South Asia

A Topic Proposal for the National Federation of High Schools
Topic Selection Committee

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Two-Page Summary Report: South Asia

Title: South Asia - Defense Cooperation

Proposed Resolutions (Ranked)

1. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its defense cooperation with South Asia.

2. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security cooperation with South Asia.

3. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security assistance to South Asia.

4. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security and/or defense cooperation with South Asia.

5. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security assistance to and/or defense cooperation with South Asia.

Affirmative Cases

Affirmative teams can advocate specific expansions of U.S. defense cooperation with one or more South Asian countries. India affirmatives would be the most common and may propose maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean, defense technology co-production under the iCET/TRUST framework, expanded joint exercises, or cyber and space cooperation. Pakistan affirmatives could expand counterterrorism intelligence sharing, rebuild military-to-military ties, or address the TTP threat through joint operations. Afghanistan affirmatives might propose limited counterterrorism cooperation to counter ISIS-K and al-Qaeda, or engagement with the Taliban on border security. Smaller-state affirmatives will be less common but could address Chinese influence in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, or Nepal through defense partnerships. Advantage areas include regional stability, nuclear risk reduction, China containment, counterterrorism, and freedom of navigation. Additional advantages that derive from the topic will allow for debate on economic and climate implications as well.

Negative Strategies

Negative teams have robust ground. Country-specific disadvantages include Chinese and Russian escalation in response to deeper U.S. engagement, Pakistani political instability, Indian democratic backsliding, and bilateral relations trade-offs (e.g., deepening ties with India alienates Pakistan). Generic disadvantages about military overextension, diplomatic capital, and defense spending trade-offs apply broadly. Counterplans proposing non-military cooperation (economic, humanitarian, diplomatic) are strong, as are condition counterplans and agent counterplans using specific agencies. Critical teams can deploy a variety of literature including criticisms of capitalism, critical security studies, settler colonialism, orientalism, and the DesiCrit framework. The 2025 India-Pakistan crisis provides fresh evidence for nuclear brinkmanship and escalation disadvantages.

Balance

This topic provides substantial balance. While strong solvency advocates exist for expanding defense cooperation, equally powerful literature warns of escalation risks, regional backlash, and the limits of military solutions. The small number of countries (six to eight) ensures negative teams can prepare country-specific strategies, while the depth of each bilateral relationship sustains a full season of novel research. The 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, the Afghanistan-Pakistan war, and evolving U.S.-India defense ties ensure the topic remains dynamic through the next two years.

Summary Paragraph (for ballot publication, 165 words)

South Asia is among the most consequential yet underexplored regions in American foreign policy. The 2025 India-Pakistan military crisis, the most serious direct military exchange between nuclear-armed powers in decades, demonstrated that U.S. defense cooperation has real-world consequences: American-supplied systems performed in combat, capability gaps drove demand for deeper cooperation, and diplomatic efforts helped avert nuclear escalation. Simultaneously, Afghanistan has become a multi-group terrorist sanctuary, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border has erupted into open war, and China’s military footprint across the Indian Ocean continues expanding. A resolution centered on increasing U.S. defense cooperation with South Asia offers debaters rich affirmative ground--maritime cooperation with India, counterterrorism partnerships with Pakistan, and engagement with smaller states facing Chinese pressure--balanced by strong negative positions including escalation disadvantages, non-military counterplans, and critical literature on subjects ranging from American militarism to postcolonial South Asian studies and nuclear orientalism. With at most eight countries, the topic is manageable for all skill levels and styles while sustaining deep, novel research throughout the year.

Proposal Narrative

Introduction

As an international year in the topic rotation, 2027-2028 offers debaters an opportunity to explore a rich yet novel subfield of international relations literature. Though critical to American foreign policy, South Asia has received minimal attention in policy debate topics. The region offers several promising and timely avenues for a rich year of debate: the transformation of the U.S.-India defense partnership, the region's strategic importance in the face of a rising China, the fallout from America's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the aftershocks of the 2025 India-Pakistan military crisis, and Pakistan's newly elevated diplomatic standing through its central mediating role between Washington and Tehran, culminating in the June 2026 signing of the U.S.-Iran framework agreement that Pakistan helped broker.

South Asia consists of six to eight countries, depending on the source one prefers: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka; and arguably Afghanistan and the Maldives (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). This region has been neglected in policy debate resolutions. India has made a singular appearance in a high school or college resolution (1992-93). While Afghanistan played a central role in the military presence resolutions (2010-11 in high school and 2007-08 in college), those topics are now distant memory. No other South Asian country has ever appeared in a topic.

Four broad geopolitical shifts make South Asia especially crucial to America's foreign policy today. First, a lighter American role in Afghanistan has created a terrorist sanctuary that threatens regional and global security. Second, America's pivot to Asia has accelerated, with India emerging as the anchor of the Indo-Pacific strategy. Third, the resurgence of global terrorist groups like the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the region motivates additional changes in American posture. Fourth, and most dramatically, the May 2025 India-Pakistan military crisis, the first direct military exchange between nuclear-armed powers, has fundamentally reshaped the regional security architecture and demonstrated that U.S. defense cooperation decisions have immediate, tangible consequences.

History and Context of the Problem Area

Origins of Regional Tensions and Early U.S. Involvement

The roots of South Asia's contemporary security dilemmas trace to the 1947 Partition of British India. As the State Department's Office of the Historian chronicles, "The partition of India in 1947 created West and East Pakistan, two noncontiguous territories that shared a dominant religion of Islam but were very different in terms of language, ethnicity and culture" (U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, Milestones 1969-1976). Partition triggered mass displacement and communal violence and left the status of Kashmir unresolved, the dispute that produced the first India-Pakistan war of 1947-48 and a second war in 1965. The Office of the Historian continues: "In 1971, an internal crisis in Pakistan resulted in a third war between India and Pakistan and the secession of East Pakistan, creating the independent state of Bangladesh." Three wars in under twenty-five years established the rivalry that continues to structure the region's politics.

Early American involvement followed Cold War logic. Pakistan joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (later the Central Treaty Organization, CENTO) in 1955, becoming a formal U.S. treaty partner, while non-aligned India gravitated toward Soviet military supply relationships. The pattern culminated in the Nixon administration's famous "tilt" during the 1971 war. The official Foreign Relations of the United States series is direct: "Even before the 'tilt' toward Pakistan during the war, the Nixon administration concluded that peace and stability in South Asia could only be maintained by aiding Pakistan against a stronger India, which was receiving military aid from the Soviet Union. In addition, Pakistan was serving as a secret conduit on behalf of Nixon and Kissinger in their attempts to open contacts with the People's Republic of China" (U.S. Department of State, FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume E-7, Preface). Declassified records compiled by the National Security Archive document the episode in detail (National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 79).

The Cold War's end and the 1998 nuclear tests, first by India, then Pakistan, initially brought U.S. sanctions on both countries. However, the September 11 attacks transformed both relationships almost overnight: Pakistan became a frontline counterterrorism partner and was designated a Major Non-NATO Ally in 2004, while a separate process of U.S.-India rapprochement accelerated through the 2005 New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship and the landmark 2005-2008 civil nuclear agreement that ended India's nuclear isolation and unlocked the modern strategic partnership (CRS R47597). The national histories that follow build directly on these foundations, and the old patterns of alignment, hedging, and mistrust persist beneath the headlines.

Afghanistan: From Failed State to Terrorist Sanctuary

The Taliban has consolidated authoritarian governance under Supreme Leader Akhundzada's centralized rule from Kandahar, and for nearly four years no country formally recognized the regime. That isolation broke in July 2025, when Russia became the first and, as of June 2026, the only state to extend recognition (PBS News, July 3, 2025; Najibullah, May 28, 2026). Afghanistan has become what multiple analysts describe as a multi-group terrorist sanctuary. The Congressional Research Service reports that the Taliban has imposed increasingly repressive governance while terrorist organizations have expanded their operational capacity (Congressional Research Service (CRS) R45122, updated 2025).

Vanda Felbab-Brown's Brookings analysis documents how Akhundzada created parallel institutions privileging southern Pashtun Talibs despite over 90 percent poverty rates (Felbab-Brown, "The Taliban's Three Years in Power and What Lies Ahead," Brookings, August 2024). China became the first country to accept Taliban ambassador credentials in January 2024 (Kumar, February 2024; Dawi, January 2024), while Russia's Duma passed legislation in December 2024 enabling future removal of the Taliban from Russia's list of designated terrorist organizations, with Russia's Supreme Court suspending the designation on April 17, 2025 (The Moscow Times, December 17, 2024; Observer Research Foundation (ORF), 2025). That delisting cleared the way for recognition: on July 3, 2025, Russia accepted the credentials of a Taliban-appointed ambassador and formally recognized the government (PBS News, July 3, 2025; Ms. Magazine, July 3, 2025). Moscow deepened the relationship with a military-technical cooperation agreement signed by Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu and the Taliban's defense minister on May 27, 2026, its terms undisclosed (Najibullah, May 28, 2026; The Moscow Times, May 28, 2026). China, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan maintain diplomatic and economic ties with the Taliban short of formal recognition (Najibullah, May 28, 2026). India's foreign secretary met the Taliban's acting foreign minister in Dubai in January 2025, New Delhi's highest-level engagement since 2021 (Chatham House, February 2025). The Trump administration began exploratory talks with the Taliban in early 2025 (Marquardt, April 2, 2025).

ISIS-K has dramatically expanded its reach. The UN Security Council Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team expressed heightened concern about the terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan, identifying ISIS-K as responsible for the Moscow Crocus City Hall attack that killed 145 people in March 2024 and other major external operations (UN Security Council Document S/2024/556, July 2024; later toll estimates reached at least 149, per International Crisis Group (ICG) Briefing 183, July 2025). The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Global Terrorism Threat Assessment 2025, authored by Palmer, McCabe, Byman, and Jackson, provides comprehensive data on ISIS-K's expanding external operations capacity (Palmer et al., March 2025). The International Crisis Group published a major briefing examining whether ISIS-K is in retreat, documenting that while Taliban pressure has reduced domestic strikes, the group has shifted toward external operations targeting countries across the region and beyond (ICG, 2025).

Al-Qaeda's infrastructure has also expanded. The UN Monitoring Team reported al-Qaeda operates training camps in at least twelve of Afghanistan's thirty-four provinces, with al-Qaeda leaders serving in the Taliban government and the Taliban issuing passports to AQ members (Roggio, July 2024). The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point assessed that al-Qaeda Central maintains 30 to 60 operatives in Afghanistan but noted the organization's intent to conduct external terrorist operations remains firm (CTC, "The Global State of al-Qa'ida 24 Years After 9/11," 2025).

The humanitarian catastrophe is staggering. An estimated 22.9 million people, nearly half the population, required humanitarian assistance in 2025 (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), March 2025). The Trump administration's termination of all foreign assistance to Afghanistan created massive funding gaps; in 2024, the U.S. had contributed $735.7 million, covering 47 percent of the total requirements for that year's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (UN OCHA, March 2025). The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) published its final report in December 2025 and terminated operations in January 2026 (CRS R45122). The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Akhundzada and Haqqani on charges of the crime against humanity of gender persecution in July 2025 (ICC Pre-Trial Chamber II, July 8, 2025; Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Relentless Repression 4 Years into Taliban Rule," August 2025).

The Afghanistan-Pakistan border has erupted into open war. Pakistan launched airstrikes on Kabul and other Afghan cities in October 2025 reportedly targeting TTP leadership (Hussain, October 10, 2025; Encyclopædia Britannica, "Afghanistan-Pakistan Conflict 2025"). After a Qatar-brokered ceasefire (October 19, 2025) collapsed following failed Istanbul follow-on talks, fighting escalated into full conflict in February-March 2026. Pakistan's defense minister declared the country in open war with Afghanistan (France 24/Reuters, October 28, 2025; UN Security Council Report, December 2025; NPR/AP, February 26, 2026; Al Jazeera, February 26, 2026). The United States Institute of Peace (USIP)'s Senior Study Group on Counterterrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, co-chaired by Laurel Miller and Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Michael K. Nagata, warned that counterterrorism has nearly disappeared from the policy agenda despite persistent threats (USIP, May 2024).

The conflict's trajectory through June 2026 underscores its volatility. A fragile ceasefire reached in March 2026 collapsed amid mutual accusations of violations, and the United Nations reported in May 2026 that cross-border fighting had killed at least 372 Afghan civilians and injured 397 in the first three months of the year (Al Jazeera, June 10, 2026). After roughly a month of relative calm, Pakistani airstrikes on Khost, Kunar, and Paktika provinces on the night of June 9-10, 2026 killed 13 civilians--11 children, one woman, and one man, a toll confirmed by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan--while Pakistan said it had killed 26 militants and dismissed the civilian-casualty reports as propaganda (Associated Press, June 11, 2026; Al Jazeera, June 10, 2026). In a notable escalation, Afghanistan conducted rare retaliatory airstrikes on June 18-19, 2026 against alleged militant hideouts inside Pakistan's Balochistan and Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa provinces, cross-border air operations the Taliban government seldom undertakes (Al Jazeera, June 19, 2026). Pakistan struck again on June 28-29, 2026, when overnight ground operations and airstrikes across Paktia, Paktika, and Kunar killed at least 28 Afghan civilians by the UN mission's verified count, with the Taliban government putting the toll at 36, including women and children, after a militant assault on a paramilitary Rangers base in Karachi (Al Jazeera, June 29, 2026; Associated Press, June 29, 2026), prompting UN Secretary-General António Guterres to call for an immediate cessation of hostilities (UN News, June 29, 2026). The border remains closed, several rounds of internationally mediated talks, with China among the mediators, have failed to produce a durable truce, and the conflict remains live as this paper is finalized in late June 2026.

U.S.-India Defense Cooperation: A Historic Transformation

Defense cooperation proved the most resilient pillar of U.S.-India relations through 2024-2026, with landmark agreements signed even as tariff disputes and the India-Pakistan crisis created friction. The Biden administration's Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) underwent its second review in June 2024 (Biden White House Joint Fact Sheet, June 17, 2024). During Modi's February 2025 visit to Washington, Trump rebranded iCET as TRUST (Transforming the Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology), expanding its scope to critical minerals, pharmaceutical APIs, and AI infrastructure (U.S.-India Joint Leaders' Statement, White House, February 13, 2025; Chaudhuri, April 2025). The INDUS-X defense innovation bridge, launched by the U.S. and Indian defense ministries in June 2023 (DoD Fact Sheet, June 21, 2023), achieved significant milestones in its first year (USIP, "INDUS-X at One: A Year of Bilateral Breakthroughs," September 2024).

Major defense deals accelerated dramatically. India signed a deal for 31 MQ-9B drones in October 2024 valued between $3.5 billion and $3.8 billion, making India the largest MQ-9B operator globally (Janes, October 2024; Arthur, October 31, 2024). The GE F414 engine co-production program, announced via a June 2023 MoU between GE Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), proceeded through nearly three years of technical negotiations toward approximately 80 percent technology transfer, with technical terms settled only in April 2026 (GE Aerospace Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), June 2023; IDRW, April 13, 2026). Major individual defense notifications to Congress in 2024 included Seahawk helicopter systems ($1.17 billion), P-8I aircraft, torpedoes, and Javelin missiles (Kronstadt, IF12438, March 2026).

On October 31, 2025, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh signed the 2025 Framework for the U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership, a ten-year agreement the Pentagon characterized as the most ambitious and wide-ranging document yet governing U.S.-India defense ties (DoD Fact Sheet, November 13, 2025). It covers co-production in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), undersea domain awareness, air combat, munitions, and mobility. CSIS noted that U.S.-India security cooperation has been

thriving through turbulence, with maritime cooperation including India's joining the Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain and U.S. Coast Guard exercises in India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Rossow, September 2024). The Indian Navy's MILAN 2026 exercise was the largest-ever multilateral naval exercise with 74 friendly foreign countries participating (Indian Ministry of Defence Press Information Bureau (PIB) Release 2232853, February 2026; U.S. Navy DVIDS, February 2026).

India's Operation Sindoor in May 2025 exposed defense capability gaps in space-based ISR, air defenses, systems integration, electronic warfare, and drones, accelerating demand for U.S. technology and defense co-production (Peri, October 2025). The conflict also demonstrated the S-400's combat value, leading India to order five additional S-400 squadrons at approximately $6.1 billion from Russia as part of a broader $25 billion defense procurement package spanning multiple suppliers (Sen, March 27, 2026). The S-400's combat deployment has intensified the ongoing Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) tension with Washington.

U.S.-Pakistan Relations: From Historic Lows to Transactional Warming

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship underwent dramatic swings. Madiha Afzal of Brookings documented that Biden was the only U.S. president never to call his Pakistani counterpart, with the relationship settling into a low normal (Afzal, January 2025). Pakistan's February 2024 elections were widely contested, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidates won the most seats despite running as independents, but a Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led coalition formed the government (ICG Report 345, November 2024). Imran Khan was sentenced to 14 years in the Al-Qadir Trust case (Reuters, January 17, 2025) and received an additional 17-year sentence in the Toshakhana-2 case (Bukhari, December 20, 2025).

