other nations. Along with that, he also mentioned the differences in areas like culture and demographics which results in the two nations perceiving the issues differently. He emphasised on the importance of QUAD, expansion of the core areas (3 to 15) to achieve global cooperation, the effect of negative factors namely Chinese threat and climate change feeding into creation of positive factors like greater cooperation in economy, trade, investment, environment, education, healthcare, infrastructure, innovation, technology, etc. An area which he brought to everyone’s attention was the future of global standards as a way to counter China and the importance of focusing on these core areas instead of the old school thinking which propounded the focus on defence relationships.

The second speaker of the panel discussion, **VAdm M.P. Muralidharan (reted.)** focused his deliberations primarily on the relevance of maritime trade and security in the Indo-Pacific region. He put forth the prominence of India’s geostrategic location with respect to the Indian Ocean. He explained that India’s unique positioning has made it not only close to the source of natural gas and oil, but also to the busiest trade routes. He quoted Alfred Thayer Mahan words stating that, “Whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia. This ocean will be the key to the seven seas in the 21st Century. The destiny of the world will be decided on its waters”. He commented on the growing Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific region where India’s 90% of trade in volume and 70% in value lies. He continued to bring out the relevance of QUAD, its much required revival in 2017 and its shared goal of not negatively impacting any other nations. VAdm Muralidharan concluded by stating that the QUAD nations, especially India and the U.S. should regularly interact with each other bilaterally and multilaterally to combat maritime security challenges that lie ahead. Initiatives like Information Fusion Centre, India which has partnered with 25 countries including the US, QUAD Fellowship, Malabar Exercises must be expanded to counter China’s salami slicing, base building in various nations like activities.

Dr. Uma Purushothaman, the third and final panellist provided the members of audience and conference attendees with an overall view of the role of emerging technologies in the defence sector. She commented on India becoming a major power with the U.S. which has initiated several dialogues like the 2+2. She stated that the history of colonisation serves as a witness to the relevance of defence technologies. Hence, in today’s landscape as well the major powers will have a technological advantage. She highlighted the significance of trilateral arrangements wherein one nation could provide scientific knowledge, one could provide manpower, the other could provide tools and designs to achieve technological superiority in coordination with one another. Dr. Uma discussed the need for clarity and consensus on India’s stand in maritime, on the definition of Indo-Pacific, convincing partners in gaining more Naval power and for India to find ways to further invest in its naval power.



VAdm. M.P. Muralidharan (retd),
Mr. Vikram Singh and Dr. Uma Purushothaman
making their remarks during the session





Panel 4 during the question answer session.



A view of the audience during the question answer session.



Concluding Remarks by Dr. Reetika Syal, Senior Officer, Research, CPPR

The session was concluded by Dr. Reetika Syal, Senior Officer, Research, CPPR. She summarised the session by highlighting the key points from each session while thanking all the esteemed delegates and panellists. Dr. Syal summarised that the panel discussion brought out the importance of strategic relations between India and the United States, in the context of the Russia- Ukraine crisis. Ms. Judith Ravin, Consul General of U.S. in Chennai, had endorsed shared values of India and the U.S., the world's largest and two of the oldest democracies, stressed upon the need for deeper participation among the governments, administration, and the people, through global strategic comprehensive partnership, which has become imperative for peace and security today.

The first session brought out the importance of civil society organisations in building capacity and technology which could help build domestic and foreign policy. The second session brought out the converges and challenges in Indo-U.S. commitments regarding investing in clean energy and renewable energy needs to be emphasised. Also it highlighted the economic impact of climate change. The third session on Day-2, focused more on the market sector and on the financial and economic relationships of both the countries. The session brought out an important focus on the 3 Es- conservation of Energy, Ecology, and Environment. The balance of trade between India and America should be the way forward, and the need to open up the sectors and to give a push to agricultural markets. The concluding session highlighted the technological and security aspect where the speakers highlighted varied aspects of the Indo-Pacific where the U.S.-India cooperation is progressing and can be harnessed. The areas of common interests for the two countries include QUAD, joint military exercises, trade, climate and health partnerships, clean energy partnerships, bio-technology etc. In the end, the room agreed on the fact that mediations and diplomacy discussions, talks of corporations and engagements, need to be brought out of closed doors, and spoken about in academic gatherings and in think tank circles.



Dr. Reetika Syal providing the concluding remarks



Group photo with the speakers,
Team CPPR and officials from the United States Consulate General in Chennai.



Group photo of all the delegates with the speakers,
Team CPPR and officials from the United States Consulate General in Chennai.



Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)

First Floor, 'Mandoli House, New Link Rd, opp. Metro Pillar 821, Kochi, Kerala 682020
www.cppr.in