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ABSTRACT

The nature and content of relations between New Delhi and Washington have been an enigma and a paradox over the last five decades. India's relations with the US have always been a roller coaster. The time has come to take stock of the situation from the point of view of the recent trends and the future directions in India-United States relations. The economic dimension will have a multiplier effect on bilateral ties between the two countries in the years to come. In the South Asian context, a "top down global approach" and a "down up regional approach" is simultaneously required. The need of the hour is for India and the US to reflect a certain confidence in their bilateral diplomacy. The limits to India-US military cooperation have to be recognised, and one is not quite sure at this stage whether Indian and American geo-political interests and perceptions will converge in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Relations between the world's two largest democracies have been both intriguing as well as complex. In the context of India-United States relations, much remains to be understood about the different sources of conflict in their relations, and how they have interacted over different periods of time and in divergent policy-making contexts. This requires an inquiry into the situational and personal variables, cultural influences, the impact of constituents on the negotiation process and other related aspects. Needless to say, over the years, one has also noticed the role of the interacting variables in India-US relations. The nature and content of relations between New Delhi and Washington have been an enigma and a paradox over the last five decades. India's relations with the US have always been a roller coaster. A former Indian Ambassador to the US termed the relations as "a pattern of misunderstanding, miscalculations and missed opportunities." Dennis Kux has called India and the US "Estranged Democracies."

The love-hate syndrome haunts relations between the two countries. Differences in our backgrounds, resources, attitudes, perspectives and priorities were clearly reflected during the Cold War. The characteristic American hostility towards India was particularly visible during the Dulles period, when a country that did not toe the American line was considered to be against it. The battle lines got hardened during the Cold War when the differing world views of the Indians and the Americans came into sharp focus. Both New Delhi and Washington have viewed their national interests vis-a-vis the world at large in divergent ways. These continue, in more ways than one, in the post-Cold War world too. Henry Kissinger called it "the never-never land of India-US relations." In spite of the accumulated and persistent discomfort between India and the US, relations have never broken down completely, and the apostles of harmony have repeatedly had to discover grounds for hope. For example, one can recall the quiet India-US cooperation during the Gulf war. Now that the Cold War in the traditional sense is over, the emerging scenario between the world's two largest democracies deserves to be examined. One needs to look ahead into the future. Though political relations are now less prickly, areas of difference remain. Much remains to be done. The time has come to take stock of the situation from the point of view of the recent trends and the future directions in India-United States relations.

The United States and India have learned a great deal from each other. When the Cold War came to an end, there were many reasons to look ahead with hope. The end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the consequent eclipse of Pakistan's strategic importance to the US, and the invocation of the Pressler Amendment on Pakistan were all seen as healthy signs towards improving India-US relations. The irritants in India-US relations

caused by bipolarity and India's close ties with the former Soviet Union were eliminated, and hence likely to affect relations between the two countries. Added to this were the sweeping economic reforms programme initiated by the former Narasimha Rao government.

In spite of the Cold War having come to an end, the basic parameters remain largely unchanged. Washington now realises that it has to reckon with New Delhi's views on regional as well as global issues. The swings and shifts in India-United States relations have largely been the result of the clash of US global strategic interests, concerns and priorities as opposed to the regional security interests, priorities and concerns of India (Venkataramani, 1982). In the process what we have seen over the years have been short-term marriages of convenience by the US in pursuit of its global interests. This has been one of the basic problems in India-US relations. During the Cold War, for example, Washington was concerned about the global threats to the region from international Communism. In the new multipolar international order, India sees itself as a major actor. If the US is to advance its interests in South Asia, Washington needs to get over the stereotypes. The average American has tended to consider the region as inflicted with poverty, squalor, overpopulation, ethnic and religious conflict and natural disasters. The region was even perceived to be out of the radar screen of the US. The truth is that South Asia is vital to America both in terms of long and short term opportunities.

ECONOMIC TIES AND INDIA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

Any analysis of India-US relations will not be complete without the inclusion of the economic interests and concerns of the two. There are tremendous possibilities in India-US economic ties, which could even make India the focus of Washington's South Asia policy. As India gets enmeshed in the global financial system, one can expect a growth in economic relations between the two countries. The Clinton Administration has recognised India as a major player in the economic field. South Asia as a whole is increasingly becoming a region of intense growth and development. The economic liberalisation policy of the Government of India has now paved the way for unprecedented trade and investment between India and the US. India is on the US Commerce Department's top ten "big emerging markets." The Clinton Administration has recognised India as a major player in the economic field. It may be recalled that during the visit of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown along with a big business delegation to India in January 1995, projects worth \$7 billion were signed. Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary's visit to India was equally successful, particularly on the power front.