Pakistan became the world's second-most terrorism-affected country in the Global Terrorism Index 2025, with TTP attacks surging dramatically and Pakistan recording over 1,000 terrorist attacks in 2024 (Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2025; Jadoon, October 2025). A breakthrough came in March 2025 with the joint U.S.-Pakistan capture of Mohammad Sharifullah, a key ISIS-K suspect in the 2021 Abbey Gate attack, via a CIA-ISI operation near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (Rabinowitz et al., March 4, 2025; CBS News, March 5, 2025). Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir visited the United States three times in 2025, including at least two White House meetings (Tahir Khan, December 2025; East Asia Forum, November 2025), and Pakistan signed agreements granting U.S. access to critical minerals. Pakistan's diplomatic standing rose further when Islamabad played a mediating role, alongside Chinese diplomatic intervention, in the June 2025 U.S.-Iran confrontation. That role expanded dramatically during the 2026 Iran war, which began on February 28, 2026 with U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran and the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Al Jazeera, June 12, 2026; Gulf News, April 9, 2026). Pakistan brokered a ceasefire and hosted the April 11-

12, 2026 Islamabad Talks. The talks represented the highest-level direct U.S.-Iran negotiations since the 1979 revolution, with delegations led by Vice President JD Vance and Iranian parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, which ended without an agreement but cemented Islamabad's position as the indispensable intermediary between Washington and Tehran (Joles, April 11, 2026; Javaid, April 13, 2026; Axios, April 8, 2026). Pakistani mediation culminated in a signed agreement: on June 17, 2026, President Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian remotely signed the Islamabad Memorandum, a fourteen-point framework agreement providing for an end to military strikes, the toll-free reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to commercial shipping for sixty days, the lifting of the U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports, and a sixty-day ceasefire extension to negotiate a final settlement, with Pakistan's prime minister co-signing as mediator (NPR, June 18, 2026; Al Jazeera, June 17, 2026; Austin et al., June 17, 2026). Both governments stressed that the memorandum is a framework rather than a final deal, with the core nuclear questions deferred to the sixty-day negotiating window, and the ceasefire remained fragile through late June. The episode nonetheless reinforced Pakistan's utility to both Washington and Beijing even as its structural tensions with the United States persisted.

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship is defined by this contradiction: counterterrorism cooperation and economic transactionalism operate alongside deep U.S. concerns over Pakistan's nuclear and missile trajectory. Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs raised alarm. In December 2024, the U.S. sanctioned four Pakistani entities, including the National Development Complex, for contributing to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile program (U.S. Department of State, December 18, 2024), with Principal Deputy National Security Advisor (NSA) Jonathan Finer declaring Pakistan's missile program an emerging threat to the United States in remarks at the Carnegie Endowment (Finer, December 2024; Ashtakala, January 2025). U.S. intelligence concluded Pakistan is developing an ICBM capable of reaching the continental U.S. (CRS, "Pakistan's New Long-Range Missile Development," IF13086, September 2025). Pakistan maintains approximately 170 warheads and established the Army Rocket Force Command in August 2025 (Kristensen et al., 2025).

China's Deepening South Asian Footprint

China's engagement across South Asia expanded during 2024-2026. In October 2024, India and China reached agreement on patrolling at Depsang and Demchok, the last two friction points from the 2020 Galwan crisis, though over 100,000 troops remain deployed on both sides (Chadha, December 2024). The Pentagon's 2024 China Military Power Report revealed China is considering military logistics facilities in approximately 20 countries including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (DoD China Military Power Report, December 2024; Sacks, December 2024). Chinese agencies and state-owned enterprises have financed 363 projects supporting 168 unique ports across 90 countries between 2000 and 2025 (Wooley et al., March 2026), with significant presence across the Indian Ocean region (Kardon and Leutert, "Pier Competitor," International Security, 2022).

Among smaller states, the Maldives under President Muizzu initially tilted sharply toward China before moderating as promised Chinese infrastructure financing and budgetary support failed to materialize at the scale Malé had expected (Mohamed, February 2025). Nepal signed a Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Framework Agreement in December 2024 but progress stalled over grant-versus-loan disagreements (Baral, June 2025; ORF Occasional Paper 440, June 2024). Sri Lanka's new president signed 15 cooperation documents with China in January 2025, including a $3.7 billion Sinopec refinery deal at Hambantota (Kuruwita, January 2025; Reuters, January 22, 2025). Bangladesh became the world's second-biggest purchaser of Chinese weapons, with China building Bangladesh's first submarine base at Cox's Bazar (Rejwan and Romaniuk, October 2024).

The USIP Special Report on the China-Pakistan military relationship characterizes it as a threshold alliance, short of a formal treaty but with deep interoperability, with China supplying approximately 81 percent of Pakistan's weapons imports over 2020-2024 (SIPRI, March 2025; Lalwani, March 2023; The Soufan Center, April 2025). The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission's 2025 Annual Report documented that the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict showcased Chinese weaponry including HQ-9 air defense systems, PL-15 missiles, and J-10 aircraft in their first combat use (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), November 2025).

Russia's Declining but Durable Role

Russia's share of Indian arms imports fell from 72 percent in 2010-2014 to 55 percent in 2015-2019 and further to 36 percent in 2020-2024 in the March 2025 edition; the subsequent edition, which reports later five-year windows, shows 70 percent in 2011-2015, 51 percent in 2016-2020, and 40 percent in 2021-2025, the recent uptick reflecting renewed S-400 activity (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Fact Sheet, March 2025; SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2026). Even as Russia's share declined, France surged to major supplier status over the same 2020-2024 period, becoming India's second-largest arms source. The May 2025 conflict saw the S-400 deployed in combat for the first time, leading India to order five additional squadrons at approximately $6.1 billion (Sen, March 2026). India's Defence Acquisition Council cleared $25 billion in weapons purchases including both Russian and Western systems. Bilateral trade surged to approximately $69 billion in fiscal year 2024-25, driven by Russian oil imports (Dolbaia et al., August 2025).

Russia's relationship with Pakistan also warmed, with bilateral trade breaching $1 billion in 2024 (Singh, December 2024; Hussain and Ahmed, September 2024). Reports claimed Russia approved RD-93MA engine sales for Pakistan's JF-17 jets, though Russian officials publicly denied a new direct deal in October 2025 (EurasianTimes, 2025; The Week, October 5, 2025). Russia delivered approximately 250 RD-93 engines to Pakistan since 2007 via a trilateral arrangement with China (Zakharov, October 2025). This shift complicated India's traditional expectation of Russian deference to Indian sensitivities.

The 2025 India-Pakistan Crisis: A Watershed Moment

The April 22, 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack killed 26 civilians and triggered the most consequential India-Pakistan military confrontation in decades (Misri, May 7, 2025; Al Jazeera, April 22, 2025). On May 7, 2025, India launched Operation Sindoor, striking nine locations--four in Pakistan proper (Bahawalpur, Muridke, Shakar Garh, and a village near Sialkot) and five in Pakistan-administered Kashmir--targeting Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Hizbul Mujahideen camps (Indian Government PIB, May 14, 2025; Al Jazeera, May 7, 2025; Chaudhuri, May 2025). Four days of missile, drone, and air strikes followed, with at least 125 fighter jets from both sides present at standoff ranges, the largest jet-era aerial engagement between nuclear-armed states. A ceasefire came on May 10, which the United States characterized as U.S.-brokered. India maintained, however, it was reached directly between the two countries (Peri, October 2025; Tarapore, May 2025; Indian Government PIB, May 2025).

India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, closed the Attari border crossing, and halted bilateral trade (Khandekar, April 23, 2025; CFR Global Conflict Tracker). PM Modi declared a new normal in his May 12, 2025 address to the nation: terror and talks, terror and trade, and water and blood could not coexist, and any future act of terror would be treated as an act of war (Modi, May 12, 2025). Defence Minister Rajnath Singh subsequently characterized this as Modi having "redefined India's policy against terrorism," stating that any attack on Indian soil would be considered an act of war (PIB, May 15, 2025). Pakistan reportedly convened the National Command Authority during the crisis, raising nuclear concerns (Kishore, "The Illusion of Deterrence," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, November 2025). The National Bureau of Asian Research analyzed the crisis as marking a new phase of sustained conventional conflict below the nuclear threshold, distinct in intensity, technology, and international alignment from prior India-Pakistan confrontations (Grare, National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), 2025). Foreign Policy characterized 2025 as a tumultuous year for South Asia, with the India-Pakistan conflict described as the most serious since 1971 (Kugelman, December 24, 2025). The treaty has remained in abeyance through June 2026, with India conditioning any restoration on Pakistan ending cross-border terrorism (DD News, March 20, 2026). The dispute sharpened in June 2026 when, after India's water-resources minister signaled that flows to Pakistan could be halted, Pakistan's defense minister Khawaja Asif warned that Islamabad would "go to war" if it judged its water security under threat, while adding that conditions did not yet warrant military action (CNBC, June 22, 2026).

Regional Upheavals

Beyond the India-Pakistan crisis, the region experienced dramatic political upheavals. Student-led protests ousted Bangladesh's PM Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, with Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus sworn in on August 8 as chief adviser of the caretaker government (Mahmud, August 9, 2024; Majumder et al., August 5, 2024). February 2026 elections saw BNP win a landslide with 209 of 297 seats, while Jamaat-e-Islami emerged as the main opposition with 68 seats, raising concerns about Islamist influence in parliament (ICG Briefing 187, April 2026; NPR, February 16, 2026). BNP chairman Tarique Rahman was sworn in as prime minister on February 17, 2026, succeeding the Yunus-led caretaker government that had governed since August 2024 (Al Jazeera, February 17, 2026; PBS NewsHour, February 17, 2026). In Nepal, a Gen Z anti-corruption movement toppled PM Oli's government in September 2025, the third such uprising in South Asia after Sri Lanka 2022 and Bangladesh 2024 (Harvey et al., September 9, 2025; Basu Ray Chaudhury and Mukherjee, December 2025). Sri Lanka's GDP rebounded to 5 percent growth in 2024 and grew about 5 percent again in 2025, a second consecutive year of expansion, driven largely by predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe's IMF-backed reforms, with new President Dissanayake continuing stabilization efforts while balancing India and China (Shivamurthy, January 2025; Central Bank of Sri Lanka, April 2026). The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) strengthened with the 6th Summit's Bangkok Vision 2030 roadmap in April 2025, while the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been effectively moribund since its last summit in 2014 (BIMSTEC Secretariat; Bhowmick, May 2025; Roche, April 2025).

External Instabilities and the Durability of the Topic

Two major instabilities outside South Asia, the Russia-Ukraine war and the 2026 Iran war that briefly closed the Strait of Hormuz, dominate current headlines and will continue to evolve unpredictably through the 2027-28 season. Because neither Russia nor Iran is part of South Asia, a reasonable question is whether these volatile, fast-moving events make a South Asia topic a risky choice. They do not. Whatever direction each crisis takes, its effect is to underscore South Asia's strategic importance rather than diminish it, and the topic's core questions remain intact regardless of outcome. The author advances that these events are a reason the region will stay central to U.S. policy attention through the life of the topic.

The Russia-Ukraine war bears on the topic mainly through India's long reliance on Russian arms. According to SIPRI's March 2026 edition, India was the world's second-largest arms importer in 2021-25, and Russia remained its largest supplier at 40 percent (2021-25 window), down sharply from 51 percent in 2016-20 and 70 percent in 2011-15 as India turned toward France, Israel, and the United States (SIPRI, March 2026). Crucially, this dynamic points the same way irrespective of how the war ends. If Russian supply stays disrupted, the United States and its partners gain a widening opening to deepen defense cooperation with India; if Russia stabilizes its defense exports, the long-running U.S. effort to draw India away from Moscow

becomes more urgent. Either way, the question the resolution poses, how much defense cooperation the United States should pursue with India and its neighbors, remains live and consequential. The war may change some arguments, but not the relevance of the topic.

The same holds for the Iran war and the Strait of Hormuz. The crisis exposed how completely South Asian energy security runs through the Gulf: the IEA reports that "Bangladesh, India and Pakistan imported almost two-thirds of their total LNG supplies via the Strait of Hormuz in 2025, making them particularly vulnerable to potential disruptions" (IEA). That structural dependence does not disappear when the immediate crisis ends. Whether the Strait stays open, closes again, or stabilizes under a lasting settlement, South Asia's exposure to Gulf sea lanes, and thus its stake in maritime security cooperation, is a permanent feature of the region's geography. A South Asia topic is no less debatable in a calm year than in a turbulent one; the underlying security relationships the resolution addresses persist.

It is worth noting why two extra-regional crises touch South Asia at all: the region sits astride the world's most important energy and maritime corridors, and its largest state is simultaneously one of the world's biggest arms importers and a rising Indian Ocean power. The Congressional Research Service notes that "PRC maritime presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is steadily growing, and Beijing has secured port access with several immediate neighbors of India, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka" (CRS R47597, May 2026). Far from making South Asia a marginal concern during global turbulence, events in Ukraine and the Gulf repeatedly draw American attention back to the region. The instabilities are evidence of South Asia's centrality.

For the committee's purposes, the takeaway is one of durability. These crises are current and unpredictable, and a topic paper would be incomplete without acknowledging them. But their unpredictability is not a liability for a South Asia resolution, because no plausible outcome renders the region's defense relationships less important to the United States. The events shaping the headlines in 2026 should be taken as a demonstration that South Asia will remain a timely and significant arena for U.S. policy throughout the 2027-28 debate season.

Status of Current Policy Addressing the Problem Area

U.S. South Asia policy transitioned from the Biden administration's iCET-centered approach to the Trump administration's recalibration emphasizing defense cooperation, targeted investment, and diplomacy. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs S. Paul Kapur's February 11, 2026 congressional testimony outlined that India is the anchor of South Asia and the western Indo-Pacific, with the ten-year defense framework and TRUST initiative as centerpieces. For Pakistan, counterterrorism cooperation and critical mineral development are priorities (Kapur, House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on South and Central Asia (HFAC SCA), February 11, 2026).

However, Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy mentions India only four times and Pakistan once; South Asia is described as no more than a footnote (D'Souza, "The US National Security Strategy: A Sobering Reality Check for South Asia," December 2025). The Stimson Center's "Revive the South Asia Strategy" recommended a standalone South Asia strategy alongside the Indo-Pacific framework (Threlkeld and Zazycki, November 2024). Congressional engagement has been significant: the U.S.-India Defense Cooperation Act of 2024 (S.4793), introduced by then-Sen. Marco Rubio, proposed enhanced cooperation including expedited defense articles transfer and a CAATSA exception, though the bill was not enacted before the 118th Congress adjourned (Congress.gov). The FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), signed December 2025, includes provisions for broadening India engagement through the Quad, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue among the United States, India, Japan, and Australia (Tribune India, December 20, 2025).

Major think tank recommendations reflect broad consensus on the need for deeper engagement. RAND recommended boosting U.S.-India private sector defense industrial cooperation to reduce India's reliance on Russia (Parachini and Mishra, January 2025). Brookings argued a more capable India would be a key Indian Ocean security provider willing to burden-share (Madan, September 2024). The Center for a New American Security (CNAS) warned that the future of democracy in South Asia directly impacts U.S.-China great power competition (CNAS, 2025). Hudson Institute cautioned that isolating Pakistan risks pushing it closer to China (Haqqani, June 2025).

Probable Affirmative Case Areas

Affirmative: India

India will be the largest country on this topic. Affirmative teams can propose expanding maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean, deepening defense technology co-production under the TRUST framework, accelerating joint exercises, or enhancing cyber and space cooperation. The ten-year defense framework signed in October 2025 provides extensive solvency evidence. Specific plan texts might include: expanding INDUS Innovation to include AI-enabled autonomous systems; increasing Indian Navy access to U.S. logistics facilities under the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA); co-producing next-generation ISR platforms; or deepening submarine warfare cooperation. Advantages include China containment, Indian Ocean freedom of navigation, defense industrial base strengthening, and reducing India's dependence on Russian arms (Rossow, September 2024; Peri, October 2025; Parachini and Mishra, January 2025; Madan, September 2024).

The literature supplies concrete solvency advocates for what specific actions India affirmatives would take. A June 2025 Center for a New American Security report led by Lisa Curtis, former National Security Council Senior Director for South and Central Asia, recommends that the United States "expand the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative via use of regional information fusion centers, particularly in the western Indian Ocean," noting that while IPMDA "has been largely successful in providing a maritime common operating picture to track illegal activities," coverage "in the western Indian Ocean has remained sparse" (Curtis et al., CNAS, June 18, 2025). The same report urges Quad members to "pool resources and coordinate investments in regional subsea cable infrastructure, including repair and maintenance capabilities, to reduce dependence on Chinese-operated vessels."

