

India-Us Defense and Strategic Cooperation: The Post-Cold War Setting

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ABSTRACT

US – India relations entered a new phase in the post-cold war era. This new face of U. S. - India engagement has been persistently deepening and fostering in a manner that the US vividly supports India's rise as a significant part of Asian security and stability. This article explains the shift within the U.S. policy establishment towards India in the post-cold war era. The study additionally highlights the strategic importance of India from the American perspective. It also reviews the shared interests of the U.S. and India that turned- up a new page in U. S.-India relations. Consequently, the United States began to classify India as an important partner to work with in the 21st century. The early nineties brought about vital changes in the international political and strategic scene. The soviet Union disposed of its political and ideological stance and terminated its military confrontation with the US. Finally, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the communist regimes in Eastern Europe started tottering and collapsing. The Warsaw pact lost its value. The Berlin Wall fell, east embraced west.

Keywords: *Warsaw pact, Berlin Wall, collective security system, new arms control agreements, Cold War period in the South Asian region, The U.S. strategic concerns Asia-Pacific and Middle East., terrorism*

INTRODUCTION

US – India relations entered a new phase in the post-cold war era. This new face of U. S. -India engagement has been persistently deepening and fostering in a manner that the US vividly supports India's rise as a significant part of Asian security and stability. This article explains the shift within the U.S. policy establishment towards India in the post-cold war era. The study additionally highlights the strategic importance of India from the American perspective. It also reviews the shared interests of the U.S. and India that turned- up a new page in U. S.-India relations. Consequently the United States began to classify India as an important partner to work with in the 21st century.

The early nineties brought about vital changes in the international political and strategic scene. The soviet Union disposed of its political and ideological stance and terminated its military confrontation with the US. Finally, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the communist regimes in Eastern Europe started tottering and collapsing. The Warsaw pact lost its value. The Berlin Wall fell, east embraced west. The US emerged as a unipolar actor and its role in the Gulf War in January-February 1991 added a new dimension in U.S. domination of the world. Emerging as a unilateral power on the world scene, the United States introduced a new world order that was to build the post-Cold War international political, economic and strategic milieu, on its own terms. The main aims of the future U.S. global agenda were:

1. New leadership role for the United States in the new emerging world.
2. Establishment of the collective security system, emphasising the multinational cooperation to deter aggression and achieve peace and prosperity.
3. Prevention of the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them by concluding and verifying new arms control agreements and non-proliferation regimes.
4. Promotion of concept of secular democracy.
5. Enhancement of the respect for human rights.
6. Development of market economies.
7. Growth of the U.S. economic potential to accelerate trade, investment, and implementation of effective principles of proportional gains.
8. Protection against international threats of narcotics, terrorism and environmental problems¹.

The guiding principle for implementation and expansion of the new international order triggered the idea of establishment of a new regional alliance system in different parts of the world. It was presumed that the new regional power centres, likely Israel, Germany, Britain, France, India, South Korea, and Japan, would support the U.S. foreign policy agenda and play a significant role on the political, military and economic fronts of international scenario in future². President George Bush (1989-93) described the scenario as follows “We can help ensure future peace and defend our interests through a range of military arrangements... bilateral alliances, access agreements, and structures. While we must adjust our force structure to

reflect post Cold War realities, we also must protect our interests and allies³.”

To promote the U.S. international policy goals, the American policy makers presented a three- pronged strategy of ‘Shape, Respond and Prepare.’ This three-pronged strategy aimed at shaping up the environment to “prevent or deter threats through diplomacy, international assistance, arms control programs, nonproliferation initiatives, and overseas military presence.” This strategy retained the option to “respond across the full spectrum of potential crisis,” and maintained the ability to meet the new “challenges of tomorrow’s uncertain future⁴.” Such an approach presented both challenges and opportunities.

3.2 STRATEGIC DEFENCE COOPERATION

From the U.S. perspective, the South Asia region, remained relatively significant to pursue its new world order⁵. The new priorities of the Americans in the region were:

1. Halting the trend towards nuclear proliferation.
2. Preserving peace and stability in the region
3. Strengthening the trend towards democratisation
4. Promoting the respect for human rights.
5. Pursuit of U.S. interests in trade and investment; and
6. Promote bilateral assistance to enhance economic development.

