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Senator McCain Presses for Expanded U.S.-India Partnership

By Jeff Baron | Staff Writer | 05 November 2010



Senator John McCain calls the partnership with India "one of the most consequential bipartisan successes of recent U.S. foreign policy."

Washington — Senator John McCain says the U.S.-India strategic partnership, substantial though it is, should be expanded greatly in coming years for the benefit of both countries and the Asia-Pacific region.

"The potential to expand our partnership is immense," McCain told an audience on the eve of President Obama's state visit to India.

The U.S. Election Day on November 2 "was a reminder, as if we needed one, that Americans will always have plenty to fight about, but I am pleased that the U.S.-India relationship hasn't been one of them. We need to keep it that way," McCain said. "We need to continue to elevate our partnership with India above the political fray because its potential benefits are too important to America, to India and to the world."

McCain, a senior Republican lawmaker who was Obama's opponent in the 2008 presidential election, called the U.S.-India strategic partnership "one of the most consequential bipartisan successes of recent U.S. foreign policy. It began with President Bill Clinton's historic visit to India in 2000. It grew exponentially with President George W. Bush's strategic decision to invest America's global influence in the propulsion of India's rise to power, a decision that reached its fullest expression in the groundbreaking civilian nuclear agreement."

McCain also praised the support for the partnership among Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who he

said staked "his political life" on achieving the nuclear agreement.

Speaking at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, McCain said the U.S.-India partnership should encompass the range of areas on which the countries share strategic interests: "defeating terrorism and extremism, shaping the rise of China, securing the global supply of energy and developing new sources of it, sustaining global economic growth and strengthening geopolitical trends with favorable, open societies." He said the countries share basic values: human rights, democratic limits on state power, tolerance and entrepreneurialism.

"Who can believe in 'Asian values' or doubt the universality of democratic capitalism in a world where India exists?" he asked.

McCain offered three strategic goals for the U.S.-India relationship: in South Asia, shaping "sovereign, democratic states" that "contribute to one another's security and prosperity"; in the Asia-Pacific region, acting to favor "free societies, free markets, free trade and free commerce"; and globally, strengthening "a liberal international order and an open global economy."

In South Asia, the main threat is "the violent Islamist extremism emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan," McCain said. He added that, for India's sake as well as its own, the United States must remain in Afghanistan "until the job is done" and Afghanistan offers no haven for terrorism.

He urged caution in the U.S. policy toward Pakistan and its army. "Though our common interests with Pakistan's army are limited, the U.S. and India have a natural partner in the overwhelming majority of Pakistani society. We all desire a civilian-led, democratic Pakistan that lives in peace with India and fights all the terrorist groups operating in Pakistan," he said.

The senator praised India's growing security relationships with other democratic Asia-Pacific nations, including Australia and Japan, and said these moves will increase India's sovereignty rather than limit it. He said security cooperation with the United States can include intelligence, space and cyberspace as well as the two militaries on land and at sea.

"There's no reason why we can't work to facilitate India's deployment of advanced defense capabilities such as nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, missile defense architecture, as well as India's inclusion in the development of the joint strike fighter," he said.

"Of course, some may think this is all directed at the containment of China," McCain added. "The United States and India seek positive relationships with China, and we each hope that China's rise to power is accompanied by Chinese decisions to wield that power responsibly."

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