In The Washington Quarterly, Peter Dean, Michael J. Green, and Alice Nason propose "a fifth pillar of a US Indian Ocean strategy": "assessing India's maritime security requirements for the Indian Ocean" and updating "exercises planning, the US-India Defense Industry Roadmap, and the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET) to prioritize those areas" (Dean, Green, and Nason, The Washington Quarterly, 2025). India's Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses likewise argues that "India's partnership with the United States to develop cutting-edge anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and Maritime Autonomous Systems (MAS) technologies will be crucial to strengthening the Indian Navy's overall underwater domain awareness (UDA) capabilities," while stressing that both nations "would need to develop enabling policy frameworks and pursue legislative amendments"--affirmative governmental action--for such collaboration to proceed (Vignesh, MP-IDSA Issue Brief, January 2026). An earlier Heritage Foundation report provides a template for jet-engine technology transfer plans, recommending that the executive branch "[d]irect the departments and agencies involved in the ITAR process for the F414 technology transfer to expedite their respective reviews" (Venable and Smith, June 8, 2023). Writing in War on the Rocks, Sameer Lalwani and

Vikram J. Singh likewise urged the administration to take the relationship "to new heights" by "advancing defense technology cooperation, enhancing joint military operational cooperation, and updating and reinvigorating the bilateral defense framework" (Lalwani and Singh, War on the Rocks, February 11, 2025).

These advocates translate directly into illustrative plan texts: (1) the United States federal government should expand the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiative, including information-sharing agreements with western Indian Ocean fusion centers; (2) the United States federal government should substantially increase co-development of anti-submarine warfare and maritime autonomous systems with India, including the enabling policy frameworks both governments require; (3) the United States federal government should complete the F414 jet engine co-production agreement with India, expediting all required technology-transfer reviews. Evidence supporting these affirmatives appears in the Appendix.

A question likely to arise at the topic meeting is whether rising U.S.-India cooperation denies affirmatives uniqueness: if cooperation is already trending up, what is left for an affirmative to do, and what disadvantage links remain? The 2025-2026 record answers this concern. The relationship hit genuine turbulence: in August 2025 the administration imposed an additional 25 percent tariff that brought total tariffs on India to 50 percent, among the highest on any U.S. trading partner. A February 2, 2026 interim deal cut the rate to 18 percent, only for the Supreme Court to invalidate the tariffs' legal basis altogether on February 20, 2026 in Learning Resources, Inc. v. Trump. The administration's replacement was a temporary import surcharge under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, set at 10 percent in the underlying proclamation and announced as rising to the statutory 15 percent cap (an increase trade-law analysts disagree over whether the administration ever formally implemented). That surcharge was itself ruled unlawful by the Court of International Trade in May 2026 but left in effect by a Federal Circuit stay on June 11, 2026 pending appeal, so that Indian goods faced an effective surcharge of roughly 10 percent as of late June. In any event, the surcharge expires by statute on July 24, 2026 absent congressional extension, leaving U.S.-India trade terms legally unsettled (Learning Resources, Inc. v. Trump, 607 U.S. ___ (2026); CRS Legal Sidebar LSB11398; Covington & Burling, February 2026; Global Trade Alert, February 2026; Gibson Dunn, May 2026). Further, India rejected the U.S. offer of F-35 fighters, "dealing a blow to defense ties just as President Donald Trump announced new tariffs and publicly criticized New Delhi's close ties with Russia" (Charpentreau, 2025). Reports circulated of paused U.S. procurement deals, including the $3.6 billion P-8I purchase; reports India's Ministry of Defence denied as "false and fabricated," but which reflected the period's uncertainty (Ainvest, August 2025). The procurement ultimately moved forward: India's Defence Acquisition Council granted Acceptance of Necessity for six additional P-8I aircraft on February 12, 2026, a step Indian defense media read as a sign that "defence ties with US regain momentum" (Naval News, February 13, 2026; India Strategic, April 18, 2026). Meanwhile, the marquee GE F414 engine co-production deal announced in June 2023 remained unsigned nearly three years later; GE Aerospace and HAL reached agreement on technical matters only in April 2026, with commercial negotiations still pending, a formal

contract anticipated later in 2026, and the first India-made engine not expected until roughly 2029 (IDRW, April 13, 2026, an Indian defense trade outlet citing Economic Times reporting, used here for the deal timeline).

Sameer Lalwani of the Special Competitive Studies Project captured the inflection point in December 2025, describing a planned Indian Ocean tabletop exercise that could not proceed because, in his words, “now there’s you know a trust gap that I think has emerged.” He added that “this is something that can be rebuilt,” but that doing so “is going to require like you know some steady outreach by US government officials” (Lalwani and Vaishnav, December 9, 2025). SIPRI data confirm that hedging persists: Russia still supplied roughly 40 percent of India’s major arms imports in 2021-2025, down from 51 percent in 2016-2020 (SIPRI, Trends in International Arms Transfers, March 2026 edition). This evidence cuts both ways, by design: cooperation is not inevitable (preserving affirmative inherency), and the status quo is not maximally provocative to China or Russia (preserving negative disadvantage uniqueness). The Asia pivot makes the topic timely precisely because U.S. choices in the region are live and contested, not settled.

Affirmative: Pakistan

Pakistan affirmatives will play a significant role. Despite the challenging bilateral relationship, Pakistan's close ties with China and its status as the world's second-most terrorism-affected country ensure its relevance. Possible affirmatives include rebuilding counterterrorism intelligence cooperation, joint operations against TTP and ISIS-K, expanding International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs, or providing counterinsurgency equipment. The March 2025 joint capture of an ISIS-K suspect provides recent solvency evidence. Advantages include counterterrorism, regional stability, preventing Pakistani state failure, and nuclear security (USIP, May 2024; Jadoon, October 2025; Afzal, January 2025).

The Pakistan affirmative also has named advocates and active policy channels. Following Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Secretary of State Marco Rubio's June 19, 2025 reaffirmation of counterterrorism cooperation, building on the May 2024 Pakistan-U.S. Counterterrorism Dialogue, analysts have outlined cooperation "through capacity building, intelligence sharing and technical assistance, provided by the United States," noting that "[s]ince March 2023, the United States has trained more than 300 police and first responders from Pakistan" (Tactics Institute, 2026). Pakistan's ambassador to the United States, Masood Khan, publicly urged Washington to resume military equipment sales for counterterrorism (The Media Line). The military-to-military channel remains active: Exercise Inspired Gambit-2026, the thirteenth iteration of the bilateral counterterrorism exercise, ran January 8-16, 2026 at Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Centre in Pabbi, with U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Baker attending its Distinguished Visitors' Day (The Express Tribune, January 2026).

The need is acute: the Pak Institute for Peace Studies recorded 699 terrorist attacks in Pakistan in 2025, a 34 percent increase over the previous year, killing 1,034 people, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa alone suffering 413 attacks (PIPS, Pakistan Security Report 2025; Khan, January 2, 2026). Pakistan's diplomatic standing has also risen dramatically through its mediation between Washington and Tehran. From hosting the April 2026 Islamabad Talks, the highest-level direct U.S.-Iran negotiations since 1979, to co-signing the June 17, 2026 framework agreement that ended the active phase of the 2026 Iran war (Kurlantzick, CFR, April 28, 2026; NPR, June 18, 2026), mediation has served to give Washington new reasons to invest in the relationship. Illustrative plan texts include restoring full International Military Education and Training programming for Pakistan, resuming Foreign Military Sales of counterterrorism equipment, and formalizing intelligence-sharing arrangements against the TTP and ISIS-K.

Critically, the Pakistan affirmative is cooperation with a state partner: Pakistan fields its own large military and intelligence services, and the affirmative strengthens a sovereign government's fight against insurgent groups attacking that state: the TTP and Baloch separatist organizations. This is conventional security cooperation of the kind the United States conducts with partners worldwide. As the next section explains, the Afghanistan affirmative presents the opposite problem, and the two should not be conflated.

Affirmative: Afghanistan

Afghanistan is likely the third largest country on this topic. The affirmative could propose limited counterterrorism cooperation with the Taliban to counter ISIS-K, which now poses the greatest extraregional terrorist threat per the UN Security Council (S/2024/556). More broadly, cooperating on border security could help address the Afghanistan-Pakistan war. Advantages include counterterrorism, preventing regional destabilization, and humanitarian access. The USIP Senior Study Group's recommendation for a cost-effective deter and disrupt strategy provides a qualified solvency advocate (USIP, May 2024).

The Afghanistan affirmative addresses a fundamentally different problem: managing terrorist threats emanating from a territory whose de facto government is not a U.S. partner. Seth Jones, writing for the Council on Foreign Relations in an April 2022 contingency planning memorandum, outlined the leading policy option: "work with the Taliban against some terrorist groups, most notably ISIS-K. This option could involve providing economic and humanitarian assistance, and potentially even intelligence, to the Taliban government in return for a sustained campaign against ISIS-K." As Jones notes, when asked in 2021 whether the United States could work with the Taliban against ISIS-K, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley answered that "it's possible" (Jones, April 2022). West Point's Combating Terrorism Center has mapped complementary over-the-horizon postures organized around detection, denial, and punishment (CTC, "No Good Choices").

A question raised in review, and certain to arise at the topic meeting, is whether any affirmative can cooperate with Afghanistan without formally recognizing the Taliban regime. The record shows engagement and recognition are separable. The Stimson Center documents that Washington "engaged in quiet outreach to Taliban representatives on issues including counterterrorism, inclusivity, and the rights of women and girls" while it "resisted calls from the Taliban for diplomatic recognition, sanctions relief, and the unfreezing of Afghan central bank assets" (Threlkeld and Shahid, March 2024). The State Department itself has explained: "While the United States has no intention of reopening an embassy in Afghanistan at this time, we do engage pragmatically with a wide variety of Afghans, including the Taliban, through our diplomats based in Doha" (De Luce et al., July 3, 2024). Affirmatives can therefore defend cooperation through the Doha channel without defending recognition. Peer-reviewed scholarship on Russia's own four-year course before its 2025 recognition reaches the same conclusion: Abdul Wasi Popalzay characterizes Moscow's 2021-2025 posture as "de facto alignment without de jure endorsement": "hosting Taliban delegations, facilitating regional dialogue, and expanding counterterrorism coordination—without extending formal diplomatic recognition" (Popalzay, Journal of Eurasian Studies, November 2025).

Whether such engagement is wise is precisely the debate; it supplies rich negative ground rather than a topic defect. An appeasement disadvantage argues that engagement legitimizes the regime: Human Rights Watch reports that Afghan women's rights defenders "demand that the Taliban not be recognized as the legitimate government of Afghanistan" (Barr, Human Rights

Watch, September 2, 2025), and commentators warned that Russia's July 2025 recognition, the first by any major power, "sends a dangerous message that repression can be rewarded with international legitimacy" and "will only embolden the Taliban to escalate their restrictions" (Feminist Majority Foundation, quoted in Ms. Magazine, July 3, 2025). UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk reported in March 2026 that the Taliban's "cascade of edicts and laws" is "having a crushing impact on the Afghan people, particularly women and girls" (OHCHR, March 2026). Russia, still the only state to have formally recognized the Taliban government, deepened ties further by signing a first-ever military-technical cooperation agreement with Kabul during a late-May 2026 Moscow security forum (Jayaprakash and Shekhawat, 2026). A domestic political fallout disadvantage, congressional and public opposition to dealing with the Taliban, provides a second country-specific link. Representative evidence for both appears in the Appendix.

The contrast with Pakistan is stark. Jones again: "in contrast to virtually every other U.S. counterterrorism campaign since 9/11, the United States has no partner force on the ground in Afghanistan" and, the same source notes, "virtually no intelligence architecture in Afghanistan," having "shut down its embassy and CIA station when it withdrew military forces in August 2021" (Jones, April 2022). The Pakistan affirmative works with a partner state against its internal insurgency; the Afghanistan affirmative manages transnational threats from non-partner territory. The cross-border dimension links them--the TTP attacks Pakistan from Afghan sanctuary (Roggio, November 12, 2025)--but as Britannica's reference entry states plainly, "The Pakistani Taliban aims to counter Pakistan's authority, whereas the Afghan Taliban seeks cooperation with Pakistan" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Students who debate both affirmatives will learn two distinct counterterrorism logics, not one.

Affirmative: Smaller States

Affirmatives addressing Chinese influence in smaller South Asian states provide additional diversity. The Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal all face growing Chinese military and economic pressure. Plans could include defense cooperation agreements with the Maldives to counter Chinese naval presence, maritime security assistance to Sri Lanka, or military modernization support for Bangladesh. The Pentagon's revelation that China is considering military logistics facilities in more than 20 countries, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, provides strong advantage evidence (DoD China Military Power Report, December 2024; Pande, 2025; Mohamed, February 2025).

Smaller-state affirmatives also have concrete advocates. The East-West Center's occasional paper series on the maritime security of smaller South Asian states, covering Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, argues that "crafting cooperation initiatives tailored to the distinct needs of each smaller South Asian state will facilitate optimal outcomes for their national security and the global commons," noting that the Bay of Bengal supports 90 percent of Bangladesh's trade and 100 percent of its energy transportation (Hossain, Didi, and Attanayake, 2025). Admiral Samuel Paparo, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, has called Sri Lanka's position at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean "strategically vital"; Sri Lanka has led Combined Task Force 154 and contributed to Operation Prosperity Guardian (Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, September 2025). The India-led Colombo Security Conclave offers an existing architecture into which U.S. maritime domain awareness packages and coast guard capacity-building plans could plug. Illustrative plan texts include maritime domain awareness assistance to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and coast guard capacity building for the Maldives. Evidence appears in the Appendix.

Probable Negative Strategies

Disadvantages

Disadvantage: Chinese Escalation

Disadvantages centered on Chinese response will be a cornerstone of negative strategy. China has significantly increased its military presence in the Indian Ocean and views U.S.-India defense cooperation as direct containment. The USCC 2025 Annual Report documented China's willingness to leverage regional conflicts to test and advertise its weapons. Deepening U.S. ties with India could accelerate Chinese military cooperation with Pakistan, already at roughly 80 percent of Pakistan's arms imports in 2021-2025, or provoke aggressive responses along the Line of Actual Control. Link evidence is abundant from Carnegie, CSIS, and Hudson analyses.

Recent statements supply 2026-dated link evidence. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning declared on May 26, 2026: "Cooperation between countries should be conducive to regional peace, stability and prosperity and not target any third party. We oppose forming exclusive groupings or engaging in bloc confrontation" (quoted in Zhang, June 2026, and Organiser, May 29, 2026; state-aligned Chinese and Indian outlets, cited here as evidence of official positions). Because Beijing frames any expanded U.S. security role in the region as bloc confrontation, this link applies to cooperation with India, with smaller states, and even with Pakistan, making it a generic link novices can deploy against the entire topic.

The impact scenarios are well documented and current. The 2025 U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission report found that during the May 2025 India-Pakistan clash "Beijing opportunistically leveraged the conflict to test and advertise the sophistication of its weapons, useful in the contexts of its ongoing border tensions with India and its expanding defence industry goals" (USCC, 2025 Annual Report). That dynamic feeds two distinct negative impacts. First, a containment-and-encirclement scenario: deeper U.S.-India cooperation can be argued to accelerate China's military support to Pakistan, already the source of the overwhelming majority of Pakistan's arms imports, and to harden Chinese force posture along the disputed Line of Actual Control, where the 2020 Galwan clash showed how quickly border friction can turn lethal. Second, an arms-race and proliferation scenario: by validating Chinese platforms in combat and tightening the China-Pakistan defense relationship through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, expanded U.S. involvement can be framed as spurring a regional capabilities spiral rather than deterring one. Both scenarios draw on abundant, recent analysis from Carnegie, CSIS, and the Hudson Institute, giving the negative a China disadvantage that is simultaneously generic enough to apply against every affirmative and specific enough to carry a concrete, high-magnitude impact.

Disadvantage: Russian Response

Russia's declining but durable arms relationship with India creates a second core topic disadvantage. Deeper U.S. defense cooperation could accelerate Russia's pivot toward Pakistan, as evidenced by the RD-93MA engine sales and growing Russia-Pakistan trade (Zakharov, October 2025; Dolbaia et al., August 2025). CAATSA tensions over India's S-400 purchases provide additional link evidence.

The Russia disadvantage gained a concrete 2026 anchor when the India-Russia Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS) entered into force on January 12, 2026. Andrey Kortunov of the Russian International Affairs Council called the pact "a signal to Washington that America cannot take India for granted," and Moscow has offered India the S-500 air defense system as a successor to the S-400 (Sharma, April 24, 2026). Moscow and New Delhi were also negotiating additional S-400 deliveries as of May 2026 (The Moscow Times, May 26, 2026). Affirmative pressure on India to choose American platforms thus risks Russian counter-moves: deepened logistics access, accelerated S-400 and S-500 sales, or technology offers the United States will not match.