A US-India Commercial Alliance has been established to promote

greater interaction between the private sectors of the two countries. It may be recalled that during Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to the US in May 1994, it was decided to revive the India-US Economic/Commercial Sub-commission. Hence the former acts as a complement to the work of the latter. The India-US Commercial Alliance has been a success so far, due to the Indian government's commitment to open markets and set up a fair and transparent regulatory system. Both the countries need to capitalise on the opportunities to enhance mutual economic cooperation. India is now going through the gigantic task of transforming its economy while maintaining its democratic traditions. It is expected that the economic dimension will have a multiplier effect on bilateral ties between the two countries in the years to come.

The US is the largest trading partner with India. The total volume of bilateral trade is now in the range of nine and ten billion dollars. India has a favourable balance of trade with the US, with a trade surplus of nearly \$500 million to \$1 billion. The US is now the single largest investor in India accounting for almost billion \$ 4, out of a total of about \$ 12 billion worth of foreign investments cleared by the Government of India since 1991. Being the largest foreign investor in India, the US accounts for about half of all foreign equity. Much as exports to the US are important for India, the US also needs the Indian market in a global market that is increasingly becoming competitive. India-US relations in trade and commerce should be facilitated on the basis of bilateral economic equations. The tremendous increase in India-US economic cooperation is the cornerstone of the new relationship between the two countries.

KASHMIR AND INDIA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

Kashmir has bedevilled India-US relations in recent times. It has been on the high priority list of successive US Administrations, and particularly the Clinton dispensation. US Congressman Lee Hamilton, for example, once described the Kashmir issue as the "single most contentious issue disrupting India-US relations" (**Indian Express, April 30, 1994**). A lot of heat was generated in India when in October 1993 the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Robin Raphel, stated that the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir is disputed. In the words of Ms Raphel: "We do not recognise the Instrument of Accession as meaning that Kashmir is an integral part of India...the people of Kashmir have got to be consulted in any kind of final settlement of the Kashmir dispute" (**Times of India, October 30, 1993**). The general picture that emerged was that the US questioned the very accession of Kashmir to India and the situation in Kashmir was even compared to the civil war in Afghanistan. Needless to say, a damage limitation exercise was undertaken by Ms Raphel during her visit to India in March 1994 with the primary objective of removing whatever misunderstandings had been created over her statement. Besides, the differences over the human rights situation in Kashmir continue to be an irritant between the two countries.

There were some who believed that Ms Raphel's statement reflected the antipathy of the middle-level bureaucracy in the State Department towards India. These statements clearly further strained India-US relations, which India perceived as interference in its internal affairs. Former Indian Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit opined that never since the Nixon-Kissinger "tilt" of the early Seventies, had India-US relations deteriorated to the extent they did following Ms Raphel's statement. India has so far not accepted any third party mediation to resolve the issue. New Delhi basically considers Kashmir to be a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan that should be resolved within the framework of the Simla Agreement. A good starting point would be for Washington to clearly spell out its stand on the territorial integrity of India. Any attempt to push India into making concessions on Kashmir could only be counter-productive. It will be in the interest of both India and Pakistan and external powers like the US to follow a policy of least provocation and try and build mutual trust. This trend has to be consolidated in the years to come in the interest of regional and global peace. The US needs to encourage a solution to the Kashmir dispute based on the existing territorial and ground realities. There is need for greater pragmatism on all sides, and a sense of realism has to go into the entire exercise. The need of the hour is for India

and the US to reflect a certain confidence in their bilateral diplomacy.

THE NUCLEAR AND MISSILE ISSUE AND INDIA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

The nuclear issue between India and the US remains as hot as it was 22 years ago when India conducted a peaceful nuclear explosion. Differences over the nuclear issue have greatly complicated the course of India-US relations and reflected the discordant aspect of their relations. In US-India relations, the nuclear divide may be treated as either a dependent or an independent variable. All the same, it has acted as a factor further complicating ties between the two countries. Both the countries do not hesitate to hide their basic differences over the issue. The US sold the idea of a regional nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) with India. For a time, even Kashmir was seriously perceived by Washington as a flashpoint for a possible nuclear conflict. It is believed in certain quarters that the Clinton Administration's nuclear policy towards South Asia is clearly India focussed, because China cannot be touched, and that Pakistan is a problem. The Brown Amendment and the recent exposures in the Washington Times about the ring magnet sales from China to Pakistan have further weakened US nuclear non-proliferation law at a time when Islamabad has been expanding its nuclear weapons capability clearly in violation of US law.

