



## CHANGING FACETS OF INDO US RELATIONS IN POST 9/11 PHASE : CONVERGENCE OF INTEREST

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### ABSTRACT

The end of the Cold War freed India-U.S. relations from the constraints of global bipolarity, but interactions continued for a decade to be affected by the burden of history, most notably the longstanding India-Pakistan rivalry and nuclear weapons proliferation in the region. India's swift offer of full support for U.S.-led counterterrorism operations after September 2001 was widely viewed as reflective of such change. In recent years, the United States and India have engaged in numerous and unprecedented joint military exercises. Discussions of possible sales to India of major U.S.-built weapons systems are ongoing. Plans to expand high technology trade have become key bilateral issues in recent years. In this article the author attempts to present factors responsible for changing Indo-US relations post 9/11 with focus on convergence of interests.

**KEYWORDS :** Strategic, Cold war, Non-proliferation, partnership

### BACKDROP:

In the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, India took the immediate and unprecedented step of offering to the United States full cooperation and the use of India's bases for counterterrorism operations. The offer reflected the sea change that has occurred in recent years in the U.S.-India relationship. A marked improvement of relations began in the latter months of the Clinton Administration. President Clinton spent six days in India in March 2000 and was accelerated after a November 2001 meeting between President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee,<sup>1</sup> when the two leaders agreed to greatly expand U.S.-India cooperation on a wide range of issues, including counterterrorism, regional security, space and scientific collaboration, civilian nuclear safety, and broadened economic ties. In December 2001, the U.S.-India Defense Policy Group met in New Delhi for the first time since India's 1998 nuclear tests and outlined a defense partnership based on regular and high-level policy dialogue.

A U.S.-India Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism was established in January 2000 and meets regularly. U.S. and congressional interests in India cover a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from the militarized dispute with Pakistan and weapons proliferation to concerns about human rights, health, and trade and investment opportunities. In the 1990s, India-U.S. relations were particularly affected by the demise of the Soviet Union. India's main trading partner and most reliable source of economic and military assistance for most of the Cold War and New Delhi's resulting need to diversify its international relationships.

President Clinton's 2000 visit to South Asia seemed a major U.S. initiative to improve cooperation with India. During his subsequent visit to the United States later in 2000, Prime Minister Vajpayee addressed a joint session of Congress and issued a joint statement with President Clinton agreeing to cooperate on arms control, terrorism, and HIV/AIDS. Vajpayee returned to Washington in November 2001 and during the Bush Administration high-level visits have continued at a greatly accelerated pace. Prime Minister Singh paid a July 2005 visit to Washington where a significant joint U.S.-India statement was issued, and President Bush visited India in March 2006. Today, the Bush Administration vows to "help India become a major world power in the 21st century," and U.S.-India relations are conducted under the rubric of three major "dialogue" areas: strategic (including global issues and defense), economic (including trade, finance, commerce, and environment), and energy.<sup>2</sup>

constraints of global bipolarity, but interactions continued for a decade to be affected by the burden of history, most notably the longstanding India-Pakistan rivalry and nuclear weapons proliferation in the region. Recent years, however, have witnessed a sea change in bilateral relations, with more positive interactions becoming the norm. India's swift offer of full support for U.S.-led counterterrorism operations after September 2001 was widely viewed as reflective of such change. Today, President Bush calls India a "natural partner" of the United States and his Administration seeks to assist India's rise as a major power in the new century. In July 2005, President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Singh issued a Joint Statement resolving to establish a U.S.-India "global partnership" on a wide range of issues.

Proliferation-related restrictions on U.S. aid were triggered, and then later lifted through congressional-executive cooperation from 1998 to 2000. Remaining sanctions on India (and Pakistan) were removed in October 2001. Continuing U.S. interest in South Asia focuses on ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan, a problem rooted in unfinished business from the 1947 Partition and competing claims to the Kashmir region. India is in the midst of major and rapid economic expansion. Many U.S. business interests view India as a lucrative market and candidate for foreign investment. The United States supports India's efforts to transform its once quasi-socialist economy through fiscal reform and market opening. Since 1991, India has taken steps in this direction, with coalition governments keeping the country on a general path of reform. However, there is U.S. concern that movement remains slow and inconsistent.<sup>3</sup>