Disadvantage: Nuclear Escalation

The 2025 India-Pakistan crisis provides fresh, specific evidence for nuclear escalation disadvantages, and the structural conditions that made it dangerous remain in place. The crisis, the most severe military exchange between the two nuclear-armed rivals in over half a century, saw strikes on military infrastructure paired with disinformation, a combination the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists warned could turn a conventional conflict into a nuclear crisis (Kishore, November 2025). The danger is compounded by the near-total absence of bilateral crisis-management architecture: India and Pakistan have no meaningful arms-control treaties or escalation-control protocols and have failed to use their communication hotlines dependably in past crises (Arms Control Association, July 2025). For the negative, this supplies a high-magnitude impact scenario, any affirmative that deepens U.S. entanglement with one rival can be argued to raise the odds that Washington is drawn into a future crisis between them, or that a partner emboldened by U.S. backing miscalculates.

A second nuclear dimension links the topic directly to U.S. security. Beginning in December 2024, senior U.S. officials publicly identified Pakistan's long-range missile development as a threat to American soil: then-Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jonathan Finer said it was "hard for us to see Pakistan's actions as anything other than an emerging threat to the United States" (Sethi, November 2024; CRS IF13086). The 2026 Intelligence Community Annual Threat Assessment reiterated the concern, grouping Pakistan with Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran among states whose missile programs "put our Homeland within range," while flagging South Asia as a region where India-Pakistan relations "remain a risk for nuclear conflict" (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2026 Annual Threat Assessment). Affirmatives that expand cooperation with Pakistan must answer the proliferation and homeland-threat

implications; affirmatives that tilt toward India invite the Pakistani counter-argument, advanced by Islamabad itself, that U.S. technology transfers to New Delhi drive the very missile competition that produces these threats.

Finally, the September 2025 Pakistan-Saudi Arabia mutual-defense pact introduced an extended-deterrence dimension that negatives can develop into a distinct impact scenario, raising the prospect that Pakistan's nuclear umbrella could be stretched beyond South Asia (Sameer Ali Khan, December 2025). Taken together, the crisis instability, the homeland-threat assessments, and the extended-deterrence questions give the negative a nuclear disadvantage with both unusually high relevance and unusually current, government-sourced link evidence. This will provide ground that anchors competitive negative strategy across the topic.

Disadvantage: Pakistan Relations / Bilateral Trade-offs

Deepening ties with India risks further alienating Pakistan, pushing it closer to China. Hudson Institute warned that isolating Pakistan risks creating a more dangerous adversary (Haqqani, June 2025). Conversely, cooperating with Pakistan risks Indian backlash. This bilateral trade-off provides specific, germane disadvantages to almost every affirmative plan.

The 2025-2026 period sharpened this disadvantage's links in both directions. President Trump's repeated claims to have mediated the May 2025 crisis "infuriated New Delhi"; as Happymon Jacob observed in Foreign Affairs, "American officials have been careful not to offend Indian sensitivities in this area—but Trump doubled down" (CFR, April 2026). The White House hosted Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir twice after the conflict (Bajpaee, November 26, 2025). Affirmatives that deepen cooperation with Pakistan risk Indian backlash; affirmatives that deepen cooperation with India give the negative India-Pakistan zero-sum links. The disadvantage has live, recent link evidence for both trade-off scenarios.

Disadvantage: Country-Specific Politics

It is worthy to enumerate what country-specific strategies concretely mean. Internal politics disadvantages are the clearest example, and each major country supplies one.

For India: Foreign Policy assessed that "2025 has arguably been the most difficult foreign-policy year for Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he assumed power in 2014," noting that "the earlier irrational exuberance in New Delhi about the India-U.S. relationship, as evidenced by Indians being among the most positive about a second Trump term, has faded" (Bajpaee, November 26, 2025). Opposition leaders have attacked perceived deference to Washington, with Rahul Gandhi deriding the government as the "Rashtriya Surrender Sangh" (Countercurrents, May 2026, an opinion outlet cited for the rhetoric of domestic backlash). An affirmative that visibly aligns India with Washington hands Modi's opponents ammunition and pressures the government to demonstrate strategic autonomy, generating both political backlash links and policy reversal risks.

For Pakistan: civil-military tensions and Imran Khan's continued imprisonment keep domestic politics volatile. PTI remains popular, the May 2025 conflict rallied the nation behind the military, and "Free Imran Khan" interventions by U.S. lawmakers have repeatedly complicated the bilateral reset (Shahid, July 2025; Nasir, April 2025). Khan received an additional 17-year sentence in the Toshakhana-2 case in December 2025, to run consecutively after his 14-year term (Bukhari, December 20, 2025), and underwent a fifth eye procedure in June 2026 amid reported vision loss, remaining imprisoned with no release (Sen, June 15, 2026). Madiha Afzal of Brookings documents the historical pattern: U.S. cooperation has tended to flow through and strengthen Pakistan's military, entrenching the civil-military imbalance (Afzal, April 3, 2024). U.S. security cooperation thus links to disadvantages about empowering the army over civilian institutions and inflaming anti-American sentiment.

For Afghanistan: the Taliban movement is internally divided between the Kandahar-based clerical leadership around Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and the more internationally engaged Haqqani network (Middle East Institute). Engagement disadvantages can argue that U.S. cooperation strengthens one faction over another--rewarding hardliners or, alternatively, empowering the Haqqanis--with unpredictable consequences for Afghan governance. Together, these three internal-politics disadvantages show that country-specific strategies exist for every major actor on the topic and function across all of the proposed resolution mechanisms.

Politics is an illustration and not to be taken as the only type of country-specific disadvantage. There will be additional country-specific sectors of negative disadvantage ground based on various internal differences including economics, cultural, or logistical factors.

Counterplans

The topic offers unusually deep counterplan ground, because nearly every affirmative mechanism: arms sales, basing, training, intelligence-sharing--has a non-military or alternative-agent substitute with its own literature. A strong non-military counterplan, paired with disadvantages to the military process, will contain many smaller cases and serve as a functional limit to the affirmative ground. The specific counterplans below each compete with affirmative mechanisms and carry named net benefits drawn from the disadvantage ground above.

Counterplan: Diplomatic and Economic Engagement

Rather than deepening defense cooperation, the United States substitutes diplomatic and economic tools: trade, development assistance, sanctuary-denial through partners. This counterplan has a named solvency advocate: an April 2026 South Asian Voices analysis concludes that "despite Pakistan's repeated military strikes on TTP targets, terrorist incidents increased by 24 percent in 2025, underscoring the hard truth that military action alone will not solve Pakistan's TTP problem," recommending sanctuary-denial through economic and diplomatic leverage, including through China and Qatar, rather than kinetic action (Kayani, April 2, 2026; the Pak Institute for Peace Studies' primary count shows a 34 percent increase; the two sources count incidents differently, but both document the same upward trajectory). It competes with security-assistance affirmatives and takes the militarism and Pakistan-relations disadvantages as net benefits.

Counterplan: Restraint

A broader restraint counterplan rejects expanded security commitments in favor of diplomatic retrenchment. The Quincy Institute's response to the 2025 National Security Strategy collects experts arguing the United States should "promote restraint as a central principle of US foreign policy—fewer wars and more effective diplomatic engagement" (Quincy Institute, December 2025). This competes with every affirmative that deepens U.S. military entanglement and carries the China-escalation and nuclear-escalation disadvantages as net benefits.

Counterplan: Multilateral Institutions

Instead of bilateral U.S. defense cooperation, regional or minilateral bodies--BIMSTEC, the Quad, or SAARC-adjacent frameworks--coordinate security cooperation. A BIMSTEC counterplan substitutes a multilateral track for direct U.S.-South Asia ties, competing with the resolution's bilateral "with" framing and taking as a net benefit the disadvantages that flow from a visible U.S. military footprint.

Counterplan: Conditions

A conditions counterplan grants the affirmative's defense cooperation only after the partner meets benchmarks: human-rights improvements, democratic governance, or counterterrorism cooperation. The literature on conditioning U.S. security assistance is extensive, and the counterplan competes through the desirability of the condition while capturing the country-specific politics disadvantages (for instance, the argument that unconditional cooperation entrenches Pakistan's military over its civilian institutions).

Counterplan: Alternative Agent

Because security assistance is administered across multiple agencies, agent counterplans are viable: the State Department, USAID, or intelligence channels can substitute for Defense Department action, competing on the agent-specification ground discussed in the Definitions section and accessing net benefits tied to militarization and to civil-military balance in recipient states.

Representative evidence for the counterplan solvency advocates appears in the Appendix.

Critical Approaches/The Kritik

The topic sits atop an unusually rich critical-theory literature, much of it written about South Asia specifically. The criticisms below fall into two groups: classic criticisms of security, militarism, capitalism, and liberal institutionalism; and identity-based criticisms--postcolonial, subaltern, feminist, and decolonial--several of which take South Asia as their original case. Because South Asians are a large constituency in the debate community, this topic also offers many students an access point to their own history and scholarship. Representative evidence for each argument appears in the Appendix.

Criticism: Securitization

Drawing on the Copenhagen School, the securitization literature argues that naming something a security threat is itself a political act with consequences. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde hold that "'security' is thus a self-referential practice, because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue—not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat" (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998). When U.S. policy frames Pakistani nuclear weapons, Afghan terrorism, or Chinese regional influence as existential dangers requiring defense cooperation, it performs a securitizing move that forecloses ordinary politics, and the affirmative's plan is that move enacted. The link is the affirmative's own threat construction.

Criticism: Militarism and the Military-Industrial Complex

This criticism treats defense cooperation as a vehicle for militarism and corporate war profiteering rather than security. William Hartung's history of Lockheed Martin traces how the largest U.S. weapons maker "has shaped US foreign policy for decades" (Hartung, Prophets of War, 2011). Because U.S. defense cooperation with India and Pakistan runs largely through Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales, the affirmative directly enriches the arms industry; the criticism argues this entrenches a militarized common sense in which every regional problem invites a weapons-transfer solution.

Criticism: Capitalism

The capitalism criticism reads the arms trade as the export of surplus and the reproduction of a North-South military hierarchy. Anna Stavrianakis defines militarism as "the social and international relations of the preparation for, and conduct of, organized political violence" (Stavrianakis & Selby, Militarism and International Relations, 2013) and ties arms transfers to the subordination of the postcolonial South. With India among the world's largest arms importers, the affirmative becomes a case study in how capital and weapons flow together from core to periphery.

Criticism: Neoliberal Institutionalism

Liberal-institutionalist theory is both the framework many affirmatives rely on and an object of critique. Robert Keohane argues that international regimes function "not as weak substitutes for world government but as devices for facilitating decentralized cooperation among egoistic actors" (Keohane, After Hegemony, 1984), and that "cooperation therefore does not imply an absence of conflict." An affirmative that defends defense-cooperation agreements as cooperation-producing institutions rests on exactly this logic; the argument (and its realist mirror image) contests whether such institutions produce peace or merely manage hegemony.

Criticism: Orientalism

Edward Said's foundational critique holds that the West constructs "the Orient" as its inferior opposite in order to dominate it: Orientalism is, "in short, a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, Orientalism, 1978). Applied to the topic, the criticism argues that U.S. defense cooperation rests on an Orientalist construction of South Asia as an unstable space requiring Western management, a frame that positions Washington as the rational security manager of an irrational region.

Criticism: Nuclear Orientalism

Hugh Gusterson's concept is the most topic-specific critical literature available, developed expressly against the Western reaction to the 1998 Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests. He documents the orthodoxy "that, while we can live with the nuclear weapons of the five official nuclear nations for the indefinite future, the proliferation of nuclear weapons to nuclear-threshold states in the Third World, especially the Islamic world, would be enormously dangerous" (Gusterson, Cultural Anthropology, 1999). Any affirmative that frames Indian or Pakistani nuclear weapons as the threat justifying U.S. defense cooperation reproduces exactly this double standard.

Criticism: The "Muslim world"

Mahmood Mamdani critiques the post-9/11 division of Muslims into "good" and "bad", a "Culture Talk" under which, "whether in Afghanistan, Palestine, or Pakistan, Islam must be quarantined" (Mamdani, 2002; Mamdani, 2004). U.S. counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan and engagement over Afghanistan construct those countries as a Muslim threat-space, legitimizing drones, surveillance, and security partnership while erasing the U.S. role in producing the militancy it later fights.

Criticism: Subaltern

Gayatri Spivak's subaltern critique, rooted in the South Asian Subaltern Studies school, argues that the most affected are structurally silenced. Her analysis of colonial "rescue" yields the formulation "white men are saving brown women from brown men," and her conclusion that "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 1988). Defense cooperation

negotiated in Washington and New Delhi or Islamabad speaks for, and over, the displaced, the rural poor, women, and minorities whose security is most at stake but who never appear at the table.

Criticism: Feminist International Relations

Feminist IR asks the question Cynthia Enloe made central: "Where are the women?" Enloe shows how military bases and militarization depend on and reshape women's lives, and J. Ann Tickner reconceptualizes security to surface the gendered costs that conventional analysis renders invisible (Enloe, Bananas, Beaches and Bases, 1990/2014; Tickner, Gender in International Relations, 1992). Bases, arms transfers, and militarized borders--Diego Garcia, Kashmir--produce gendered harms (camp-town economies, sexual violence, displacement) that the affirmative's security framing erases.

Criticism: Postcolonial South Asia

Sankaran Krishna's study of India and Sri Lanka argues that "the attempt to construct nation-states on the basis of exclusionary narratives of the past and univocal visions for the future has reached an impasse," indicting "the journey of modernist nationhood with singular conceptions of sovereignty and identity" in South Asia (Krishna, Postcolonial Insecurities, 1999). The argument questions whether U.S. defense cooperation with these states underwrites precisely the majoritarian, militarized nationhood Krishna critiques.

Criticism: Decolonial and Diego Garcia

The most concrete decolonial critical literature centers on Diego Garcia, the joint U.S.-U.K. base in the Chagos Archipelago and the platform for U.S. power projection into the Indian Ocean. UN experts found that the 2025 UK-Mauritius agreement "fails to guarantee and protect the rights of the Chagossian people, including their right to return to Diego Garcia," because by "maintaining a foreign military presence of the United Kingdom and the United States on Diego Garcia" it perpetuates the islanders' expulsion (OHCHR, June 10, 2025; see David Vine, Island of Shame, 2009). The base's existence rests on the forced removal of the Chagossians, a living settler-colonial indictment of the U.S. military footprint that any Indian Ocean affirmative must answer.

Criticism: Additional Ground for Opportunities

DesiCrit, which analyzes South Asian American racialization through critical race theory, offers additional novel ground (Harpalani, 2013). Because South Asians represent a large minority within the debate community, this topic provides a valuable access point for students exploring their own history and culture.

Proposed Resolutions

The following resolutions are sorted in the author's preference. They center on defense cooperation with South Asia and include phrases most commonly found in related articles. "Defense cooperation" provides a compelling case: it encompasses security assistance and cooperation without allowing humanitarian assistance affirmatives or creating artificial mechanism counterplans. Its general definition refers to DoD activity, conducted with allied and friendly nations, to advance international security (Defense Acquisition University, 2018).

1. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its defense cooperation with South Asia.

2. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security cooperation with South Asia.

3. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security assistance to South Asia.

4. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security and/or defense cooperation with South Asia.

5. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security assistance to and/or defense cooperation with South Asia.

Resolution 1 is preferred because it provides maximum flexibility while maintaining topical limits through the defense cooperation mechanism.

Resolution 2 narrows the geographic scope to security cooperation, which may be appropriate if the committee prefers a more constrained topic, but comes with concerns.

Resolution 3 specifies security assistance, which is further constrained and less supported by the literature base.

Resolution 4 and Resolution 5 offer and/or options which may broaden the scope of the topic or resolve ambiguities between security cooperation and defense cooperation. The author does not prefer a list topic.

To accommodate reviewer feedback on wording, two variants of Resolution 1 are also discussed for the wording committee's benefit, exchanging "with" for the prepositions used in past international topics:

6. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its defense cooperation toward South Asia.

7. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its defense cooperation to South Asia.

Past topic practice informs the choice among prepositions. The 2022-2023 resolution used "security cooperation with" the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and 2016-2017 used "engagement with" the People's Republic of China; 2013-2014 used "economic engagement toward" Cuba, Mexico, and/or Venezuela; and 2007-2008 used "public health assistance to" Sub-Saharan Africa. "With" is intuitively superior for cooperation, cooperation is inherently bilateral, and "with" makes the partner explicit, while "toward" may marginally widen affirmative flexibility (actions directed at the region without a willing partner) and "to" pairs more naturally with assistance than with cooperation. After extensive review, Resolution 1 remains the author's strong preference.

Definitions

Because the resolution turns on several terms of art, this section collects multiple authoritative definitions for each, drawn from U.S. statute, Defense Department doctrine, dictionaries, and scholarly sources. Where a term admits competing constructions, those competing definitions are the raw material of topicality debate; the most consequential are "South Asia," whose scope ranges from six to nine countries, and "defense cooperation," which, unlike "security cooperation," is not a defined term in U.S. defense doctrine. Definitions are provided in the Appendix.

"Defense cooperation."