Washington's perception of the means and ends of its non-proliferation efforts in South Asia has brought it into conflict with the countries in the region. In this context neither a unilateral approach nor a confrontational approach will help. It may be recalled that the "cap, reduce, eliminate" formula of the US for the nuclear programmes in South Asia was not acceptable to India. The tactfulness with which Washington deals with India, Pakistan and China on the nuclear issue, would be a test of its post-Cold War nuclear diplomacy, on the one hand, and its commitment to the cause of nuclear non-proliferation, on the other. In the South Asian context, a "top down global approach" and a "down up regional approach" is simultaneously required.

India's missile programme has been another contentious issue in Washington's perspective. The medium range Prithvi and long range Agni missile programmes are perceived by the US as potential systems that can deliver nuclear warheads. The US feels that Prithvi's induction will encourage the deployment of nuclear weapons in the subcontinent. Constant pressure has been brought to bear on India not to deploy the Prithvi missiles and to stop testing of the long range Agni missiles. Even the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) members have applied pressure both collectively and individually. In short, the US perceives India as "part of the problem" of missile proliferation, and "not as a partner" in its solution. Washington perceives any attempt by New Delhi to deploy the Prithvi as a watershed in the South Asian strategic environment. Hence, Washington sees the MTCR as a key instrument in the battle against missile proliferation.

It may be rather simplistic to treat the issue of ballistic missiles in terms of the South Asian region alone. Needless to say, South Asia does not exist in a geo-strategic vacuum, and missiles which have the range to target the subcontinent cannot be ignored. China has deployed hundreds of missiles on its territory, and is even reported to have supplied M-11 missiles to Pakistan in the early 1990s. Besides, Pakistan has also been developing the 600+ km range Hatf-3 missile. Any attempt to understand the problem of ballistic missiles in South Asia will also have to take cognizance of those missiles that are targetted towards the subcontinent. Missiles deployed in countries like China, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan and the Central Asian region become significant in this context. Saudi Arabia, for example, has acquired many 2,700-km range CSS-2 ballistic missiles from China since 1988, after the MTCR came into effect. The need of the hour is to work towards a comprehensive and universal regime for the control and management of ballistic missiles.

It will perhaps be unrealistic to expect India to conform to the one-

sided stipulations of the MTCR. Besides, as the former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev put it: "If the US sells arms to Pakistan, it should not be surprised why India responds by testing missiles" (**Deccan Herald, February 12, 1996**). India has thus far rejected the US call to halt testing of the Prithvi missile. New Delhi contends that deployment of Prithvi would depend on the threat perception and the security situation prevailing at a particular point of time. To quote from the Carnegie Endowment Report prepared in 1993 by Selig Harrison and Geoffrey Kemp: "The Indian security perspective is dominated by the perceived threat of Chinese power, both conventional and nuclear, including alleged Chinese intermediate-range missiles emplacements in Tibet and Sinkiang, and by a desire to maintain what New Delhi considers an acceptable safety margin of military superiority over Pakistan." Though India has co-sponsored the move for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, and had unambiguously supported the imposition of a verifiable cap on the production of fissile materials, yet differences have surfaced over the method and way of doing this, rather than the objective. Whether the proposed Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the fissile materials cut-off will only serve to legitimise the nuclear weapons programme of the nuclear weapon states, will have implications for all the countries in South Asia and for the global non-proliferation regime as a whole. India has contended that any exemptions and exceptions would only lead to a CTBT that will not be comprehensive, and perhaps even discriminatory.

DEFENCE COOPERATION AND INDIA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS

India-US relations transcended to a new level of understanding when in 1991 it was decided to expand strategic cooperation between their defence forces. The kind of strategic dialogue and defence cooperation that is now being envisaged has never taken place in the past between the two countries. In the past, India was particularly sensitive to the perception that Americans either wish to ignore it or to attach unfair restrictions on its legitimate defence needs. Collectively, the various proposals were called the Kickleigher proposals after Lt Gen Claude Kickleigher, who was in Hawaii as Commander of the US Pacific Army. The Kickleigher proposals were drawn from existing Army programmes with other countries. In fact, it was the US Pacific Command which first mooted the possibility of greater cooperation with India in the region. It may be noted in this context that the US Pacific Command is responsible for American security in both the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean regions. The objective of the Kickleigher proposals was to pursue a common policy of gradually strengthening ties towards expanded cooperation and partnership by the end of the decade. Since then, defence ties have evolved gradually without so much disturbing the balance of power in the subcontinent. In the case of India, defence relations are being virtually built from scratch. Ever since the military dialogue began, the US has been keen to have joint military exercises, particularly in the mountainous terrain. Beginning 1991, the two countries have been having joint military exercises, including joint naval exercises which were held in May 1992. India-US service-to-service cooperation saw joint naval drills being conducted in the early part of 1995. Washington even fielded two nuclear powered submarines in these exercises.