The U.S. policy in South Asia focused on the reinvention of the region as a nuclear free and democratic area. The region was also underscored for enlargement of the U.S. economic interests, in course of the development of a free market economy⁶. New policy orientations reversed the options in the past and set new trends in diplomacy. The new adjustments in U.S. South Asia policy were in accordance with the new international strategic order that changed the course of U.S. alignment of the Cold War period in the South Asian region.

India was regarded as a regional power centre. Recommending an Indo- centric policy in South Asia, many American experts underlined that India as the largest democracy and the dominant power in the region could play an important role to check future challenges⁷. Henry Kissinger, former U.S. Secretary of state, quoted India in his article entitled ‘New World Order,’ as a dominant power in the South Asian region. He said that “the Indian nation has retained a finely-tuned

sense of domination which causes it to insist on prominence over all territories controlled from New Delhi at the acme of British rule⁸.”

Indian defence potentials, in particular, were viewed as very important. India’s blue- water navy was rated as appropriate to meet the U.S. interests in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf region. Indian military strength was also valued as a countervailing power against China. The Americans had viewed the rising tide of Islamic extremism in Afghanistan and Central Asian republics as a more serious challenge to the new international order. Pakistan had been ranked as a main promoter of Islamic extremism in the region. India as a secular democracy was considered as effective to check Islamic extremism and terrorism⁹. Under the different recommendations from U.S. study groups for evaluation of U. S. -India relations in the 21st century, India was assigned a central role in the new world order. The U.S. strategic concerns that prompted the U.S. government to form a strategic partnership with India were:

1. China’s emergence with a huge military might in the Asia-Pacific which could eventually challenge the U.S. predominance in the region.
2. Russia’s potential revival could alter the international security arrangements, inserting new role for Moscow in the European affairs, but more so in the Asia-Pacific and Middle East.
3. An emerging strategic partnership between Russia and China could complicate the strategic equation on the Western rim of the Pacific.
4. Challenges posed by the heady mix of Islamic terrorism, Afghanistan, Pakistan and some of the Central Asian Republics, and moreover, the Gulf poses grave challenges for the United States and India, on the whole.
5. Pakistan-sponsored potential Talibanization in Afghanistan could mess up with the South West Asia scene.
6. A politically and economically unstable nuclear Pakistan can be dangerous for world peace. Pakistan as a central Islamic state can most probably supply nuclear material to other Islamic countries.
7. In view of expanding Talibanization, Islamists can take control of Pakistani nukes¹⁰.

Looking at India’s foreign policy in the post Cold War period, it seems obvious that New Delhi has kept its options open vis-à-vis relations with other countries and sharing of the global concerns. India moved swiftly to transform its relations with America in a

partnership. The Indians had realised that strategic partnership with the unipolar world power would carry support in political, military, and economic terms and help build a suitable environment for the extension of Indian influence in the region. The downgrading of Pakistan's image as a promoter of Islamic terrorism and its incredibility in international politics had provided a great opportunity for the Indians to win the trust of the United States and filled the vacuum left by the uncertainties of the Pakistan-United States alliance. Times of India wrote:

The end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Gulf war has created unprecedented opportunities for India to wean the US away from its traditional ally, Pakistan. The transformation of US-Pak relations are a major security gain for India. In fact, Pakistan is not likely to hand over a nuclear device to fellow Islamic countries, but the pan-Islamic wave sweeping the region can hardly make the US comfortable on this score. US now sees militant Islam as one of the biggest threats (and) Pakistan simply cannot be a credible US ally against militant Islam. In sum, India has a golden opportunity to capitalize the US on the downgrading of Pakistan, (and) should not spoil this by knee-jerk anti-imperialist sentiment¹¹ .”