Though central to the resolution, this phrase is not a defined term of art in U.S. law or Department of Defense doctrine. The Defense Acquisition University describes it as "a generic term for the range of activity undertaken by DoD with its allies and other friendly nations to promote international security." Such activity, it states, "includes, but need not be confined to, security assistance, industrial cooperation, armaments cooperation, Foreign Military Sales (FMS), training, logistics cooperation, cooperative research and development (R&D), Foreign Comparative Testing (FCT), and Host-Nation Support (HNS)" (Defense Acquisition University, 2018). Scholarly treatments define its most institutionalized form: in the most-cited study of the subject, Brandon Kinne writes that "bilateral defense cooperation agreements, or DCAs, are now the most common form of institutionalized defense cooperation," establishing "broad defense-oriented legal frameworks between signatories, facilitating cooperation in such fundamental areas as defense policy coordination, research and development, joint military exercises, education and training, arms procurement, and exchange of classified information" (Kinne, International Organization, 2018). Crucially, Kinne distinguishes such cooperation from alliance: "DCAs contain no mutual defense or nonaggression obligations. They are not alliances." The absence of a codified definition is itself a topicality consideration: because "defense cooperation" functions as a colloquial umbrella rather than a statutory category, affirmatives and negatives will reason by analogy from the adjacent, and codified, term "security cooperation," and topicality debates over what counts as "defense cooperation" should be expected.

“Security cooperation.”

Security cooperation is a defined statutory and doctrinal term, and it is the umbrella category in U.S. practice. By statute, “the term ‘security cooperation programs and activities of the Department of Defense’ means any program, activity (including an exercise), or interaction of the Department of Defense with the security establishment of a foreign country” to build allied capabilities, secure peacetime and contingency access, and “build relationships that promote specific United States security interests” (10 U.S.C. § 301). The Defense Security Cooperation Agency’s manual defines it in parallel terms as “all activities undertaken by the DoD to encourage and enable international partners to work with the United States to achieve strategic objectives,” including “all DoD-administered security assistance (SA) programs” (DSCA, Security Assistance Management Manual, C1.1.1). This term and its associated definition may be overly restrictive.

“Security assistance.”

Security assistance is a subset of security cooperation, distinguished by the statutes that authorize it. It is “a group of programs authorized by federal statutes by which the United States provides defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services by grant, lease, loan, credit, or cash sales” (DSCA glossary), authorized chiefly under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and the Arms Export Control Act of 1976 (Title 22) and overseen by the Department of State, even where administered by the Defense Department. The distinction matters for topicality: an affirmative confined to Title 22 security assistance acts through a narrower, State-led channel than one operating across the full Title 10 security-cooperation space. This is further restrictive than security cooperation.

“Substantially increase.”

“Substantial” carries both a qualitative and a quantitative sense in the definitional literature. Debate-topicality compilations gather the ordinary-language senses: “important, large, considerable, valuable” (Cambridge Dictionary of American English) and “large in size, value, or importance” (Oxford College Dictionary). Quantitative standards will be in relation to existing baselines and relevant percentages are contested. The term functions as the resolution’s threshold: it screens out trivially small affirmatives and gives the negative a topicality argument against cases whose increase in defense cooperation is merely incremental.

“South Asia.”

South Asia will refer to at most 8 countries under most interpretations. No single definition commands universal assent, and the variation is a central scoping question for the topic. Geographically, the region is the sub-Himalayan landmass dominated by the Indian Plate; while it “has never been a coherent geopolitical region, it possesses a distinct geographical identity” (South Asian Academy of Management, 2025). The institutional definitions diverge on membership. The narrowest common core, Encyclopaedia Britannica’s, lists Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, with Afghanistan and the Maldives “often considered part of South Asia as well” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) comprises eight members: those six plus Afghanistan (admitted 2007) and the Maldives. The World Bank used the same eight-country grouping through FY24 but, as of July 1, 2025, reclassified Afghanistan and Pakistan out of its South Asia region. Selected evidence for definitions are provided in the Appendix.

“The United States federal government” and “its.”

The United States federal government is the national government established by the Constitution, consisting of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches (US Legal). The possessive “its” restricts the resolution to the federal government’s own defense cooperation, cooperation it itself undertakes, rather than cooperation it merely encourages allies, contractors, or partner states to pursue. This is agent-specification ground: it bears on whether “consultation” affirmatives, or cases that act through third parties, are topical.

“With.”

The preposition “with” frames the cooperation as bilateral and mutual, an interaction between the United States and a South Asian co-actor, rather than a one-directional transfer “to” a passive recipient. Kinne notes that defense cooperation agreements are “typically highly symmetric, mutually committing signatories to a common set of guidelines” (Kinne, 2018). The choice among “with,” “toward,” and “to” in the resolution variants therefore carries substantive weight: “cooperation with” implies a willing partner, which has consequences for affirmatives premised on partners whose alignment with Washington is contested.

Application of NFHS Criteria for Debate Resolutions

Timeliness and Durability

America's relationship with South Asia is among the most actively evolving subjects in U.S. foreign policy, and it is timely along every dimension the committee weighs. The 2025 India-Pakistan crisis was the first direct military exchange between two nuclear-armed states in over half a century. The ongoing Afghanistan-Pakistan border war, Pakistan's surprise emergence as a U.S.-Iran mediator culminating in the June 2026 framework agreement, and the rapid expansion of U.S.-India defense ties through the 2025 ten-year Major Defense Partnership framework all guarantee that the region will remain in the headlines throughout the 2027-2028 season. None of the structural dynamics that drive the topic--China's expansion into the Indian Ocean, transnational terrorism radiating from Afghan territory, the India-Pakistan nuclear rivalry, or India's slow pivot away from Russian arms--is likely to be resolved before debates conclude; each will instead generate a steady stream of fresh evidence and arguments across the season.

Crucially, the topic's durability does not depend on the region staying calm, and it is not destabilized by the fast-moving crises that dominate today's headlines elsewhere. The Russia-Ukraine war and the 2026 Iran war that briefly closed the Strait of Hormuz are raised as reasons a South Asia topic might become less relevant, but the opposite is true: each crisis, whatever its outcome, deepens South Asia's strategic salience rather than diminishing it. If Russian arms supply stays disrupted, the United States gains a widening opening to draw India closer; if it stabilizes, the long U.S. effort to wean India off Moscow becomes more urgent; either way the resolution's core question stays live. Likewise, the Hormuz crisis exposed that Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan import the majority of their LNG through the Strait, a structural dependence that persists no matter how the immediate crisis resolves and that anchors the case for maritime-security cooperation.

A topic whose relevance survives every plausible turn of two extra-regional wars is, by definition, durable: the underlying defense relationships the resolution addresses will remain consequential to the United States in a calm year and a turbulent one alike. The topic is also substantive enough to reward a full season of repeated debate, allowing students to refine arguments against an evolving evidence base rather than exhausting the literature early.

Accessibility and Material

An extraordinary wealth of freely accessible, high-quality material exists across every level of the activity. Major think tanks--Brookings, CSIS, Carnegie, the Stimson Center, USIP, the Hudson Institute, RAND, CNAS, the Atlantic Council, and the Observer Research Foundation--publish continuously on South Asian security, and nearly all of it is open-access. Primary government sources are equally abundant: the Congressional Research Service issues regular

reports on India-U.S. relations, arms transfers, and Afghanistan and Pakistan policy; the Department of Defense, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the State Department, SIGAR, and the Director of National Intelligence all publish relevant material; and statutory definitions are freely available through the Cornell Legal Information Institute and the U.S. Code. International organizations--the United Nations, SIPRI, the International Crisis Group, the IAEA, and the OHCHR--supply authoritative data and primary documents, and reputable journalism from Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, The Diplomat, War on the Rocks, and major wire services tracks developments daily.

This depth matters for accessibility at both ends of the competitive spectrum. Novices can enter the topic through familiar, intuitive concepts: terrorism, nuclear weapons, great-power competition. Advanced debaters can mine a vertically rich literature on specific defense-cooperation mechanisms, agent and process distinctions, regional politics, and a deep critical-theory base spanning postcolonial, securitization, and feminist scholarship. Because so much of the core evidence is government-produced or think-tank-published rather than paywalled academic work, even the smallest and least-resourced programs can build and update competitive files.

Student Interest and Engagement

The 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, the first direct military exchange between nuclear-armed powers in decades, generated global headlines, dominated international coverage for weeks, and offers exactly the kind of high-stakes scenario that captures student attention. The questions the topic raises are the defining foreign-policy challenges of students' lifetimes: the rise of China, renewed great-power conflict with Russia, the long campaign against transnational terrorism, and nuclear brinkmanship between bitter rivals. These are not abstractions but live controversies students encounter in the news, giving the topic an immediacy that sustains engagement across a long season. The topic also carries unusual personal resonance for the debate community itself. South Asian Americans have been one of the largest and fastest-growing minority groups in competitive debate, yet South Asian history, politics, and security have received almost no attention in past policy topics; this resolution offers many students a rare opportunity to engage academically with their own histories and the region their families come from. Beyond representation, the topic opens distinctive critical ground: the DesiCrit framework, which theorizes the racial ambiguity and racialization of South Asian Americans, and a broader body of postcolonial and decolonial scholarship give students personal and intellectually serious entry points that few other topics can match (Harpalani, 2013). For a wide range of debaters, spanning argument styles and regional practices, the topic offers a genuine hook.

Educational Quality

This topic exposes students to divergent, well-developed viewpoints on some of the most consequential questions in international relations, and it does so with analytic rigor. When should the United States cooperate with authoritarian or repressive regimes to secure its interests, and at what moral cost? How do nuclear weapons shape the behavior of rival states, and does deterrence make conflict less likely or merely more catastrophic when it occurs? Should the United States prioritize containing China or countering terrorism when the two goals pull in different directions? Does military cooperation reduce the risk of war by building stability and interoperability, or increase it by hardening rivalries and emboldening clients? Each of these questions has a serious literature base on both sides, so students must weigh competing strategic logics, evaluate empirical evidence, and confront genuine ethical trade-offs. The topic also builds transferable analytic skills--comparative reasoning across countries, the use of primary government documents, and engagement with both policy analysis and critical theory--that carry well beyond competitive debate into civic and academic life. Because the resolution spans security studies, regional history, economics, and political theory, it rewards genuine research and sustained argument innovation.

Balance

Balanced affirmative and negative ground exists, and the structure of the topic builds that balance in rather than leaving it to chance. Strong solvency advocates support expanding defense cooperation across the region--maritime-security cooperation with India, counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan, engagement with the Taliban against ISIS-K, and tailored partnerships with the smaller states--but an equally powerful literature warns of escalation, regional backlash, entrenchment of authoritarian militaries, and the limits of military solutions. The result is that every affirmative faces at least two specific, well-evidenced disadvantages: a regional-relations or country-specific politics disadvantage and a great-power escalation disadvantage centered on China or Russia. The small number of topical countries, roughly six to eight, keeps the research burden manageable, ensuring that even the smallest programs can construct and continually update country-specific negative positions rather than facing an unmanageable sprawl of cases. Counterplan ground is unusually deep, because nearly every affirmative mechanism has a non-military or alternative-agent substitute with its own literature, and critical teams have an extensive menu of postcolonial, securitization, feminist, and decolonial options grounded in scholarship specific to the region. Traditional debate circuits can also engage directly with the human and economic stakes of these decisions. Across competitive styles, neither side enters with a structural advantage.

Novice Packet Guidance

A novice packet should include at least three affirmatives: an India affirmative about maritime cooperation and China containment; a Pakistan affirmative about counterterrorism cooperation; and an Afghanistan affirmative about countering ISIS-K. For the negative, include one counterplan (non-military cooperation), one criticism (critical security studies or capitalism), and three disadvantages (Chinese escalation, Russian response, and nuclear risk). These positions are intuitive, clear, and provide robust clash.

The core mechanisms of how defense cooperation mechanisms operate, knowledge novices need to debate the topic confidently, are well documented in primary government sources. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) is, in the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's words, "the U.S. Government's program for transferring defense articles, services, and training to our international partners and international organizations," "funded by administrative charges to foreign purchasers and is operated at no cost to taxpayers" (DSCA, Foreign Military Sales FAQ). The process moves from a partner's Letter of Request through a Letter of Offer and Acceptance, State Department review, and Defense Department implementation, with end-use monitoring afterward (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs). Foreign Military Financing (FMF) provides grants and loans that finance partners' FMS purchases, and International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds foreign officers' professional military education in the United States (CRS IF11437; DSCA Security Assistance Management Manual).

For India specifically, Kronstadt of the Congressional Research Service explains the architecture novices will encounter constantly in the literature: "From 2016 to 2020, the United States and India concluded several 'enabling' defense cooperation accords which in many cases provide the legal framework for an intensified defense partnership, including a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA); a Communications, Compatibility, and Security Agreement (COMCASA); and a Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Cooperation (BECA)," and notes that "India has received at least $1 million in U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding annually since 2003" (Kronstadt, IF12438). Learning what these mechanisms are, and how plans use them, is itself a valuable civic and policy education.

The topic is novice-accessible because core negative strategies cross-apply to every packet affirmative. The China response disadvantage links to U.S. defense cooperation with any South Asian state, since Beijing characterizes expanded U.S. security cooperation in the region as "bloc confrontation" (Mao Ning, May 26, 2026). The non-military engagement counterplan--diplomacy, development, economic statecraft--competes with every affirmative mechanism, with named solvency advocates (Kayani, April 2026; Quincy Institute, December 2025). Restraint-based arguments indict the affirmative's premise across all three countries. A novice who learns one disadvantage and one counterplan at the start of the season can compete against the entire

packet. This is well-suited for the scaffolding novice debate should provide, while still leaving room to specialize with country-specific politics disadvantages as the season progresses.

The three packet affirmatives teach three distinct policy logics. The India affirmative is partnership deepening with an advanced strategic partner: the debates concern technology transfer, co-production, and alliance management. The Pakistan affirmative is counterterrorism cooperation with a state partner: the United States strengthens a sovereign military's fight against insurgents attacking it. The Afghanistan affirmative is threat management from non-partner territory: the United States must decide whether and how to engage a de facto regime it does not recognize, with the engagement-versus-recognition question built into the case. Novices who debate all three learn that counterterrorism is not one problem but several; the negative ground against each differs instructively, from arms-racing and alliance disadvantages against India to appeasement and legitimacy disadvantages against Afghanistan engagement.

Finally, the topic builds durable skills: reading and comparing think tank and government sources; understanding how foreign policy mechanisms (FMS, FMF, IMET, enabling agreements) function; debating uniqueness in a fast-moving news environment; and weighing security interests against human rights values in cases like Taliban engagement. Representative evidence for the packet affirmatives and core negative positions appears in the Appendix.

Conclusion

South Asia sits at the center of the defining challenges of contemporary U.S. foreign policy: the strategic competition with China, the long shadow of transnational terrorism, the management of a nuclear rivalry between bitter neighbors, and the slow realignment of a rising democratic power away from a declining Russia. A resolution on U.S. defense cooperation with South Asia gives high school debaters a year to grapple with these questions through a stable, well-bounded mechanism that nonetheless opens onto a diverse and genuinely contested literature. The topic is timely without being fragile: its relevance has been sharpened by the 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, the Afghanistan-Pakistan war, Pakistan's unexpected turn as a U.S.-Iran mediator, and the expanding U.S.-India partnership, yet it does not rise or fall with any single fast-moving event, surviving every plausible turn of the wars in Ukraine and the Gulf. It is accessible to the smallest programs through open-government and think-tank sources, and deep enough to reward the most advanced research. It offers balanced ground built into its very structure: every affirmative meets specific country and great-power disadvantages, a deep bench of counterplans, and a rich critical literature. Simultaneously, it gives a large and underrepresented population of debaters a rare chance to engage academically with their own history. For these reasons, the author recommends the resolution "*Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its defense cooperation with South Asia.*" It captures the strategic core of the problem area, maintains clean topical limits through the defense cooperation mechanism, and preserves the flexibility that a full season of debate demands. South Asia is overdue for the attention of the policy debate community, and the 2027-2028 season offers an ideal moment to engage this region.

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Appendix: Selected Evidence

This appendix presents a sampling of evidence illustrating key affirmative, negative, and possible topicality interpretations available under the proposed resolutions. Each entry pairs a tag line summarizing the argument with a full paragraph of source text. These selections are representative rather than exhaustive; the evidence base for this topic area is extensive, with strong literature from major think tanks, government agencies, academic institutions, and reputable news outlets.

Topicality and Definitions Evidence

The statutory purpose of U.S. military assistance: common defense against internal and external aggression for friendly countries (22 U.S.C. 2301).

22 U.S.C. § 2301 '61 - *Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute. 22 U.S.C. § 2301, "Congressional statement of policy." https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/2301 //TKV*

> The Congress of the United States reaffirms the policy of the United States to achieve international peace and security through the United Nations so that armed force shall not be used except for individual or collective self-defense. The Congress finds that the efforts of the United States and other friendly countries to promote peace and security continue to require measures of support based upon the principle of effective self-help and mutual aid. It is the purpose of subchapter II of this chapter to authorize measures in the common defense against internal and external aggression, including the furnishing of military assistance, upon request, to friendly countries and international organizations.

Security assistance is a Title 22 program administered by the Department of Defense, Department of State, and Defense Security Cooperation Agency.

