

India as a World Power Changing Washington's Myopic Policy

by Victor M. Gobarev

Executive Summary

American interest in and concerns about India rose sharply after that country carried out underground nuclear tests in May 1998. Clinton administration officials belatedly acknowledged that developing a good working relationship with India should be one of America's top foreign policy priorities. President Clinton's visit to South Asia in March 2000 was an important symbolic step.

That initiative, however, does not constitute a major breakthrough in relations between India and the United States. Paying greater attention to India, although long overdue, cannot by itself dramatically improve uneasy U.S.-Indian relations and turn India into a de facto strategic partner. The fundamental mistake made by U.S. leaders has been to underestimate India and its economic and military potential. How India uses its growing power can either enhance or seriously undermine U.S. interests. Continued insistence by the United States that India liquidate its nuclear arsenal will only cause major problems in relations between Washington and New Delhi.

Washington's overemphasis on the proliferation issue illustrates the tendency of U.S. policy-makers to treat India as a potential adversary rather than a potential friend. U.S. leaders should not insist on improvement in New Delhi's

human rights record in Kashmir, or set other preconditions, for the U.S.-Indian relationship. Pursuing the current course may well extend the impasse in relations to the point of irrevocably "losing" India.

Mistakes in U.S. policy have contributed to India's drifting toward a Russia-India-China nexus aimed at preventing U.S. global domination. The likelihood of India's participation in an anti-U.S. alliance will depend on what New Delhi thinks about American geopolitical designs toward India and its national security interests.

A long-range strategy needs to be based on Washington's willingness to accept India's world power status. That means accepting India into the club of nuclear weapons states and enthusiastically endorsing New Delhi's bid for permanent membership in the UN Security Council. The main benefit to the United States of such a breakthrough in U.S.-Indian relations would be to prevent a dramatic adverse change in the current global geopolitical situation, which currently favors the United States. An assertive India could help stabilize the Persian Gulf and Central Asian regions. Even more important, India could become a strategic counterweight to China and a crucial part of a stable balance of power in both East Asia and South Asia.

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Introduction

President Clinton's visit to India in late March 2000, the first visit by a U.S. president in 22 years, was long overdue. As Clinton himself admitted, India, the second most populous country in the world, has never been a major focus of U.S. foreign policy.¹ Conventional wisdom attributes Washington's dismissive attitude to the fact that India was seen as belonging to the opposing camp during the Cold War. That explanation seems insufficient. The United States always paid utmost attention to its relations with the Soviet Union, the leader of that camp. The main reason for the difference was that, unlike India, the Soviet Union was considered dangerous. Such inattention to the home of one-sixth of the planet's population may be explained (but not justified) by the ferocity of the West-East confrontation that consumed nearly all of America's significant national security and foreign policy interests.

However, it is much more difficult to explain why the end of the Cold War did not produce much change in U.S. policy toward India. During the Bush administration and the first Clinton administration, relations with India were largely ignored. (President Clinton took months even to name an ambassador to New Delhi.) India was not considered a potential threat (or even a serious geopolitical player) as opposed, for example, to neighboring China. Thus, China was engaged, whereas India was almost forgotten.

The situation finally began to change during the second Clinton administration. For the first time, a comprehensive U.S. strategy toward the South Asian giant, although still lacking some essential features, was formulated. The strategy was based on "A New U.S. Policy toward India and Pakistan," a report prepared by a group of independent analysts.² U.S. strategic goals in the region were determined to be the following:

- to deter a regional nuclear arms race;
- to restrict exports of nuclear technolo-

gy from India and Pakistan to third countries;

- to assist in resolving Indian-Pakistani disputes that might provoke a regional war;
- to preclude the nuclear capabilities of either India or Pakistan from falling into the hands of anarchists and ideological extremists; and
- to expand political, economic, and military ties with India and Pakistan in the post-Cold War era.

A series of steps toward rapprochement with India followed. In addition, American interest in India grew after it carried out underground nuclear tests in May 1998.