From the Indian perspective, the factors which influenced India to build a strategic partnership with the United States were the following:

1. With its growing stockpile of nuclear weapons and military might, China poses a long range security threat to India.
2. Pakistan's nuclear capability and its exclusive missile armory have added a horrifying dimension to the South Asian security scenario.
3. The deepening China-Pakistan strategic nexus could create a security challenges which are entirely against the Indian interests.
4. Expanding Islamic militancy, sponsored and launched by Pakistan, has engendered the Indian security, externally and internally. India singly cannot handle this threat of Islamic militancy, therefore it needs international collaboration.
5. Swiftly developing strategic relations between Russia and China are creating an equilibrium of power to checkmate the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. China's increasing activism is entirely against the Indian interests in the region¹².

During the Gulf War, the new tendency in Indian policy appeared when the Indian government provided maximum logistic support to the U.S. forces in the Indian Ocean. India provided refueling facilities to the U.S. aircrafts transiting from the Far East to the Gulf through India¹³. It was a turning point in Indian policy towards the United States–India strategic partnership. The U.S. government hailed the Indian stand during the Gulf war. This Indian gesture helped much to bring the two states closer. New Delhi also concluded an agreement with Washington to share valuable military intelligence¹⁴.

3.3 INDIA-US DEFENCE RELATIONSHIP

The Indo-U. S. Military collaboration began in 1992. Military cooperation grew so far that an India-U. S. Army Executive Steering Committee was set up. This was followed by the setting up of the Joint Steering Committee of the two countries. Subsequently, the two countries' Navies carried out their first ever joint exercise in May 1992¹⁵. The Clinton administration swiftly worked on the agenda for South Asia that centred on giving a real shape to the strategic engagement with India. Consequently, the new U.S. policy towards South Asia signified that the future ties of U.S. with India would no longer be a prisoner of U.S. relations with Pakistan. The following trends were discernible:

1. America discarded its policy of being “evenhanded” towards both India and Pakistan- a policy which equated the two countries.
2. A new policy was adopted in contrast to the past policy of pressurising India towards a solution of the Kashmir dispute.
3. A congruent approach appeared among the Americans over the Indian stand that Pakistan had been promoting cross-border terrorism in India generally and Kashmir in particular. The United States promised to join hands with India in the fight against terrorism.
4. Furthermore, the US stepped back from its policy of advising India on its matters with Pakistan, particularly Kashmir¹⁶.

The diplomatic maneuverings recurrently took place for the upward march towards the beginning of a new phase in India-U. S. Relations. The visit of the Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to the United States in May 1994 was historic in this regard. It marked the commencement of a new phase in U.S.-India relations. The Indian

and American leaders discussed security related concession to make the strategic bargain workable and mutually advantageous for both sides. Both the sides agreed to expand official contacts, advance and improve on the 1984 understanding on high-technology transfer, boost defence cooperation, and commerce. In mid- January 1995, Defence Secretary William Perry visited India and he concluded a defence agreement with his Indian counterpart and established a ‘Defence Policy Forum, to reevaluate the strategic interests of both the countries, promote links between officials of both sides and increase steadily the opportunities of training and joint exercises. This landmark agreement on military cooperation was a breakthrough in India- U.S. relations¹⁷. The agreement provided for “consultations between the Pentagon and India’s Defence Ministry, as well as joint military exercises, military training, defence research, and weapons production.”

About the agreement, William Parry commented that the agreement would open “a new era in our security relations¹⁸.” Immediately after the William Perry visit, Secretary of Commerce, Ron Brown¹⁹, went to New Delhi, where he agreed to establish a ‘Commerce Forum’ to open new vistas for the promotion of economic relations between the two countries. U.S Secretary of Treasury Robert E Rubin²⁰ also visited India, and signed an agreement to increase investment in India. Now, heavy lobbying took place in Washington for the new, broader relationship between India and United States. On August 6, 1997, President Clinton, speaking at a White House press conference, referred to a stronger U.S. presence in South Asia and said that the “U.S. presence should be ‘heavily’ felt in South Asia because of the long relationship America had with India and because of the enormous potential of the region for good if things go well and for ill if things don’t. ... We can be an even better friend in the next 50 years, and a more constructive supporter of resolving these difficulties in the near term.”