Defense Security Cooperation Agency '25 - *Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). "Security Assistance and Security Cooperation Programs." Security Assistance Management Manual, Chapter 11. Updated April 21, 2025. https://samm.dsca.mil/chapter/chapter-11 //TKV*

> Security Assistance (SA) is a group of U.S. State Department (State) programs authorized by the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961, as amended, and the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) of 1976, as amended, or other related statutes by which the U.S. provides defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services by grant, loan, credit, or cash sales to its international partners in furtherance of national policies and objectives. SA programs provide an effective avenue for interfacing with foreign governments and are a key tool of U.S. foreign policy. These SA programs promote U.S. security by increasing the ability of U.S. allies and partners to deter and defend against possible aggression, promote defense burden-sharing, and foster regional stability. SA programs can be administered by the DoD or the State.

Statutory definition: Security assistance includes military assistance, economic support, military education and training, and peacekeeping operations.

22 U.S.C. § 2304 '76 - *Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute. 22 U.S.C. "security assistance." https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/2304 //TKV*

> the term "security assistance" means— (A) assistance under part II (military assistance) or part IV (economic support fund) or part V (military education and training) or part VI (peacekeeping operations) or part VIII (antiterrorism assistance) of this subchapter; (B) sales of defense articles or services, extensions of credits (including participations in credits), and guaranties of loans under the Arms Export Control Act [22 U.S.C. 2751 et seq.]; or (C) any license in effect with respect to the export to or for the armed forces, police, intelligence, or other internal security forces of a foreign country of— (i) defense articles or defense services under section 38 of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2778); or (ii) items listed under the 600 series of the Commerce Control List contained in Supplement No. 1 to part 774 of subtitle B of title 15, Code of Federal Regulations.

Defense cooperation is a broad term encompassing all formal and informal military-to-military cooperation between two or more countries.

IRSEM '21 - *IRSEM (French Institute for Strategic Research, Military School), October 2021. "Defence Cooperation in the 21st Century." https://www.irsem.fr/storage/file_manager_files/2025/03/etude-irsem-86-defence-cooperation.pdf //TKV*

> Given this theoretical gap, our research aims to explore in greater detail the different forms of defence cooperation in the 21st century and proposes a typology from the standpoint of their legitimacy and efficacy. We define defence cooperation as all formal and informal partnerships, whether or not they are based on an accord or a treaty. They can be of military nature, which includes training exchange programmes, joint exercises, and the development, production and export of defence equipment, but may also pertain to broader security-related problems, be it conventional issues such as peacekeeping or unconventional ones like piracy and terrorism.

Defense cooperation requires armed-forces-to-armed-forces working arrangements to achieve mutual aims.

Center for Land Warfare Studies '08 - *Center for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), 2008. "Defence Cooperation as a Tool for Enhancing National Interest." https://www.claws.in/ //TKV*

> Defence cooperation may be defined as any arrangement between two or more nations where their Armed Forces work together to achieve mutual aims and objectives. This can include exchanges and liaison visits, individual and joint training, joint military exercises, common doctrine and equipment procurement. The objectives of defence cooperation between countries are to promote intra and extra regional peace and stability through dialogue and cooperation in the field of defence and security, to promote mutual understanding on defence and security challenges as well as to enhance transparency and openness and to imbibe 'best practices' in various military fields by observing specific aspects of functioning of the militaries of more advanced countries. Defence cooperation offers a range of benefits. It helps build trust and confidence, as also facilitates cooperation at political and economic level between nations.

Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) are active arrangements for routine, day-to-day defense cooperation--distinct from passive alliance commitments.

Kinne '25 - *Kinne, Brandon. University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, August 19, 2025. "Five Questions on Defense Cooperation Agreements." https://ucigcc.org/blog/five-questions-on-defense-cooperation-agreements/ //TKV*

> Think of alliances as passive agreements, whereas DCAs are active. The point of a DCA is to engage in routine forms of day-to-day defense cooperation, like promoting research into new types of military technology, facilitating arms trade, and conducting joint military exercises and contributions to peacekeeping operations. It's not that one is more important than the other—they do different things. DCAs have become increasingly visible because they're all over the place now. Back in the 1980s, it was mainly the United States and Soviet Union signing DCAs with a handful of countries.

South Asia is best defined geographically rather than geopolitically; it has a distinct geographical identity despite never being a coherent geopolitical region.

South Asian Academy of Management '25 - *South Asian Academy of Management, 2025. "About South Asia." https://southasianaom.org/about-south-asia/ //TKV*

> South Asia comprises the sub-Himalayan countries and some adjoining countries. Topographically, it is dominated by the Indian Plate, which rises above sea level as the Indian subcontinent south of the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush. South Asia is surrounded (clockwise, from west) by Western Asia, Central Asia, Eastern Asia, Southeastern Asia and the Indian Ocean. South Asia is home to about one fourth of the world's population, making it both the most populous and most densely populated geographical region in the world. While South Asia had never been a coherent geopolitical region, it has a distinct geographical identity. The boundaries of South Asia vary based on how South Asia is defined. South Asia's north, east, and west boundaries vary based on definitions used.

"South Asia" is used interchangeably with "Indian subcontinent" in academic literature, though political sensitivities lead some to prefer the former term.

South Asian Academy of Management '25 - *South Asian Academy of Management, 2025. "About South Asia." https://southasianaom.org/about-south-asia/ //TKV*

> The "South Asian subcontinent" or the "Indian subcontinent" is a geographical term referring to the large, self-contained landmass which covers most of South Asia. The term "Indian subcontinent" refers to a large, self-contained landmass which is geographically separated from the rest of the Asian continent. Due to similar scope, the terms "South Asia" and "Indian subcontinent" are used by some academics interchangeably. Due to political sensitivities, some prefer to use the terms "South Asian Subcontinent", the "Indo-Pak Subcontinent", or simply "South Asia" or "the Subcontinent" over the term "Indian subcontinent". According to some academics, the term "South Asia" is in more common use in Europe and North America, rather than the terms "Subcontinent" or the "Indian Subcontinent".

South Asia is authoritatively defined as eight countries--including Afghanistan and the Maldives--plus the Indian Ocean.

USIP China-South Asia Senior Study Group '20 - *USIP China-South Asia Senior Study Group. "China's Influence on Conflict Dynamics in South Asia." United States Institute of Peace, December 16, 2020. https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/12/chinas-influence-conflict-dynamics-south-asia //TKV*

> Along the way, their first stop is South Asia, which this report defines as comprising eight countries—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—along with the Indian Ocean (particularly the eastern portions but with implications for its entirety).

Alternatively, the core of South Asia is six countries, with Afghanistan and the Maldives often included.

Encyclopaedia Britannica '22 - *Encyclopaedia Britannica. "South Asia." 2022. https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Asia //TKV*

> South Asia, subregion of Asia, consisting of the Indo-Gangetic Plain and peninsular India. It includes the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka; Afghanistan and the Maldives are often considered part of South Asia as well. The term is often used synonymously with "Indian subcontinent," though the latter term is sometimes used more restrictively to refer to Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.

Defense cooperation agreements establish broad defense-oriented legal frameworks but are explicitly not alliances--they contain no mutual-defense obligation.

Kinne '18 - *Kinne, Brandon J. "Defense Cooperation Agreements and the Emergence of a Global Security Network." International Organization 72, no. 4 (2018): 799-837, at 799-800. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000218 //TKV*

> At their core, these agreements establish long-term institutional frameworks for routine bilateral defense relations, including coordination of defense policies, joint military exercises, working groups and committees, training and educational exchanges, defense-related research and development, and procurement. As frameworks, DCAs reserve specific details of implementation for protocols and implementing legislation. This flexibility means DCAs can both improve traditional defense capabilities and address such protean nontraditional threats as terrorism, trafficking, piracy, and cyber security. Importantly, DCAs contain no mutual defense or nonaggression obligations. They are not alliances. And unlike the forms of defense cooperation that dominated great-power politics during the Cold War, they are typically highly symmetric, mutually committing signatories to a common set of guidelines.

Defense cooperation is the DoD's generic term for the full range of cooperative activity undertaken with allies and friendly nations.

Defense Acquisition University '18 - *Defense Acquisition University. "Defense Cooperation." Glossary, 2018. https://web.archive.org/web/20220814222838/https://www.dau.edu/glossary/Lists/GlossaryContentSource/DispForm.aspx?ID=27267&ContentTypeId=0x010075CE08309C803448877BEF42E0836454 //TKV*

> Defense cooperation is a generic term for the range of activity undertaken by DoD with its allies and other friendly nations to promote international security. Such activity includes, but need not be confined to, security assistance, industrial cooperation, armaments cooperation, Foreign Military Sales (FMS), training, logistics cooperation, cooperative research and development (R&D), Foreign Comparative Testing (FCT), and Host-Nation Support (HNS).

Security cooperation comprises all DoD activities to build defense relationships and enable partners to work with the United States toward strategic objectives.

Defense Security Cooperation Agency '18 - *Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). "Chapter 1 - Security Cooperation Overview and Relationships." Security Assistance Management Manual, 2018, C1.1.1. https://samm.dsca.mil/chapter/chapter-1 //TKV*

> SC comprises all activities undertaken by the Department of Defense (DoD) to encourage and enable international partners to work with the United States to achieve strategic objectives. It includes all DoD interactions with foreign defense and security establishments, including all DoD-administered Security Assistance (SA) programs, that build defense and security relationships; promote specific U.S. security interests, including all international armaments cooperation activities and SA activities; develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations; and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to host nations. It is DoD policy that SC is an important tool of national security and foreign policy and is an integral element of the DoD mission.

Affirmative Case Evidence

Bangladesh / Rohingya: USAID cuts shuttered camp schools and youth-training centers, forcing Rohingya children into early marriage, hazardous labor, and prostitution.

Gelineau '25 - *Gelineau, Kristen. Associated Press, December 17, 2025. "Trafficked, exploited, married off: Rohingya children's lives crushed by foreign aid cuts." https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/trafficked-exploited-married-off-rohingya-childrens-lives-crushed-128474878 Global investigative reporter for AP covering Asia-Pacific human rights. //TKV*

The sudden and severe foreign aid cuts imposed this year by U.S. President Donald Trump, along with funding reductions from other countries, shuttered thousands of the camps' schools and youth training centers and crippled child protection programs. Beyond unwanted marriages, scores of children as young as 10 were forced into backbreaking manual labor, and girls as young as 12 forced into prostitution.

Restore U.S. Aid: The USAID shutdown has created a strategic vacuum across South Asia that China is actively exploiting through expanded Belt and Road investments.

Borton '25 - *Borton, James. "How Trump's hobbling of USAID cedes Southeast Asia to Chinese influence." South China Morning Post, February 9, 2025. https://www.scmp.com/opinion/world-opinion/article/3297456/how-trumps-hobbling-usaid-cedes-southeast-asia-chinese-influence Borton is Senior Fellow at the Johns Hopkins SAIS Foreign Policy Institute. //TKV*

The Trump administration's decision to freeze international assistance and gut federal agencies has sent shock waves across the globe, with profound implications for Southeast Asia. Since its establishment in 1961 by US president John F. Kennedy, USAID has been a cornerstone of US global engagement. The agency promotes sustainable development, reduces poverty and fosters stability in regions where America has vital strategic interests. In 2023, the United States remained the world's largest provider of foreign aid, allocating nearly US$68 billion to support humanitarian efforts and security initiatives. The uncertainty surrounding the future of USAID programmes also risks undermining diplomatic relations and ceding influence to geopolitical rivals such as China, which has expanded its own development financing. China could seize this opening by ramping up its Belt and Road Initiative and funding infrastructure projects such as roads, ports and railways. Ultimately, the absence of USAID could erode US soft power, diminish regional stability and create conditions that undermine US national security interests by strengthening China's ability to set the regional agenda.

Bhutan: Conditions are ripening for the United States and Bhutan to establish formal diplomatic relations--a small-scope affirmative with significant strategic value.

Seetharaman '25 - *Seetharaman, Abhinav. "The Case for the US and Bhutan to Establish Formal Diplomatic Relations." The Diplomat, April 10, 2025. https://thediplomat.com/2025/04/the-case-for-the-us-and-bhutan-to-establish-formal-diplomatic-relations/ //TKV*

Amid the high-profile examples of U.S. engagement with South Asia - including last February's visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the United States - there lies a great opportunity for Washington to deepen its ties with smaller countries in the region. Bhutan is one such example: a country with which the United States should consider establishing diplomatic relations.

Whole-region strategy: A standalone South Asia strategy covering all South Asian states--including Pakistan and Afghanistan--is necessary to establish clear U.S. priorities.

Threlkeld & Zazycki '24 - *Threlkeld, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth Zazycki. "Revive the South Asia Strategy." Stimson Center, November 26, 2024. https://www.stimson.org/2024/revive-the-south-asia-strategy/ Threlkeld is Senior Fellow and Director of the South Asia Program at Stimson. //TKV*

Develop a comprehensive South Asia strategy. The incoming administration should direct its national security team and relevant agencies to invest attention and resources into the development of an updated South Asia strategy that clearly articulates U.S. interests in the region, allowing Washington to manage challenges and leverage opportunities. It should also recognize the potential for regional states to play key roles beyond South Asia and identify U.S. policy objectives in line with this extra-regional engagement. This strategy should cover all South Asian states - including Pakistan and Afghanistan - to establish clear priorities among the U.S. interests in the region. These include nonproliferation and nuclear risk, counterterrorism, economic growth and debt sustainability, trade and investment, energy security and environmental concerns, and technology cooperation.

India Affirmative: Expand the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiative--solvency advocate with concrete recommendations.

Curtis et al. '25 - *Curtis, Lisa, Kareen Hart, Ryan Claffey, Keerthi Martyn, and Thomas Corel. "Quad: The Next Phase." Center for a New American Security, June 18, 2025. https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/quad Curtis is Senior Fellow and Director of the Indo-Pacific Security Program at CNAS and former NSC Senior Director for South and Central Asia (2017-2021). //TKV*

Expand the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative via use of regional information fusion centers, particularly in the western Indian Ocean. The 2022 IPMDA initiative has been largely successful in providing a maritime common operating picture to track illegal activities, but coverage in the western Indian Ocean has remained sparse. The Quad should investigate expanding information-sharing agreements with the Seychelles' Regional Fusion and Law Enforcement Center for Safety and Security at Sea and the Madagascar Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center to develop a better picture of the entire Indian Ocean.

India Affirmative: Prioritize India's maritime requirements through the Defense Industry Roadmap and iCET--solvency advocate.

Dean et al. '25 - *Dean, Peter, Michael J. Green, and Alice Nason. "Modernizing US Indian Ocean Strategy." The Washington Quarterly 48:1 (2025). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2025.2480514 Green is CEO of the United States Studies Centre and former NSC Senior Director for Asia. //TKV*

A fifth pillar of a US Indian Ocean strategy would be assessing India's maritime security requirements for the Indian Ocean and update exercises planning, the US-India Defense Industry Roadmap, and the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET) to prioritize those areas. Any US Indian Ocean strategy will retain an emphasis on India's preeminence in the Indian Ocean sub-region; US officials remain rightly in agreement that it is in US interests to assume a secondary role, due to competing strategic priorities and material realities. Accordingly, US officials should work within the bilateral to protect against future risks to Indian leadership, building off the positive engagement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump's Washington, DC meeting in February 2025 that boosted US military sales to India, including MQ-9B Sea Guardian and Sky Guardian drones and F-35 Joint Strike Fighters.

India Affirmative: Co-develop anti-submarine warfare and maritime autonomous systems--cooperation requires affirmative government action.

Vignesh '26 - *Vignesh, R. "India-US Defence Cooperation in Advanced Undersea Systems." Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Issue Brief, January 2026. https://idsa.in/publisher/issuebrief/india-us-defence-cooperation-in-advanced-undersea-systems Vignesh is an Associate Fellow at MP-IDSA's Centre for Military Affairs. //TKV*

India's partnership with the United States to develop cutting-edge anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and Maritime Autonomous Systems (MAS) technologies will be crucial to strengthening the Indian Navy's overall underwater domain awareness (UDA) capabilities. Both nations, however, would need to develop enabling policy frameworks and pursue legislative amendments to help their respective defence industries collaborate on developing cutting-edge technologies for the undersea domain. India-US defence cooperation continued to make steady and significant progress throughout 2025, despite diplomatic strains between the two nations related to the Trump Administration's position on Operation Sindoor and its imposition of 50 per cent tariffs on India. There was a series of high-level defence engagements throughout 2025, resulting in the signing of key agreements to guide collaboration on the joint development of advanced military technologies.

India Affirmative: Take the partnership to new heights--technology cooperation, operational cooperation, and framework modernization--solvency advocate.