### USA-India Strategic Partnership in Post 9/11 Phase

President Bush visited India in early March, the first such trip by a U.S. President in six years. The President was given a grand welcome in India, even as tens of thousands of protestors opposed to U.S. policies and to New Delhi's partnership with Washington marched in several Indian cities. On March 2, President Bush and Prime Minister Singh issued a statement expressing mutual satisfaction with "great progress" made in advancing the U.S.-India "strategic partnership." The statement, which reviewed bilateral efforts to expand ties in a number of key areas, notably announced "successful completion of India's separation plan," a reference to ongoing and complex negotiations related to President Bush's July 2005 vow to achieve "full civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India." The separation plan requires India to move 14 of its 22 reactors into permanent international oversight by the year 2014 and place all future civilian reactors under permanent safeguards. India's Foreign Secretary visited Washington in late March to defend the nuclear

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initiative and, on April 5, Secretary of State Rice appeared before key House and Senate committees to press the Administration's case.<sup>4</sup> The India-Pakistan peace initiative continues, with officials from both countries (and the United States) offering a positive assessment of the ongoing dialogue. In a March 24 speech marking the launch of a new bus service linking Indian and Pakistani cities, Prime Minister Singh said "India sincerely believes that a strong, stable, prosperous, and moderate Pakistan is in the interest of India," and he envisioned someday entering into a Treaty of Peace, Security, and Friendship with Islamabad. Pakistan cautiously welcomed the comments while insisting that Kashmir remained the "heart of conflict, mistrust, and hostility" between the two countries,

The now-concluded Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) initiative encompassed several major issues in India-U.S. relations. Since 2001, the Indian government has pressed the United States to ease restrictions on the export to India of dual-use high-technology goods (those with military applications), as well as to increase civilian nuclear and civilian space cooperation. These three key issues came to be known as the "trinity," and top Indian officials stated that progress in these areas was necessary to provide tangible evidence of a changed U.S.-India relationship. Despite these considerations, many observers saw in the NSSP evidence of a major and positive shift in the U.S. strategic orientation toward India, a shift later illuminated more starkly with the Bush Administration's intention to initiate full civil nuclear cooperation with India.<sup>5</sup>

July 2003 saw the inaugural session of the U.S.-India High-Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG), where officials discussed a wide range of issues relevant to creating the conditions for more robust bilateral high technology commerce; the fourth HTCG meeting was held in New Delhi in November 2005. Since 1998, a number of Indian entities have been subjected to case-by-case licensing requirements and appear on the U.S. export control "Entity List" of foreign end users involved in weapons proliferation activities. In September 2004, as part of NSSP implementation, the United States modified some export licensing policies and removed the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) headquarters from the Entity List. Further adjustments came in August 2005 when six more subordinate entities were removed. Indian entities remaining on the Entity List are four subordinates of the ISRO, four subordinates of the Defense Research and Development Organization, one Department of Atomic Energy entity, and Bharat Dynamics Limited, a missile production agency.

#### **India's Revamped Global Status in Post 9/11 Phase:**

India's status as a non-signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty has kept it from accessing most nuclear-related materials and fuels on the international market for more than 30 years. New Delhi's 1974 "peaceful nuclear explosion" spurred creation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) an international export control regime for nuclear-related trade — and Washington further tightened its export laws with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Act of 1978. The July 2005 U.S.-India Joint Statement notably asserted that, "as a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology, India should acquire the same benefits and advantages as other such states," and President Bush vowed to work on achieving "full civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India." Such proposed cooperation is controversial and would require changes in both U.S. law and in NSG guidelines. India reciprocally agreed to take its own steps, including identifying and separating its civilian and military nuclear facilities in a phased manner and placing the former under international safeguards. Some in Congress express concern that civil nuclear cooperation with India might allow that country to

advance its military nuclear projects and be harmful to broader U.S. nonproliferation efforts. While the Bush Administration previously had insisted that such future cooperation with India would take place only within the limits set by multilateral nonproliferation regimes, the Administration now seeks adjustments to U.S. laws and policies, and has approached the NSG to adjust the regime's guideline. After months of complex and difficult negotiations, the Indian government in March 2006 presented a plan to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities as per the July 2005 Joint Statement. Shortly thereafter, H.R. 4974 and S. 2429, to waive the application of certain requirements under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 with respect to India, were, at the President's request, introduced in the Congress.<sup>6</sup>