The diplomatic move between India and United States received a further boost when Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral met President Clinton in New York on September 23, 1997 at the annual session of the UN General Assembly. Both the leaders agreed to press the strategic discussions to a decisive point by resuming the debate on nuclear proliferation and disarmament that had been stalled for about three years. The U.S. Under-Secretary of State Thomas Pickering arrived in New Delhi in October 1997 and initiated the broad-ranging strategic dialogue on the lines elucidated at the Gujral-Clinton meeting²¹. Pickering’s mission was successful in carrying forward the “new beginning” in India-United States relations. Strategic links between the two states swiftly

expanded with the continuation of the various projects and supply of military equipments and technologies. In terms of economic plans, the India–United States strategic partnership was also based on joint ventures. India offered large opportunities for the American investors. The U.S. companies including General Motors Corp, Kellogg, Du Pont and Motorola Inc., started projects in India²². Over time, the nuclear issue appeared as central to all the strategic dialogues for upgrading the India-U. S. Partnership. The U.S. officials started to acknowledge the nuclear capabilities of India. They underlined the option of a ‘grand bargain’ with India in the nuclear field. The American experts proposed a change in U.S. nuclear non-proliferation policy, emphasising a stable nuclear relationship with India that would help India in ending India’s nuclear isolation and attaining the legitimacy as a nuclear weapon state. Selig S. Harrison, a renowned American expert on South Asian affairs, suggested a nuclear deal with India²³. He proposed that the United States should abandon its “roll back” policy and “reconcile to India’s acquisition of the nuclear weapons option.” The United States, he argued, should lift “ban on the sale of nuclear reactors to India and other restrictions on U.S. cooperation with India’s civilian nuclear power programme.” Sumit Ganguly, a leading American specialist on South Asian affairs, suggested that the United States should adopt a new approach towards India, conceding India the right to “retain and pursue its nuclear option because of major security concerns²⁴.” Consequently, the Clinton administration adopted a low key approach with regard to India on nuclear proliferation. The rollback approach was replaced by the policy of advanced technological cooperation with India. This new policy focused on locating the nuclear issue in the broader context of the search for a comprehensive strategic deal with India. Sumit Ganguly commented that the nuclear stability with India had been the essential part of US-India strategic partnership, aspiring India as a legitimate nuclear power to create an equilibrium vis-a-vis China’s nuclear dominance. The Indian nuclear tests further consolidated the grounds for developing a nuclear understating between India and the United States.

3.4 BILATERAL LEVEL DEFENCE

The United States-India strategic dialogue, which expanded over fourteen rounds in 1998-1999, was the longest series of negotiations at the bilateral level between the two

countries. The talks focused on issues related to security, disarmament, and nonproliferation. They led to create more understanding on security concerns amongst the authorities of both sides²⁵. President Clinton's visit to India in March 2000 was crucial in starting a new era in India-U. S. Relations "India-U. S. Relations: A Vision for the 21st Century" signed by President Clinton and Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee was a unique, groundbreaking agreement that defined the agenda of the partnership between the two states in the 21st century. The statement expressed the shared belief that the relationship between the two countries could be a vital factor in shaping international peace, prosperity and democratic freedom and for ensuring strategic stability in Asia and beyond. It reaffirmed:

In the new century, India and the United States will be partners in peace, with a common interest in a complimentary responsibility for ensuring regional and international security. We will engage in regular consultations on, and work together and with others for strategic stability in Asia and beyond. We will bolster joint efforts to Counter Terrorism and meet other challenges to regional peace. We will strengthen the international security system, including in the United Nations and support the United Nations in its peacekeeping efforts, we acknowledge that tensions in South Asia can only be resolved by the nations of South Asia²⁶.

The leaders of both sides agreed over various initiatives to speed up and integrate the process of forwarding the U.S. – India relationship in depth. These steps included²⁷:

1. Regular bilateral summits.
2. Constant meetings between the senior officials of both sides to discuss the mutual concerns in a broad range related to security, economy and non-proliferation.
3. Regular meetings of the Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism to intensify cooperation and sharing information.
4. Bilateral economic discourse through a high rank coordinating panel, led by the U.S. Secretary of Treasury and Indian Finance Minister.

5. Commercial dialogue between the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and India's Minister of Commerce & Industry.
6. U. S. -India Working Group on Trade to boost understanding and cooperation on trade policy.
7. Joint Consultative Group on Clean Energy and Environment would focus on collaborative projects, clean energy technologies, private and public sector investment and cooperation, climate change and other environmental issues.