Lalwani & Singh '25 - *Lalwani, Sameer, and Vikram J. Singh. "How to Get the Most Out of the U.S.-Indian Defense Partnership." War on the Rocks, February 11, 2025. https://warontherocks.com/2025/02/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-the-u-s-indian-defense-partnership/ Lalwani is Senior Advisor at the Special Competitive Studies Project; Singh is a former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia. //TKV*

The first Trump administration made great strides on defense cooperation with India, as did the Biden administration. India is poised to play an important role in deterring Chinese aggression and enhancing stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific. The second Trump administration has an opportunity to take this relationship to new heights and help India play that stabilizing role by advancing defense technology cooperation, enhancing joint military operational cooperation, and updating and reinvigorating the bilateral defense framework. Doing so will require both countries to break old habits and push the envelope of cooperation.

Pakistan Affirmative: Enhanced U.S. counterterrorism cooperation--solvency advocate and the cooperation baseline.

Tactics Institute '26 - *Tactics Institute. "Pakistan's Renewed Commitment: Can Enhanced US Cooperation Turn the Tide Against Terrorism?" 2026. https://tacticsinstitute.com/analysis/pakistans-renewed-commitment-can-enhanced-us-cooperation-turn-the-tide-against-terrorism/ //TKV*

On June 19, 2025, Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif and United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio reiterated Pakistan's commitment against terrorism and the need to strengthen mutual cooperation, which is in follow up to prior commitments, including the Pakistan-U.S. Counterterrorism Dialogue that took place in May 2024 in Washington, DC. These commitments outlined how to counter TTP, IS-K, and others, through capacity building, intelligence sharing and technical assistance, provided by the United States. Since March 2023, the United States has trained more than 300 police and first responders from Pakistan, and has established police training on border security and counterterrorism. The United States' operations were designed to help Pakistan become more adept in identifying, stopping, and responding to terrorist attacks. Joint counter-terrorism efforts have resulted in tangible impact.

Afghanistan Affirmative: Cooperate with the Taliban against ISIS-K--the leading policy option.

Jones '22 - *Jones, Seth G. "Countering a Resurgent Terrorist Threat in Afghanistan." Council on Foreign Relations, Contingency Planning Memorandum Update, April 2022. https://www.cfr.org/report/countering-resurgent-terrorist-threat-afghanistan //TKV*

The first is to work with the Taliban against some terrorist groups, most notably ISIS-K. This option could involve providing economic and humanitarian assistance—and potentially even intelligence—to the Taliban government in return for a sustained campaign against ISIS-K. When asked in 2021 whether the United States could work with the Taliban to combat ISIS-K, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley responded that "it's possible." A variant of this option could be for the United States to de facto leave counterterrorism operations to the Taliban—but provide little or no U.S. assistance. However, this option falls short in at least two ways. First, the Taliban has close ties with numerous terrorist groups in Afghanistan, including al-Qaeda, that are enemies of the United States. While the Taliban has conducted some operations against ISIS-K, Taliban leaders have shown little interest in countering other terrorist groups.

Afghanistan Affirmative: Engagement and recognition are separable--the United States already engages without recognizing.

Threlkeld & Shahid '24 - *Threlkeld, Elizabeth, and Sania Shahid. "Pragmatism and Pressure Points: US-Taliban Engagement." Stimson Center, March 4, 2024. https://www.stimson.org/2024/pragmatism-and-pressure-points-us-taliban-engagement/ //TKV*

As the dust settled through the fall and winter of 2021, the US pursued a policy of tentative engagement. Taliban representatives in Doha tried to assure the international community that they had changed following their draconian rule in the 1990s. Washington adopted a pragmatic approach that combined the provision of humanitarian assistance with steps to prevent the collapse of Afghanistan's economy. Key among these were the general licences issued by the Treasury Department, which sought to facilitate some transactions with Afghanistan despite existing sanctions. Simultaneously, Washington engaged in quiet outreach to Taliban representatives on issues including counterterrorism, inclusivity, and the rights of women and girls. The US resisted calls from the Taliban for diplomatic recognition, sanctions relief, and the unfreezing of Afghan central bank assets, which Washington had undertaken following the Taliban takeover.

Afghanistan Affirmative: Engagement without recognition is a recognized model--Russia cooperated for four years without recognizing.

Popalzay '25 - *Popalzay, Abdul Wasi. "Russia's Strategic Engagement With the Afghan Taliban Post-2021: A Realist Appraisal of Geopolitical Interests, Security Calculus, and Regional Diplomacy." Journal of Eurasian Studies, published online November 30, 2025. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/18793665251401936 //TKV*

Realist considerations have deeply shaped Russia's engagement with the Taliban since 2021. Rather than seeking ideological alignment or democratic transformation, Moscow has prioritized securing its borders, containing jihadist movements, maintaining strategic influence in Central Asia, and resisting perceived Western encroachment. This explains its careful policy of de facto engagement—hosting Taliban delegations, facilitating regional dialogue, and expanding counterterrorism coordination—without extending formal diplomatic recognition, thus avoiding a premature endorsement of a regime still ostracized by much of the international community.

Smaller States Affirmative: Tailored maritime security cooperation with Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka--solvency advocate.

Hossain et al. '25 - *Hossain, Delwar, Rasheeda M. Didi, and Chulanee Attanayake. "Maritime Security Challenges of Smaller South Asian States." Edited by Frank O'Donnell. East-West Center Occasional Paper Special Series. 2025. https://www.eastwestcenter.org/news/announcement/maritime-security-challenges-smaller-south-asian-states-occasional-paper-special //TKV*

Examining the maritime domain and security of Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka illustrates important security factors for the United States and for the world. Multidimensional maritime security is a critical element of global and regional stability and economic development efforts, and crafting cooperation initiatives tailored to the distinct needs of each smaller South Asian state will facilitate optimal outcomes for their national security and the global commons. The Bay of Bengal (BoB) is strategically and economically vital for Bangladesh, supporting 90 percent of its trade and 100 percent of its energy transportation. It has critical geopolitical significance for Bangladesh as an influential littoral state of the BoB, connected with the Indian Ocean.

Negative Evidence

Indian Cooperation Bad: A U.S.-India downturn pushes New Delhi toward a Russia-India-China triple entente, reversing decades of strategic progress.

Pande '25 - *Pande, Aparna. GIS Reports, October 27, 2025. "A new Triple Entente between India, Russia and China." https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/india-russia-china/ Director of the Initiative on the Future of India and South Asia, Hudson Institute. //TKV*

> The most likely scenario is that India will continue to cooperate with the West and sustain its strategic partnership with the U.S., while preserving its close ties with Russia and China. The Russia-India-China Triple Entente is not intended as an anti-Western or anti-American bloc, but rather reflects India's assessment of its geopolitical imperatives. This could change, however, if the current downward trajectory in U.S.-India relations persists and if President Trump's criticism of India extends beyond trade to national security. New Delhi would likely react strongly to any U.S. move to treat India and Pakistan as a single policy framework, intervene in the Kashmir dispute or resume military assistance to Karachi. Any attempt by the U.S. to intervene in India's backyard remains anathema to New Delhi. If this happens, and China - sensing an opportunity - makes India an offer on resolving their border dispute, then a major reset in India-China ties is possible.

Russia remains one of India's top defense suppliers and its continental counterweight to China; breaking up Russia-China alignment requires sustaining--not expanding--current U.S. cooperation.

Pande '25 - *Pande, Aparna. GIS Reports, October 27, 2025. "A new Triple Entente between India, Russia and China." https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/india-russia-china/ //TKV*

> Russia remains one of the top defense suppliers to India, with France, Israel and the U.S. vying for the next few spots. Since 2000, India has bought nearly $40 billion in Russian arms. Purchasing from Russia builds strategic leverage, from New Delhi's perspective. That the equipment is cheaper is an added advantage. Similarly, Russian oil and natural gas - sold at favorable prices under a price cap - is a welcome source of energy for India, which depends on external sources for 80 percent of its energy requirements. Ever since the Sino-Soviet split of 1966, Moscow has been viewed by Indian strategists as India's counterbalance to China on the Asian continental landmass. India views China as a threat on both land and sea, yet considers itself better positioned in the Indian Ocean thanks to the presence of allied navies. On the continental front, India views itself as facing a one (China) or two-front (China and Pakistan) war all on its own.

U.S.-India relations are down now: personal, political, and strategic factors have combined to create the most challenging moment for the partnership in years.

Madan '25 - *Madan, Tanvi. Brookings Institution, August 14, 2025. "A challenging moment for the US-India relationship." https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-challenging-moment-for-the-us-india-relationship/ Senior Fellow, Center for Asia Policy Studies. //TKV*

> Strategically, there's currently a missing element: convergence on China. Shared views of the challenges posed by an assertive China have fueled cooperation between the two countries—and, crucially, incentivized New Delhi and Washington to manage their differences. Within the Trump administration, however, there isn't a consensus or even a dominant view on China. The president himself wants a deal with Xi Jinping. A U.S.-China détente, even if temporary, independently poses problems for India. It also means that China competition hasn't provided the motivation that it has in the past to keep India ties steady or manage differences. Then there's the new element: Trump's personal pique vis-à-vis India. Trump seems miffed that New Delhi, in contrast to Islamabad, has contradicted his claims that he averted nuclear war between India and Pakistan using the threat of tariffs.

Pakistani Cooperation Bad: Continued U.S. security cooperation with Pakistan--including its Major Non-NATO Ally status--undermines the U.S.-India partnership and turns every affirmative internal link.

Palkar & Guha Sarkar '25 - *Palkar, Srujan, and Mrittika Guha Sarkar. "Amid India-Pakistan tensions, the US must rebalance its security priorities in South Asia." Atlantic Council, May 19, 2025. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/amid-india-pakistan-tensions-the-us-must-rebalance-its-security-priorities-in-south-asia/ Palkar is the global India fellow at the Atlantic Council. //TKV*

Yet even as the United States expands strategic cooperation with India—publicly endorsing its counterterrorism priorities—it continues to extend Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status to Pakistan. This gives Pakistan a privileged military cooperation position under US law and eligibility for loans, agreements, and priority weapons delivery, along with closer ties to NATO countries' military establishments—all without any preconditions or accountability on counterterrorism. This dual-track posture risks US credibility and incentivizes ambiguity over accountability. It sustains a structural pattern: provocation by militant actors, calibrated retaliation, and rapid external intervention—without a chance for any party to go to the root of the problems. As such, the United States should pursue a conditional revocation of Pakistan's MNNA status—suspending it while outlining concrete benchmarks for its restoration.

Conditional cooperation counterplan: Revoking or conditioning Pakistan's MNNA status--rather than expanding cooperation--would reframe the relationship around current realities without rupturing it.

Palkar & Guha Sarkar '25 - *Palkar, Srujan, and Mrittika Guha Sarkar. "Amid India-Pakistan tensions, the US must rebalance its security priorities in South Asia." Atlantic Council, May 19, 2025. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/amid-india-pakistan-tensions-the-us-must-rebalance-its-security-priorities-in-south-asia/ //TKV*

In fiscal year 2023, Pakistan's debt servicing obligations absorbed over 80 percent of federal revenue, foreign exchange reserves fell below four billion dollars, and inflation peaked near 30 percent, though it has now eased to around 5 percent. These economic pressures sharply limit the policy options available to civilian leaders. The United States could more effectively support structural economic reforms in Pakistan by explicitly linking privileges—such as MNNA status—to concrete progress on economic governance and institutional accountability. In this context, revoking MNNA would not rupture relations but reframe them around contemporary realities. The United States remains a key voice in international financial institutions and investment forums that shape Pakistan's recovery path. From IMF conditionality to multilateral development flows, economic leverage is now the primary channel of influence.

China Soft Power DA: China is actively exploiting the power vacuum left by USAID cuts across South Asia, offering nearly identical programs and deepening Belt and Road influence.

Cicarelli '25 - *Cicarelli, Siena. "China Seizes an Opportunity from the United States in Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Response." Council on Strategic Risks, April 11, 2025. https://councilonstrategicrisks.org/2025/04/11/china-seizes-an-opportunity-from-the-united-states-in-humanitarian-aid-and-disaster-response/ //TKV*

While the humanitarian toll of the USAID withdrawal is severe - fueling preventable deaths, global health risks, conflict, and inequality - it also threatens US national security interests. The dissolution of USAID has created a soft power vacuum in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific for China to easily fill. The Chinese government has long used foreign aid and investments via the Belt and Road Initiative to gain strategic influence in Africa, Asia, and South America. However, it had to navigate existing US investments and partnerships. Now, with US resources gone, China has the opportunity to bolster its geostrategic interests - and outcompete the United States.

NATO Consultation CP: European allies can play essential roles in South Asia/China contingencies--U.S. policy should engage NATO and the IP4 rather than act unilaterally.

Brady & Byman '25 - *Brady, Iselin, and Daniel Byman. "How NATO Can Support the United States in Asia." Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 24, 2025. https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-nato-can-support-united-states-asia Byman directs the Warfare, Irregular Threats, and Terrorism Program at CSIS. //TKV*

If a conflict with China breaks out, the United States will want the support of its NATO allies. China and Russia hold a "no limits" partnership and aid one another in conflicts that do not directly impact each other, making it critical for the United States to have the support of allies. Although their own capabilities do not offer much significant help militarily in Asia, European states can play several important roles in various contingencies involving China. Before a conflict breaks out, Europe can join with the United States to conduct freedom of navigation operations and military exercises in the Indo-Pacific, signaling their presence and support for the United States. A symbolic military role matters politically even if it is militarily negligible. If a UK frigate is fired on or deployed German forces are killed, these countries would then be implicated in any war, thus increasing the risk to China—and bolstering deterrence.

Counterplan: Non-military approaches solve--military action alone fails against the TTP.

Kayani '26 - *Kayani, Amer. "Beyond Bombing: Pakistan's Sanctuary Problem in Afghanistan." South Asian Voices (Stimson Center), April 2, 2026. https://southasianvoices.org/sec-m-oth-n-pakistan-sanctuary-problem-04-02-2026/ //TKV*

Pakistan's ongoing airstrikes in Kabul and Kandahar on Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Taliban targets has marked a significant escalation in Islamabad's post-2021 Afghanistan policy. Since the Taliban's return to power, Pakistan largely relied on border controls and diplomatic pressure to stop cross-border attacks. These recent direct strikes on the Taliban reflected frustration with the Taliban's unwillingness, or failure, to stop Afghan territory from being used against Pakistan. However, despite Pakistan's repeated military strikes on TTP targets, terrorist incidents increased by 24 percent in 2025, underscoring the hard truth that military action alone will not solve Pakistan's TTP problem. Going forward, Pakistan's military operations against the TTP and the Taliban may cause temporary network disruptions and impose costs on the Afghan Taliban, but they are unlikely to produce a long-term solution so long as the TTP retains sanctuary in Afghanistan.

Appeasement Disadvantage: Engagement rewards repression and emboldens the Taliban.

Feminist Majority Foundation '25 - *Feminist Majority Foundation, quoted in Ms. Magazine, "Russia Becomes First Major Country to Recognize Taliban Regime." July 3, 2025. https://msmagazine.com/2025/07/03/russia-recognize-taliban-afghanistan-women-gender-apartheid/ //TKV*

This recognition legitimizes the Taliban's brutal system of gender apartheid, empowers the Taliban's campaign of oppression against more than half the Afghan population, and sends a dangerous message that repression can be rewarded with international legitimacy. It will only embolden the Taliban to escalate their restrictions and further silence the voices of women, girls, and all those resisting their brutal regime.

India Politics Disadvantage: 2025 was Modi's hardest foreign-policy year--U.S. alignment is domestically contested.

Bajpaee '25 - *Bajpaee, Chietigj. "India's Strategic Autonomy Doesn't Work in a Great Power World." Foreign Policy, November 26, 2025. https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/11/26/india-end-strategic-autonomy/ Bajpaee is a senior research fellow for South Asia at Chatham House. //TKV*

Recent conciliatory statements by both leaders alludes to a de-escalation of tensions and a trade deal eventually being reached between both countries. However, the earlier irrational exuberance in New Delhi about the India-U.S. relationship, as evidenced by Indians being among the most positive about a second Trump term, has faded. So have claims that Modi and Trump maintained a special or privileged relationship. Modi prided himself on maintaining a personalized foreign policy of cultivating close relations with key world leaders. However, this was unable to deter the wrath of Trump's fickle and transactional foreign policy. At a more fundamental level, recent developments point to broader challenges facing India's foreign policy. India's long-standing commitment to strategic autonomy has been both a boon and a burden for the country's foreign policy.

India Politics Disadvantage: 2025 was Modi's hardest foreign-policy year since 2014--U.S. alignment is domestically contested.

Bajpaee '25 - *Bajpaee, Chietigj. "India's Strategic Autonomy Doesn't Work in a Great Power World." Foreign Policy, November 26, 2025. https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/11/26/india-end-strategic-autonomy/ //TKV*

2025 has arguably been the most difficult foreign-policy year for Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he assumed power in 2014. A terrorist attack in Indian-administered Kashmir in April was followed by a four-day conflict between India and Pakistan in May. While brief, the conflict marked the worst period of hostility between the two countries in decades. The India-Pakistan conflict also became a catalyst for the downturn in the India-U.S. relationship as Trump claimed credit for the cessation of hostilities—a narrative refuted by New Delhi but one that Islamabad was only too happy to echo. Adding insult to injury, relations deepened between Islamabad and Washington, with the White House hosting Pakistan Army chief Asim Munir twice since the conflict. Modi and Trump had a phone conversation in June, during which Trump reportedly offered to host Modi and Munir at the White House.

