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Q7(c)

"India and USA have become such strong strategic partners that they need not become formal allies." Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- Document the India-U.S. strategic partnership (nuclear deal, 2+2, **foundational pacts**, **Quad**)
- Explain why a formal alliance is neither needed nor wanted
- **Comment:** agree with the statement; name residual frictions

Revision summary

The India-U.S. partnership includes the nuclear deal, 2+2s, **foundational pacts** and the **Quad**.

It is already thick on maritime and China-overlapping interests.

A formal alliance would demand camp discipline India will not accept and a LAC guarantee Washington will not cleanly give.

Interests diverge on Russia, trade and Pakistan; a partnership can be elastic, a treaty cannot.

Agree with the statement; keep 2+2 and **Quad** habits so a political swing in Washington does not empty the file.

Introduction

- **India and the United States now share a** strategic partnership: the civil nuclear bargain, 2+2 ministerial meetings, logistics and communications pacts, intelligence-adjacent arrangements, and the **Quad**. The statement that they have become **so strong that they need not become formal allies** is **right**. An alliance treaty would add a legal chain without adding the cooperation they already choose.

Body**How strong the partnership is**

The relationship moved from sanctions after 1998 to a **de facto** technology and maritime partnership. Foundational agreements allow refuelling, secure communications and geospatial sharing. Defence industry talk, student mobility, and a shared **Indo-Pacific** vocabulary (5(d)) are thicker than any Cold War non-aligned distance. On China, interests overlap even when language differs. This is already **alliance-like in parts of the military-technical stack**.

Why not a formal ally

Formal allies take **Article 5-type** obligations. India will not promise to fight the United States' wars, and Washington will not write an unambiguous guarantee for the LAC that binds Congress on India's terms. **Strategic autonomy** - Russia oil and platforms, Iran energy

memory, WTO fights, and a Global South voice - would look like breach of camp discipline. U.S. domestic politics (human rights, tariffs, immigration) would enter Indian elections as treaty politics. For the United States, a non-allied India is still useful: it looks less like containment cosplay to ASEAN.

Morgenthau would say an alliance should match defined interests. Here interests **overlap on China and the sea** and **diverge on Russia, trade and Pakistan**. A partnership can be issue-based. A treaty cannot be as elastic.

Comment

- **Agree: they need not** become formal allies. The partnership is strong **because** it is not a camp. Residual friction - export controls, CAATSA-type sanctions threats, data and farm trade, and U.S. comments on Indian domestic politics - is easier to manage without a treaty that turns every friction into a loyalty test. The risk of the statement is complacency: without some institutional density, a change of U.S. administration can still thin the partnership. The **Quad** and 2+2s are that density. They are not NATO, and they should not try to be.

Flow diagram

India-US partnership -> Quad 2+2 pacts
India-US partnership -> Autonomy Russia WTO
Formal alliance -> Article 5 costs
India-US partnership -> Strong enough without treaty

Conclusion

India and the United States have built a strategic partnership that already does much of an alliance's work on China and the Indo-Pacific. A formal alliance would cost autonomy and would not clarify the LAC. They need not become allies. They do need to keep the partnership's habits, because strength here is practised, not sworn.

Facts & figures

Foundational pacts

LEMOA, COMCASA and BECA enable logistics, secure comms and geospatial cooperation without a mutual-defence treaty.

Quad

The principal minilateral; not NATO, not **Article 5**.

Civil nuclear deal

The political opening that ended the post-1998 sanction era and made later defence intimacy possible.