



## **Prime Minister's Visit to the United States: A Case of Four Joint Statements**

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the United States on 25-26 June 2017. This was his first visit after President Donald Trump assumed office. It is natural that the visit and the personal relationship developed between the two heads of government was a matter of much speculation, given the friendly disposition shared between Prime Minister Modi and President Barack Obama. The two leaders met eight times in two years and President Obama also visited India twice as President of the United States.

Under President Obama, the United States heightened its engagement with countries of Asia under its pivot or rebalance to Asia policy. It was an effort to signal that the Bush-era stress on the Middle East, democratisation, and terrorism were over. It was also to engage more with the countries that were becoming the economic centre of the world. In general, it was a policy that was to help the United States seek closer relations, economic, political and security with the countries of the region.

President Trump has been critical of the policies of the previous administration and reversed the policies of the previous administration on certain issues such as in climate change, regulations for industries such as coal and energy, health insurance etc. He has also withdrawn the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). With respect to Asia, President Trump, during his campaign and later as President, has focused on the situation in North Korea and the role of China in helping the United States resolve the issue. He is also working with the Republic of Korea and Japan to counter to achieve the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. Post his inauguration he has had meetings with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Xi Jinping. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met with the members of the ASEAN in Washington. He along with Secretary of Defence James Mattis and National Security Advisor McMaster also visited the region including India. Yet, there is no clear articulation of the future policy of the United States towards Asia. It

would seem that the Trump Administration is re-focussed its attention on finding a solution to the crisis in the Middle East, while trying to resolve issues with North Korea. In such circumstances the meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Trump hold importance. As President Trump has not articulated a policy for Asia, the lack of it, allows India the opportunity to bring into the spotlight issues that are of importance to her.

This paper would be an attempt to understand the relationship between India and the United States as has been expressed through four joint statements, since Prime Minister Modi formed the government in 2014. The Joint Statements under study are from the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. The attempt is to understand the changes, if any that have taken place in the relationship over the years and possible direction for the future.

### **The India-US Relationship through four Joint Statements (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)<sup>1</sup>**

Taking the 2017 Joint Statement between Prime Minister Modi and President Trump as the base, the paper is comparing issues that have been agreed about in this statement with the previous statements made under the Administration of President Obama.

#### ***The Indo-Pacific***

The 2017 Joint Statement is titled “The United States and India: Prosperity through Partnership” taking forward from the 2016 Joint Statement that was titled, “The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century”. The 2017 statement states that, a close partnership between the two nations is central to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. To achieve this end they “reiterate the importance of respecting freedom of navigation, over flight, and commerce throughout the region; call upon all nations to resolve territorial and maritime disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law...”<sup>2</sup> while supporting regional economic activity and cooperation. The 2016 statement addressed how the two nations “...should look to each other as priority partners in the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region.”<sup>3</sup> While the respect for freedom of navigation was also part of the 2016 statement, what is different in the present statement is the use of the term Indo-Pacific. The term as opposed to Asia Pacific, highlights India’s centrality to the region. It is also recognition of India’s linkages through the Indian Ocean with the Pacific.

Another point of departure is that, unlike the 2014 Joint Statement that stated, “The leaders (of India and the United States) expressed concern about rising tensions over maritime territorial disputes, and affirmed the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in *the South China Sea*. (emphasis added)”<sup>4</sup>, the Joint Statements in subsequent years have only spoken on the need for freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes without specifically naming any region or territory.

On the issue of Afghanistan, one finds a consistency in the joint statements over the years. They all maintain the need to promote “Afghanistan’s democracy, stability, prosperity, and security.” They also committed to work together through “...continue(d) close consultations and cooperation in support of Afghanistan’s future.” A similar consistency is also found with respect

to building of nuclear and ballistic missile by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), except while the previous statements had '*urged*' DPRK to adhere to international commitments, the 2017 has changed its wording to '*strongly condemned*' DPRK and "...called upon it to *strictly to abide* by international obligations and commitments."

### ***Terrorism***

While the United States in the past has supported India and asked Pakistan to bring to justice the perpetrators of the 26/11 attacks on Mumbai and Pathankot Air base, the 2017 statement, has acknowledged that Pakistan's territory is being used to launch terrorist attacks, not specifically against India only. "The leaders called on Pakistan to ensure that its territory is not used to launch terrorist attacks on other countries. They further called on Pakistan to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai, Pathankot, and other cross-border terrorist attacks perpetrated by Pakistan-based groups."<sup>5</sup> One notable point was that Hizbul Mujahideen Chief Syed Salahuddin was designated a global terrorist by the State Department. This is a success in India's efforts to bring focus on Pakistan-backed cross-border terrorism and support to terrorism at large.

The United States has also expressed support India's initiative for the U.N. Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. As stated before the latest statement also reiterated the commitment of the two nations to strengthen cooperation against terrorist threats through intelligence sharing, operational level anti-terrorism cooperation, prevent terrorist from travel etc.

