

India's ruling elite welcomes Biden-Harris victory in US presidential election

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The victory of the Democrat Joe Biden and his running mate Kamala Harris in the US presidential election has been widely hailed by India's ruling elite—from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the leader of the main opposition Congress Party, Sonia Gandhi.

This consensus is born of the calculation that a Biden administration will be no less committed than a Trump-led Republican one to expanding the anti-China Indo-US “global strategic partnership.”

Modi, a lifelong member of the Hindu supremacist RSS, has been a close ally of Trump, a partnership based in part on their political affinities as promoters of authoritarian reaction and anti-Muslim chauvinism. When Trump appeared at the “Howdy Modi” rally in Houston in Sept. 2019, the Indian prime minister all but endorsed his re-election.

Nevertheless, Modi was among the first world leaders to congratulate Biden after he was declared president-elect. In his congratulatory tweet, Modi voiced confidence “that the vibrant India-US ties will get even stronger with your support and leadership.” He also included a special reference to Kamala Harris, whose mother emigrated from India to the US when she was 19.

In a subsequent telephone conversation with Biden, Modi emphasized his eagerness to work with the new administration, which is set to take office on January 20, although Trump continues to seek a means to illegally nullify the election. According to an Indian government statement on their Nov. 17 call, the pair “agreed to work closely to further advance the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, built on shared values and common interests.” Among “their priorities” is “cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region.”

Sonia Gandhi, in her letter to Biden, wrote, “We were greatly re-assured by your measured speeches, stress on healing divisions among the people, and promotion of gender and racial equality, global cooperation and sustainable development of all countries.”

Modi and the Indian media have highlighted Harris’

“Indian origin,” suggesting that this could cause the Biden administration to take a more favourable view of India's foreign policy ambitions. Harris no doubt will be used to promote and provide a phony “progressive” face to the reactionary and geopolitically incendiary alliance between US imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie. But like all the other members of Biden's administration, her exclusive focus will be on advancing Washington and Wall Street's predatory economic and strategic interests.

The development of a close military-strategic partnership with India to counter a “rising China” has been a key bipartisan plank of US foreign policy and world strategy for the past two decades. Both Democratic and Republican administrations have pressed for the integration of the two countries' militaries and closer foreign policy coordination. Likewise, the support within India's ruling elite for their partnership with Washington is virtually universal, since it is viewed as the best means to advance New Delhi's ambitions to become South Asia's regional hegemon and emerge as a world power.

Biden, as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during much of George W. Bush's presidency, and the Vice President under Barack Obama, has played a leading role in developing the Indo-US alliance. In December 2006, he expressed the view that the US partnership with India has the potential to become the single most important relationship for Washington. Biden said at the time, “My dream is that in 2020, the two closest nations in the world will be India and the United States. If that occurs, the world will be safer.”

The Indian media has also recalled how Biden played a key role in securing bipartisan support in the US Congress for the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, which was central to cementing the strategic partnership between the two countries. It gave India a unique status under the world nuclear regulatory regime, allowing it to purchase civilian nuclear fuel and technology, and thereby focus its indigenous resources on developing its nuclear weapons program, although New Delhi had defied and continues to

refuse to sign the American imperialist-designed Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

During the Obama-Biden administration, the Indo-US partnership became even closer. Major steps in this process included: the declaration of formal US support for India's request for permanent membership in the UN Security Council; the naming of India as a "Major Defence Partner"; India's embrace of Washington's line on the US-instigated South China Sea dispute; and the signing in August 2016 of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA). Under the LEMOA, US warships and warplanes have access to Indian ports and bases for routine refueling, re-supply and repair, and vice versa.

Biden's campaign platform indicates that his administration will further develop the US-India military-strategic partnership as a key part of Washington's war drive against Beijing. Underscoring the importance of India and the Indian Ocean to Washington's plans to contain and strategically encircle China, the Pentagon recently renamed its Asia-Pacific Command the Indo-Pacific Command.

The Democratic Party election platform, adopting language virtually identical to that of Trump and his thuggish Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, declares, "A Biden Administration will also work with India to support a rules-based and stable Indo-Pacific region in which no country, including China, is able to threaten its neighbours with impunity."

In an attempt to give a democratic gloss to American imperialism's predatory partnership with India, the Biden campaign document reprises the rhetoric that all US administrations have used since the last years of Clinton's presidency. It claims their anti-China alliance is based on "shared values" between "the world's oldest and largest democracies" and promotes it as a contribution to global peace and respect for international law.

This is all lies. The stepped up military and strategic cooperation between Washington and New Delhi has further heightened war tensions in an already explosive region, both between India and Pakistan, and India and China.

Moreover, the ruling elites in both India and America are visibly breaking with democratic forms of rule.

India's BJP government is notorious for its open assault on basic democratic rights and promotion of Hindu supremacism. In August 2019, it carried out a constitutional coup against Jammu and Kashmir, illegally abolishing the semi-autonomous constitutional status of India's only Muslim-majority state and transforming it into two union territories. The coup was bound up with a massive intensification of police-military repression against the BJP's political opponents and the Kashmiri population as a whole.

Last December, the Modi government pushed through its anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), then responded to the massive country-wide protests this provoked with lethal state violence. Many leaders of the anti-CAA protests are now facing frame-up charges, with the police and government seeking to shift onto them responsibility for the BJP-instigated communal riots that convulsed parts of Delhi last February.

In the US, democratic rights are arguably in an even more perilous state. Trump, with the support of much of the Republican Party leadership, has initiated a coup with the aim of nullifying the election and using state and fascist violence to suppress popular opposition and establish a presidential dictatorship. Terrified of any popular mobilization against Trump's coup plot, Biden and the Democrats have responded by downplaying and dismissing the threat posed by Trump and have appealed to the military and intelligence apparatus to arbitrate the political crisis.

The speed with which Modi recognised Biden as President-elect, despite his close ties to Trump, attests to New Delhi's great confidence that a Biden-led Democratic Party administration will be just as committed to the US-India military-strategic partnership as Trump and the Republicans. The BJP government would also have wanted to use quick recognition of the President-elect as a means to make clear that it does not see India's longstanding close strategic ties to Russia as constituting any obstacle to their jointly deepening the Indo-US strategic partnership, even though the Democrats have focussed their attack on Trump over his supposedly too conciliatory attitude to Russia, and a Biden administration is certain to ratchet up tensions with Moscow.

The Indian elite also anticipates that Biden will be less aggressive than Trump over trade disputes between the two countries. The Trump administration imposed several trade-war type measures against India, including higher tariffs on aluminium and steel, while demanding the removal of the remaining restrictions on US imports and investment in India.



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