Afghanistan: No partner force or intelligence architecture--the structural constraint that differentiates Afghanistan from Pakistan.

Jones '22 - *Jones, Seth G. "Countering a Resurgent Terrorist Threat in Afghanistan." Council on Foreign Relations, Contingency Planning Memorandum Update, April 2022. https://www.cfr.org/report/countering-resurgent-terrorist-threat-afghanistan //TKV*

However, the counterterrorism campaigns Sullivan mentions differ from the situation in Afghanistan today in three critical ways. First, in contrast to virtually every other U.S. counterterrorism campaign since 9/11, the United States has no partner force on the ground in Afghanistan. The United States worked with the Iraqi government, including the U.S.-trained and equipped Counter Terrorism Service, in Iraq; local security forces, such as the Libyan National Army, in Libya; the Somali government, African Union Mission in Somalia forces, and clan militias in Somalia; the Syrian Democratic Forces in Syria; and militias aided by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen. In Afghanistan today, however, the Taliban is an enemy, and anti-Taliban leaders and groups have fled the country, been killed by the Taliban, laid down their weapons, or even joined ISIS-K. Second, the United States has virtually no intelligence architecture in Afghanistan.

Securitization: naming something a security threat is a self-referential political act, not a neutral description of an objective danger.

Buzan et al. '98 - *Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. Security: A New Framework for Analysis. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998, p. 24. https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781685853808/html //TKV*

> In the case of security, textual analysis (Wæver 1988, 1995b, 1995c) suggests that something is designated as an international security issue because it can be argued that this issue is more important than other issues and should take absolute priority. This is the reason we link the issue to what might seem a fairly demanding criterion: that the issue is presented as an existential threat. If one can argue that something overflows the normal political logic of weighing issues against each other, this must be the case because it can upset the entire process of weighing as such: "If we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way)." Thereby, the actor has claimed a right to handle the issue through extraordinary means, to break the normal political rules of the game (e.g., in the form of secrecy, levying taxes or conscription, placing limitations on otherwise inviolable rights, or focusing society's energy and resources on a specific task). "Security" is thus a self-referential practice, because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue—not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat.

Neoliberal institutionalism: international regimes facilitate decentralized cooperation among self-interested states by reducing transaction costs, providing information, and constructing rules of thumb (illustrated through the IEA energy regime).

Keohane '84 - *Keohane, Robert O. After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984. https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691122489/after-hegemony //TKV*

> At the same time that we analyze how the IEA functions, we can explore in a limited way the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of international organizations in the contemporary world political economy. The theory of international regimes presented above does not predict that an international regime such as the one centered on the IEA will be effective. My argument is that cooperation among independent governments in the absence of hegemony, to achieve joint gains, is possible, and that regimes can facilitate such cooperation by reducing transaction costs, providing information, and constructing rules of thumb to guide bureaucracies in making routine decisions. But nothing has been said here to imply that this will necessarily happen, much less that it will take place automatically. If the argument here is correct, cooperation in energy should not be precluded merely by the principle of sovereignty; and insofar as it takes place, it should occur not as a result of successfully enforcing hierarchical rules, but through facilitating agreements among governments, whether by the use of rules as guidelines or through informal coordination.

Neoliberal institutionalism (continued): cooperation and conflict are not mutually exclusive.

Keohane '84 - *Keohane, Robert O. After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984. https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691122489/after-hegemony //TKV*

> Cooperation therefore does not imply an absence of conflict. On the contrary, it is typically mixed with conflict and reflects partially successful efforts to overcome conflict, real or potential. Cooperation takes place only in situations in which actors perceive that their policies are actually or potentially in conflict, not where there is harmony. Cooperation should not be viewed as the absence of conflict, but rather as a reaction to conflict or potential conflict. Without the specter of conflict, there is no need to cooperate.

Orientalism: “the Orient” is a Western construction produced to dominate, restructure, and hold authority over the East.

Said ‘78 *- Said, Edward W. Orientalism. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 2-3. https://sites.evergreen.edu/politicalshakespeares/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2014/12/Said_full.pdf //TKV*

> Related to this academic tradition, whose fortunes, transmigrations, specializations, and transmissions are in part the subject of this study, is a more general meaning for Orientalism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on. This Orientalism can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx. A little later in this introduction I shall deal with the methodological problems one encounters in so broadly construed a “field” as this.
>
> The interchange between the academic and the more or less imaginative meaning of Orientalism is a constant one, and since the late eighteenth century there has been a considerable, quite disciplined—perhaps even regulated—traffic between the two. Here I come to the third meaning of Orientalism, which is something more historically and materially defined than either of the other two. Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. I have found it useful here to employ Foucault’s notion of a discourse, as described by him in The Archaeology of Knowledge and in Discipline and Punish, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action.

Nuclear orientalism: the West treats its own nuclear weapons as safe but those of Third World and especially Muslim-world states as uniquely dangerous.

Gusterson '99 - *Gusterson, Hugh. "Nuclear Weapons and the Other in the Western Imagination." Cultural Anthropology 14, no. 1 (1999): 111-143, at p. 112. https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1999.14.1.111 //TKV*

> There is a common perception in the West that nuclear weapons are most dangerous when they are in the hands of Third World leaders. I first became interested in this perception while interviewing nuclear weapons designers for an ethnographic study of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL)— one of three laboratories where U.S. nuclear weapons are designed (Gusterson 1996). I made a point of asking each scientist if he or she thought nuclear weapons would be used in my lifetime. Almost all said that they thought it unlikely that the United States or the Russians would initiate the use of nuclear weapons, but most thought that nuclear weapons would probably be used—by a Third World country. The laboratory took a similar position as an institution. For example, using terminology with distinctly colonial overtones to argue for continued weapons research after the end of the Cold War, an official laboratory pamphlet said, Political, diplomatic, and military experts believe that wars of the future will most likely be "tribal conflicts" between neighboring Third World countries or between ethnic groups in the same country. While the Cold War may be over, these small disputes may be more dangerous than a war between the superpowers, because smaller nations with deep-seated grievances against each other may lack the restraint that has been exercised by the US and the USSR. The existence of such potential conflicts and the continued danger of nuclear holocaust underscore the need for continued weapons research. [LLNL 1990:1]

The "good Muslim / bad Muslim" critique: post-9/11 "Culture Talk" turns Islam into a political category and demands that, in Afghanistan, Palestine, or Pakistan, it be quarantined.

Mamdani '02 - *Mamdani, Mahmood. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism." American Anthropologist 104, no. 3 (2002): 766-775. https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/sj6/mamdanigoodmuslimbadmuslim.pdf //TKV*

> The link between Islam and terrorism became a central media concern following September 11, resulting in new rounds of "culture talk." This talk has turned religious experience into a political category, differentiating "good Muslims" from "bad Muslims," rather than terrorists from civilians. The implication is undisguised: Whether in Afghanistan, Palestine, or Pakistan, Islam must be quarantined and the devil must be exorcized from it by a civil war between good Muslims and bad Muslims. This article suggests that we lift the quarantine and turn the cultural theory of politics on its head. Beyond the simple but radical suggestion that if there are good Muslims and bad Muslims, there must also be good Westerners and bad Westerners, I question the very tendency to read Islamist politics as an effect of Islamic civilization—whether good or bad—and Western power as an effect of Western civilization.

Subaltern critique: colonial and imperial "rescue" is structured by the logic "white men are saving brown women from brown men," and the subaltern remains structurally unable to be heard.

Spivak '88 - *Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/Spivak%20CanTheSubalternSpeak.pdf //TKV*

> The relationship between the imperialist subject and the subject of imperialism is at least ambiguous. The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice. (The conventional transcription of the Sanskrit word for the widow would be sati. The early colonial British transcribed it suttee.) The rite was not practiced universally and was not caste- or class-fixed. The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men'. White women — from the nineteenth-century British Missionary Registers to Mary Daly — have not produced an alternative understanding. Against this is the Indian nativist argument, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: 'The women actually wanted to die.' The two sentences go a long way to legitimize each other. One never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness.

Subaltern critique (continued): the subaltern cannot speak--the female intellectual has a circumscribed task she must not disown.

Spivak '88 - *Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sj6/Spivak%20CanTheSubalternSpeak.pdf //TKV*

> I must here acknowledge a long-term usefulness in Jacques Derrida which I seem no longer to find in the authors of The History of Sexuality and Mille Plateaux. The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.

Feminist international relations: asking "where are the women?" reveals how militarization and bases depend on and reshape women's lives.

Enloe '14 - *Enloe, Cynthia. Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014, ch. 1. https://ir101.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Enloe-Bananas-Beaches-and-Bases-Ch.1.pdf //TKV*

> The woman tourist and the chambermaid; the schoolteacher and her students; the film star, her studio owners, the banana company executives, the American housewife, and contemporary YouTube enthusiasts; the male soldier, the brothel owner, and the woman working as a prostitute—all are dancing an intricate international minuet. Those who look closely at the gendered causes and the gendered consequences of that minuet are conducting a feminist investigation of today's international political system.
>
> These "dancers," however, are not in a position to call the tune. Yet even a woman who is victimized is not mindless. It is crucial to this feminist-informed investigation into unequal international relations that we not create a false (and lazy) dichotomy between the allegedly "mindless victim" and the allegedly "empowered actor." Women who are pushed to the far margin of any power system continue to assess and strategize even with the minimal resources they have available; sometimes they move beyond private strategizing to collective organizing. Nonetheless, acknowledging the severely restricted agency exercised by women pushed to the margins is not to deny that some international actors wield a lot more influence and garner far more rewards than do others. Thus, to investigate the gendered workings of international politics we will have to make power visible—power in all its myriad forms. This exploration can be uncomfortable.

Postcolonial South Asia: the modernist project of building South Asian nation-states on singular, exclusionary identities has reached a violent impasse.

Krishna '99 - *Krishna, Sankaran. Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. xvii. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttt8vt //TKV*

> This book is about the troubled and violent journey of postcolonial nationalism in South Asia. It examines the interaction between the modern enterprise of nation building and the emergence of ethnic conflict in this area by focusing on a specific event: Indian political and military involvement in the struggle between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. It argues that the attempt to construct nation-states on the basis of exclusionary narratives of the past and univocal visions for the future has reached an impasse. The fixation with producing a pulverized and uniform sense of national identity (usually along majoritarian lines) has unleashed a spiral of regional, state, and societal violence that appears endless. The disciplines of history and international relations have rendered the narrative of the nation that undergirds the political imaginaire in South Asia as rational, realist, inevitable, and progressive. One finds the contemporary violences, both physical and epistemic, that accompany nation building repeatedly justified by the claim that the history of world politics has demonstrated such violence to be both inescapable and, indeed, necessary. It is perhaps time, however, to reexamine the journey embarked upon in South Asia in the late 1940s: the journey of modernist nationhood with singular conceptions of sovereignty and identity.

Decolonial / Diego Garcia: the U.S.-U.K. base perpetuates the expulsion of the Chagossians and denies their right of return.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights '25 - *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). "Agreement between Mauritius and the UK fails to guarantee rights of Chagossians say UN experts." June 10, 2025. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/agreement-between-mauritius-and-uk-fails-guarantee-rights-chagossians-say-un //TKV*

> "By maintaining a foreign military presence of the United Kingdom and the United States on Diego Garcia and preventing the Chagossian people from returning to Diego Garcia, the agreement appears to be at variance with the Chagossians' right to return, which also hinders their ability to exercise their cultural rights in accessing their ancestral lands from which they were expelled," the experts said. They raised serious questions about whether the foreseen £40 million Trust Fund, which remains subject to yet-to-be adopted regulations, would comply with the right of the Chagossian people to effective remedy and adequate, effective, and prompt reparation, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. Most notably, the current agreement contains no provisions providing for the full panoply of the right to adequate and effective reparations as it does not provide restitution, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition, the experts noted.

Timeliness and Uniqueness Evidence

U.S.-India cooperation is at an inflection point: a trust gap has emerged that only deliberate U.S. action can rebuild.

Lalwani '25 - *Lalwani, Sameer. Interview with Milan Vaishnav. "The Quiet Resilience of U.S.-India Defense Cooperation." Grand Tamasha podcast, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 9, 2025. https://carnegieendowment.org/podcasts/grand-tamasha/the-quiet-resilience-of-us-india-defense-cooperation Lalwani is Senior Advisor at the Special Competitive Studies Project and Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the German Marshall Fund. //TKV*

I think last fall there was an Indian Ocean dialogue that involved effectively a tabletop exercise that couldn't happen for sort of unexpected reasons, but it could have taken place this year, except that now there's you know a trust gap that I think has emerged. So, it sort of sets us back in terms of being able to think through and talk about and plan for the scenarios that we're most worried about. But I also think that this is something that can be rebuilt. Sometimes so for some periods going to be slow and it's going to require like you know some steady outreach by US government officials.

The enabling-agreement architecture (LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA) provides the legal framework for an intensified U.S.-India defense partnership.

Kronstadt '26 - *Kronstadt, K. Alan. "India-U.S.: Major Arms Transfers and Military Exercises." Congressional Research Service, IF12438, Updated March 10, 2026. https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12438 //TKV*

From 2016 to 2020, the United States and India concluded several "enabling" defense cooperation accords which in many cases provide the legal framework for an intensified defense partnership, including a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA); a Communications, Compatibility, and Security Agreement (COMCASA); and a Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Cooperation (BECA). In 2018, the United States elevated India to Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1, allowing it to receive license-free access to some military and dual-use technologies regulated by the Commerce Department. In 2019, the two countries inked an Industrial Security Annex to enable transfers of classified technology between private entities. In 2024, the governments concluded a Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) to facilitate defense industrial collaboration. Negotiations on a Reciprocal Defense Procurement (RDP) agreement began in 2023.

The U.S.-India strategic partnership is anchored in a 2005 defense-cooperation framework and the Quad, widely viewed as a counter to China's growing influence--the competitive backdrop that keeps the topic timely.

Congressional Research Service '26 - *Congressional Research Service. "India-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress." R47597, updated May 4, 2026. https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47597 //TKV*

The U.S. and Indian governments formally launched a "strategic partnership" in 2005, along with a framework for long-term defense cooperation that now includes large-scale joint military exercises and significant defense trade. In concert with Japan and Australia, the United States and India in 2017 reinvigorated the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("Quad") as a flagship initiative in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy during the first Trump Administration. The mechanism is widely viewed, at least in part, as a counter to China's growing influence, although some observers question whether the strategic interests of Quad members are sufficiently aligned for collective action.

Historical Context Evidence

Partition and three wars: the origins of the India-Pakistan rivalry.

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian (n.d.) - *U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian. "Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: South Asia, 1969-1976." https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/south-asia //TKV*

The partition of India in 1947 created West and East Pakistan, two noncontiguous territories that shared a dominant religion of Islam but were very different in terms of language, ethnicity and culture. In the 1970 parliamentary elections, an overwhelming number of East Pakistanis voted for a political party that advocated autonomy for the East, but it was blocked from governing by the Army and the existing Pakistani government, and its leader was jailed. The resulting mass protests in the East were brutally suppressed by the Pakistani Army, which caused a massive refugee movement into neighboring India. In 1971, an internal crisis in Pakistan resulted in a third war between India and Pakistan and the secession of East Pakistan, creating the independent state of Bangladesh. These events altered the relationship between the United States and the region.

The 1971 "tilt": early U.S. involvement followed Cold War logic, aiding Pakistan against Soviet-supplied India.

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian '05 - *U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-7, Preface. June 28, 2005. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/preface //TKV*

Even before the "tilt" toward Pakistan during the war, the Nixon administration concluded that peace and stability in South Asia could only be maintained by aiding Pakistan against a stronger India, which was receiving military aid from the Soviet Union. In addition, Pakistan was serving as a secret conduit on behalf of Nixon and Kissinger in their attempts to open contacts with the People's Republic of China. A major theme of this volume is the Nixon administration's policy of so-called one-time only exceptions of arms sales to Pakistan, a policy that reversed the Johnson administration's moratorium of lethal military sales to both countries after their 1965 war. When over the objections of Secretary of State William Rogers, Nixon released for sale to Pakistan 100 U.S. tanks (formerly the property of the Turkish armed forces), U.S.-Indian relations, which had not been good, deteriorated even further. India responded by closing some United States Information Service (USIS) cultural centers.

Carter-era continuity: U.S. South Asia policy was shaped by nuclear proliferation, the India-Pakistan rivalry, and a preference for democratic partners--themes that still structure the topic.

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian '19 - *U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian. "Release of Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XIX, South Asia." August 8, 2019. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v19 //TKV*

This volume documents the Carter administration's approach to the South Asia region in response to the shifting political landscape at the end of the 1970s. During the first three years of Carter's presidency, U.S. relations with South Asia were shaped by three contextual factors: tensions over nuclear proliferation, the rivalry between India and Pakistan, and the Carter administration's preference for developing closer ties with democratically-elected governments.