### ***Defence and Security Cooperation***

India continues to be a 'Major Defence Partner'<sup>6</sup> for the United States and "the United States and India look forward to working together on advanced defense equipment and technology at a level commensurate with that of the closest allies and partners of the United States...."<sup>7</sup>, a point that was also raised in the 2016 statement. The 2016 statement mentioned that, "Under this (partnership) the: (a) The United States will continue to work toward facilitating technology sharing with India to a level commensurate with that of its closest allies and partners. The leaders reached an understanding under which India would receive license-free access to a wide range of dual-use technologies in conjunction with steps that India has committed to take to advance its export control objectives. (b) In support of India's Make in India initiative, and to support the development of robust defense industries and their integration into the global supply chain, the United States will continue to facilitate the export of goods and technologies, consistent with U.S. law, for projects, programs and joint ventures in support of official U.S.-India defense cooperation."<sup>8</sup>

India and the United States renewed the Framework for Defence Relationship, in 2014 for another ten years. The 2017 statement stated, "Reflecting the partnership, the United States has offered for India's consideration the sale of Sea Guardian Unmanned Aerial Systems, which would enhance India's capabilities and promote shared security interests." Stress has also been laid on maritime

security and expanding cooperation on common maritime objectives and develop new exercises. One reason for this focus on the maritime domain could be due to the expanding partnership between the United States Navy and the Indian Navy in the Indo- Pacific. The partnership is towards building interoperability to respond to threats and crisis at the high seas. The joint exercises between the Indian and United States armed forces, intelligence sharing, defence sales, and co-production opportunities, as well as counterterrorism cooperation, point to a deepening of the strategic partnership.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Economic and Trade Ties***

Enhanced cooperation in the maritime domain is also with a view to enhance trade ties between the two nations. The Indian Ocean is the crossroad to global trade, especially energy trade. It is the supply link between the Indo-Pacific and the North and South Pacific coasts. With international trade moving through sea lanes, the Indian Ocean region is of importance to not just India, but also the United States, that has a major naval presence in the waters here. Indian Ocean region is also important as the littoral States of the region are densely populated. It comprises of a number of small islands that are unpopulated or very sparsely populated, which can be used for illegal trade in humans, arms and ammunition and narcotics. They can also be used to plan attacks on commercial and military ships disrupting the normal flow of traffic on a major sea lane.

Economic growth and increased trade between the two nations has been a point of convergence. In the first meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Obama, the two leaders committed to facilitate the actions necessary to increase trade another fivefold from US \$ 200 billion in 2014 (which was an fivefold increase in trade from 2001). It further stated, “President Obama and Prime Minister Modi recognized that U.S. and Indian businesses have *a critical role to play in sustainable, inclusive, and job-led growth and development.*”<sup>10</sup> The 2015 statement stated, “...(the two leaders) expressed confidence that continued bilateral collaboration will increase opportunities for investment, improve bilateral trade and investment ties and lead to the creation of jobs and prosperity in both economies. In this regard, the Leaders agreed to continue to strengthen their broad-based partnership for development through stronger trade, technology, manufacturing, and investment linkages between the two countries and triangular cooperation with partner countries, and that continued efforts to maintain labor standards as per domestic law and agreed international norms will make these linkages more durable.”<sup>11</sup> In the 2016 statement, “the leaders highlighted the strong and expanding economic relationship between the United States and India and *committed to support sustainable, inclusive, and robust economic growth*, and common efforts to stimulate consumer demand, job creation, skill development and innovation in their respective countries.... *they pledged to explore new opportunities to break down barriers to the movement of goods and services*, and support deeper integration into global supply chains, thereby creating jobs and generating prosperity in both economies.”<sup>12</sup> The recent 2017 statement states, “they also resolved to pursue increased commercial engagement in a manner that advances the principles of free and fair trade. To this end, the United States and India plan to undertake a comprehensive review of trade relations with the goal of expediting regulatory

processes; ensuring that technology and innovation are appropriately fostered, valued, and protected; and increasing market access in areas such as agriculture, information technology, and manufactured goods and services.”<sup>3</sup> It also notes, “...that extensive economic and tax reforms launched in their respective countries will unlock immense economic opportunities for both countries, *the leaders committed to further expanding and balancing the trade relationship and to removing obstacles to growth and jobs creation.*”<sup>4</sup> Thus, while the 2016 statement spoke about exploring the need to remove trade barriers, the 2017 statement takes it a step further by stating the two countries will now do the needful. This is in keeping with the President Trump’s campaign pledge of ensuring ‘fair’ trade between the United States and other nations under his Administration. It is also in keeping with the Indian Government’s plans of easing trade regulations to help ease of doing business in and with India.