The enthusiasm shown by the service chiefs about the prospects in India-US relations has at times been in stark contrast to that of the politicians or the bureaucrats. Some scholars like Selig Harrison have even spoken in terms of the need for an "India-centered" policy, given a scenario wherein India "will gradually grow into an economic and military power, whatever the US does." As part of India's new military cooperation with the US, the larger question that has been raised is whether India would participate in a structure of "cooperative vigilance" in the region. India is basically looking for hi-tech from the US. But it has to try and do this without having to make major concessions in terms of its national interests. From the US perspective, ties with India should not disturb the subcontinent's military balance. Though cooperation with the armed forces is continuing, one wonders how long this can last without the two countries pursuing common strategic objectives. The closest the US came to this was when the US Ambassador,

Frank Wisner, in an interview to Span magazine in August 1995 stated that the US recognises the right of India to have a strong national defence. In other words, the limits to India-US military cooperation have to be recognised, and one is not quite sure at this stage whether Indian and American geo-political interests and perceptions will converge in the future.

INDIA-UNITED STATES RELATIONS: LOOKING AHEAD INTO THE FUTURE

Any improvement in India-United States relations will largely revolve around the ability and the motivation of the policy makers in both Washington and New Delhi to make a break with the turbulent past. Both countries need to count on one another. This process should continue and intensify. In the changed international scenario, the key to conducting diplomacy for both the countries is to engage in a dialogue, even when there appears to be no meeting ground. In the words of Ambassador Frank Wisner: "It has been the US hope to broaden the relationship, because of strategic significance, identify a broad range of mutual interests, so that ultimately the whole will be much greater than the sum of the parts and no difference and/or differences will impede the relationship" (**Hindu, August 14, 1995**).

Minor irritants should not come in the way of prospering bilateral relations. The effort should be to graduate from a "conflict of interests" to a "convergence of interests." Wisdom lies in talking "with" each other rather than "at" each other. The areas of difference have to be narrowed and the areas of agreement have to be widened. Perhaps there has never been a more exciting and challenging phase in India-US relations. Good diplomacy would be a very vital factor towards improving relations. India-US relations largely revolve around the question of good management. The guiding principles in India-US relations should be to keep moving on despite the sticky areas that remain to be mopped up.

The best way to improve India-US relations is to maintain a two-track dialogue--one at the government level and the other at the popular level. The current phase of India-US relations suggests that today the US too needs India in a rapidly changing world. Delinking trade from security issues in India-US relations has never been an easy proposition. Rather the endeavour should be to strike the right balance between economic and security issues. One clearly sees the complementarity of interests. India desires US investments, US technology and US markets, whereas the US desires new markets for its products and also new areas of investment abroad. Perhaps economic relations will define India-US political relations in the future, since South Asia as a whole is increasingly getting integrated with the global marketplace. One can expect that the economic aspect will have a multiplier effect on bilateral relations.

India-US relations have to be shaped by India as much by the US. Both the countries need to work towards mutual understanding, including those issues on which such understanding needs enhancement. There are many compelling reasons for both the countries to warm up towards each other. This will go a long way in reflecting the vibrant democratic and secular ideals of the two countries. Even on issues where there are differences like human rights, non-proliferation, transfer of dual use of technology, it may be necessary for New Delhi and Washington to avoid rash value judgments or didactic pronouncements. Emotive and instant reactions need to be avoided. For example, an American official is on record as having once said that "every time the US says something, India pops up and says just the opposite" (**Deccan Herald, June 13, 1992**). India and the US have to accept the inevitability of disagreements on specific issues, without distorting their overall relations. Despite differences, constructive relations between India and the US are desirable and necessary. The US has to realise that India cannot share all its prejudices and predilections and all its friends and foes. The larger question that the US should ask itself is whether this is the only basis to conduct relations with any country. India-US relations should be allowed to evolve at their natural pace. It is necessary to be open and critical and also exhibit a more knowledgeable interest in each other. There is need for greater resilience in order to deal with the challenges of the future.

CONCLUSION

India-United States relations remain to be understood about the different sources of conflict in their relations, and how they have interacted over different periods of time and in divergent policy-making contexts. The United States and India have learned a great deal from each other. Any analysis of India-US relations will not be complete without the inclusion of the economic interests and concerns of the two. There are tremendous possibilities in India-US economic ties, which could even make India the focus of Washington's South Asia policy. India's missile programme has been another contentious issue in Washington's perspective. The medium range Prithvi and long range Agni missile programmes are perceived by the US as potential systems that can deliver nuclear warheads. The best way to improve India-US relations is to maintain a two-track dialogue--one at the government level and the other at the popular level. The need of the hour is for India and the US to reflect a certain confidence in their bilateral diplomacy.

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