This constant dialogue process was given the name as 'Dialogue Architecture,' and as a part of this Dialogue Architecture, Prime Minister Vajpayee paid a visit to the United States in September 2000. This visit helped to reaffirm the broader vision of relations. Clinton and Vajpayee stressed for the continuation of dialogue on security, non-proliferation and disarmament as well as on trade, and energy to open more doors for cooperation in these areas²⁸. Perhaps from New Delhi's perspective, for the first time India's security concerns, economic strength, and capabilities in information technology were recognised at the highest level in Washington²⁹.

3.5 NUCLEAR RELATIONSHIP POST COLD WAR

A broader strategic alliance with India could not take a compact shape unless India's nuclear option was not protected. As part of the U.S. grand strategy to contain a rising China, the Americans had depicted India's nuclear capability as a counterbalance to China's nuclearisation. According to Joseph Cirincione³⁰, America's best known weapons expert and former Director for Nonproliferation at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, dealing with China in the future, India would be "more valuable as a nuclear power, rather than as a non nuclear country³¹."

Eventually, the Americans maintained a high-handed approach towards the nuclearisation in South Asia. Thus, the Americans wilfully kept mum on the Indian nuclear programme. They decided to broaden India's access to nuclear technology. While, Pakistan's nuclear programme comparatively was dealt with in a rigid way and pressure was put on Pakistan to stop its efforts for nuclearisation. The U.S. coercive diplomacy against Pakistan's nuclear programme revolved around military and economic sanctions and restrictions in presidential clearance certificate, aiming at halting the process of developing the nuclear capability. The nuclear tests in 1998 by India and

Pakistan radically shifted the South Asian security environment. After the nuclear tests, the US government immediately imposed sanctions under the auspices of the US Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Act of 1994. However, as the U.S. strategy for re-engagement in the Asia-Pacific region had focused on improving bilateral relations with India, the Americans embarked on the policy of cultivating India as a strategic and nuclear partner. The Americans argued that a nuclear India could be a better option to be an equilibrium vis-a-vis China's nuclear dominance³². The 'strategic dialogue' conducted by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Foreign Minister of India Jaswant Singh held in 1998-99 led to elaborate discussions on the security perceptions of both states. Both sides were determined to develop broad-based bilateral security relations in the 21st century³³. The Clinton administration started to treat India as a nuclear democracy. While on the other hand, Pakistan was considered as a dangerous proliferating state³⁴.

According to Bruce Riedel, a Senior Fellow at The Saban Centre for Middle East Policy, Washington, Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear bomb had enhanced the confidence of terrorists linked with Al Qaeda and other Islamic terrorist groups who had been engaged in terrorist activities in India³⁵. The Kargil conflict provided ground to the Americans. The Kargil Heights overlooking the nation's highway that connected Leh to Srinagar in Kargil and Drass sectors along the Line of Control (LOC) were captured by Pakistan-backed militants, in 1999, created a dire situation for Pakistan. Bruce Riedel commented that if conflict dragged on, there was the probability of use of nuclear weapons from the Pakistani side. The Kargil crisis was staved off by the U.S. Pakistan came under fire for initiating this conflict through a secret military operation in the area with the help of Islamic militants, belonging to the Taliban militia and other Islamic militant groups fighting in Kashmir³⁶. The Americans were of the view that a Kargil like situation could any time intensify the religious extremism that finally lead to the Talibanisation of Pakistan. The Kargil episode exposed the scope and scale of Pakistan's engagement with militant groups.

The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, gave a new twist to Washington's Pakistan policy. Thereafter Pakistan willfully and unconditionally came on the U.S. side to join the military campaign against terrorism, as a front line state, The U.S. Government removed economic sanctions imposed on Pakistan since the 1998 nuclear tests and took further initiatives to support the Pakistan's derailing economy by rescheduling \$ 3 billion in Pakistan's debt, launching a five-year \$100

million aid programme and providing \$73 million in equipment and aid to secure Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. However, despite all collaborations with Pakistan in the war against terror, the Americans perceived Pakistan as a state sponsoring terrorism.

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