### **Some Omissions**

There are a number of notable issues that are not mentioned in the 2017 statement. While the United States and India continue to talk about sustainable development and energy strategy that will help balance the needs of the environment and with economic development and energy security needs, there is no mention in the most recent statement about the partnership in developing smart cities (2014, 2015, 2016 statement), the India- US investment initiative (2014 and 2015 statement) along with the Totalisation Agreement<sup>5</sup> (2015 statement). The recent statement in keeping with President Trumps stress on bi-lateral trade is also silent on cooperation between the two nations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). There is also no mention of the United States participation for the Make in India initiatives or the other initiatives launched by the Government of India. It is hoped that some of the issues will be taken up during other meetings between officials of the two governments.

India and the United States share a relationship that has, largely, enjoyed bi-partisan support in the US Congress and the White House and a shared vision across the political, economic and security spheres. Nonetheless, the new administration in the White House has neither reaffirmed the old policies nor disclosed its new vision for the region. Yet it would seem that Prime Minister Modi has been successful in beginning a relationship with President Trump on their common views on the Indo-Pacific, tax reforms, terrorism and the need to build better economic ties.

The view from India is that the United States wants to share its burden of security in Asia with its allies and partners, the withdrawal from the Paris climate change accord is being viewed as an opportunity for China to fill in the void and for India to explore collaborations with the European Union. Economically, the United States’ stress on bi-lateral trade agreements is welcomed by India but India is also a firm support of multi-lateral organisations for trade regulation. The most promising arena for the relationship is in defence sector.

In the joint press statement with Prime Minister Modi, President Trump remarked, “During my campaign, I pledged that if elected, India would have a true friend in the White House. And that is now exactly what you have -- a true friend. The friendship between the United States and India

is built on shared values, including our shared commitment to democracy. Not many people know it, but both American and the Indian constitutions begin with the same three very beautiful words: We the people.”<sup>6</sup> The foundations of the India-United States relationship remain strong encompassing a range of joint foreign economic, social and security policy interests.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Joint Statement of 2014 available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/30/us-india-joint-statement>

Joint Statement of 2015 available at [http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24726/Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_the\\_visit\\_of\\_President\\_of\\_USA\\_to\\_India\\_Shared\\_Effort\\_Progress\\_for\\_All](http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24726/Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_President_of_USA_to_India_Shared_Effort_Progress_for_All)

Joint Statement of 2016 available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/07/joint-statement-united-states-and-india-enduring-global-partners-21st>

Joint Statement of 2017 available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28560/Joint+Statement++United+States+and+India+Prosperity+Through+Partnership>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, (2017)“Joint Statement - United States and India: Prosperity Through Partnership (2017),” <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28560/Joint+Statement++United+States+and+India+Prosperity+Through+Partnership>, Accessed on 06 July 2017.

<sup>3</sup> The Office of the Press Secretary, The White House (2016), “JOINT STATEMENT: The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century (2016),” <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/07/joint-statement-united-states-and-india-enduring-global-partners-21st>, Accessed on 06 July 2017.

<sup>4</sup> The Office of the Press Secretary, The White House (2014), “U.S.-India Joint Statement,” <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/30/us-india-joint-statement>, Accessed on 06 July 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Op.Cit 02, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2017), Accessed on 06 July 2017.

<sup>6</sup> The United States recognised India as a Major Defence Partner in 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Op.Cit 02, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2017), Accessed on 06 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Op.cit 03, The Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, (2016), Accessed on 06 July 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Nirupama Roa and Richard Verma, "Why the U.S. and India Need to Have Each Other's Backs," <http://fortune.com/2017/06/26/narendra-modi-donald-trump-meeting-news/>, Accessed on 07 July 2017

<sup>10</sup> Op. Cit. 04, The Office of the Press Secretary, The White House (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, (2015) "Joint Statement during the visit of President of USA to India "सँझा प्रयास - सबका विकास" - "Shared Effort; Progress for All" (2015)," [http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24726/Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_the\\_visit\\_of\\_President\\_of\\_USA\\_to\\_India\\_Shared\\_Effort\\_Progress\\_for\\_All](http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24726/Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_President_of_USA_to_India_Shared_Effort_Progress_for_All), Accessed on 06 July 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Op. Cit 03, The Office of the Press Secretary, The White House (2016)

<sup>13</sup> Op.Cit 02, The Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2017)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Totalization agreements are international social security agreements that eliminate dual social security taxation, both in the home country and the country where an employee works. Currently, temporary migrant Indian workers in US have to make dual payment of social security contributions by, both at home and in the country where they are deployed. India workers in the US contribute every year to social security taxes but they do not get any benefits. To avail social security benefits in US one has to stay for over 10 years, but work visas in US are provided for maximum of 6 years.

<sup>16</sup> The Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Modi of India in Joint Press Statement," <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/26/remarks-president-trump-and-prime-minister-modi-india-joint-press>, Accessed on 11 July 2017.