India has long sought access to American space technology; such access has since the 1980s been limited by U.S. and international red lines meant to prevent assistance that could benefit India's military missile programs. India's space-launch vehicle technology was obtained largely from foreign sources, including the United States, and forms the basis of its medium-range Agni ballistic missile booster, as well as its suspected Surya intercontinental ballistic missile program. In May 1998, India conducted five underground nuclear tests, breaching a self-imposed twenty four year moratorium on such testing. Despite international efforts to dissuade it, Pakistan quickly followed. The tests created a global storm of criticism and represented a serious setback for two decades of U.S. nuclear nonproliferation efforts in South Asia. Following the tests,

#### **Defence Deal: New Vistas in Convergence of Interests**

The US-India defence trade is unique considering the successful purchase of INS Jalashwa, Boeing P8-I multi-mission maritime aircraft, six C130J Super Hercules aircraft for special forces, three Boeing 737 business jets and 10 Boeing C-17 Globe master heavy military transport aircraft.<sup>7</sup> President Barack Obama, during his recent visit to India, welcomed India's decision to purchase US high-technology defence items, which the joint statement said "reflects our strengthening bilateral defence relations and will contribute to creating jobs in the United States."<sup>8</sup> The two countries signed about 20 trade deals worth \$ 10 billion which President Obama believed would not only create fifty thousand jobs in the US but would also advance US-India relations.<sup>9</sup> Mr. John Schlosser, formerly of the US state department, said that purchasing defence equipment from the US companies does make the relationship stronger owing to the informal and institutional ties which US private companies have with the government.<sup>10</sup>

India's military purchases since 1999 have been worth \$25 billion and the country is likely to spend another \$30 billion dollars by 2012, making it one of the biggest military buyers among developing countries.<sup>11</sup> According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), India's defence purchases are projected to double to more than £15 billion by 2012, climbing to £40 billion by 2022.<sup>12</sup> According to a recent KPMG-CII report, India is likely to spend up to \$100 billion on the purchase of military equipment over the next 10 years.<sup>21</sup> Besides, India is planning to acquire or manufacture 126 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) fighter aircraft worth \$12 billion, almost 1,500 155 mm howitzers, about 250 light helicopters, four more P8I Poseidon maritime reconnaissance aircraft, six more C-17s and many other items of defence equipment. This statistic makes it patently apparent that India sees defence diplomacy as an increasingly key variable in its foreign policy planning. Moreover, the major US defence and aerospace companies including Boeing, Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems etc. are hopeful of winning keen contests for high profile Indian defence deals worth close to \$30 billion.

The relationship between India and the United States has been transformed into a global strategic partnership based on shared democratic values. The region of South Asia has been vital to U.S. interests in the 21st century. Thus India, a dominant regional actor, could not be ignored by U.S. foreign policy makers. With growing economy and manpower, India has been characterized as a nascent and natural partner of the United States. In the wake of emerging trends in global terrorism it is in the interest of regional and global security that both India and the United States should make efforts towards immunizing the menace of terror. Though India has long been victimized by terrorism, it was only after the 9/11 attack on U.S. soil that the former's plea was acknowledged at the global level. The attack on the World Trade Center changed the manner in which terrorism was viewed by the international community. In the aftermath of this attack India showed its sincere support to the war on terrorism. During 2014-15 there have been many declarations and joint statements issued on counterterrorism cooperation besides military and naval joint exercises. Despite the convergence of concerns, there are still divergent geopolitical perceptions on both sides that hamper counterterrorism cooperation efforts. In the last decade, one of the most serious threats to have emerged around the world is the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This radical and extremely violent terror outfit presented an unprecedented challenge to the security and sovereignty of each and every state. Thus the need of the hour is to sustain current cooperation and work together on more capacity building and effective counterterrorism mechanisms in the future as well.

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