The Clinton Visit: A Modest First Step

The visit of President Clinton was an important move in implementing the administration's more engaged policy toward India. The Clinton administration acknowledged that a good working relationship, perhaps even a strategic partnership, with India should be a U.S. priority. President Clinton proceeded cautiously and diplomatically during the visit, carefully choosing his words in a country wary of lectures. Those Americans who argued that he should have been blunt, for example on human rights violations by the Indian army and security forces in Kashmir, were wrong.³ Such an approach would have worsened U.S.-Indian relations and not helped the human rights situation in Kashmir.

During his visit, Clinton also reaffirmed U.S. support of democracy in South Asia, and his remarks clearly favored India over Washington's long-time ally Pakistan. As the *Washington Post* put it, "The Cold War strategic alliance with the United States is over, and Pakistan must move to restore democracy and control terrorism in Kashmir or fend for itself in its mounting confrontation with India."⁴

Although there were important discussions on nuclear nonproliferation, the main

result of President Clinton's visit was most evident in another field. He and Indian prime minister A. B. Vajpayee agreed to start an "institutional dialogue" between their countries, including "regular" summit meetings.⁵ Such a dialogue, if taken seriously, could begin much-needed changes in U.S. policy toward India.

In general, Clinton's visit to India was a step toward a closer relationship between the two countries. However, the visit was not a major breakthrough. Notably, the principal U.S. goal of the visit—getting concessions from New Delhi on the issue of nuclear proliferation—was not achieved. The vast differences on the issue were clearly reflected in the "vision statement," the main document signed during the visit: "The United States believes India should forgo nuclear weapons. India believes that it needs to maintain a credible minimum nuclear deterrent in keeping with its own assessment of its security needs."⁶

The failure to persuade India to abolish its nuclear weapons program drew attention and some criticism from Congress, including the Senate Republican leadership, and from such politically diverse newspapers as the *Washington Times* and the *Washington Post*. The *Times* stated that "Mr. Clinton failed to achieve the major goal of his trip to India—convincing the world's most populous democracy to forgo nuclear weapons. . . . The president fell short on each of the specific objectives he laid out—persuading India to ban the production of fissile materials, tighten export control, and embrace the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty."⁷ The *Post* was less critical, while noting that Clinton had moderated his plea on the nuclear arms issue with praise for India. The *Post* admitted that Prime Minister Vajpayee "was unmoved" by Clinton's call for nuclear arms cutbacks.⁸ The *New York Times* tended to see only positive results of the visit, stating, "If Mr. Clinton can coax India and Pakistan to consider reciprocal steps to ease tensions—a reduction in Indian forces in Kashmir in return for a cutoff of Pakistani aid to the rebels—the visit this week will have been valu-

able indeed."⁹ That wishful thinking has not materialized: India refused even to discuss the Kashmir matter, not to mention to reduce its forces there.

The Need for Bolder Steps

Both critics and supporters of President Clinton's performance in India have failed to see the main point: even paying greater attention to India cannot dramatically improve uneasy U.S.-Indian relations and turn India into a de facto strategic partner. The principal reason is that American policy is still based on fundamentally wrong assessments of India and its place in the world and of what India can contribute to stabilizing Asia's security environment. U.S. leaders neither appreciate the importance of the interests at stake in relations with India nor understand how to set priorities for U.S. interests and goals. The United States still sees India as a Third World, poverty-stricken giant that would profit from closer cooperation with America but would be unlikely to give something valuable in return. More perceptive policy experts understand that India is already a heavyweight in South Asia and can help guarantee stability and prosperity in Asia as a whole. But even most of those experts fail to see that India is an emerging world power with an influence felt far from Asian shores.

Current American national security interests with India, such as deterring a nuclear arms race in South Asia and restricting exports of nuclear technology, are no doubt noble. But is it productive to treat the decision by the world's largest democracy to develop nuclear weapons the same way we treat pariah states' nuclear ambitions? Is pressuring India to forgo nuclear weapons our best option?

The United States considers India neither a serious adversary (despite its nuclear weapons) nor a serious ally. The mounting evidence of India's rapid growth in virtually every major field has not yet been properly

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assessed. We fail to see India's enormous potential and its growing ability to affect, either positively or negatively, U.S. foreign policy and national security interests. As a result, U.S. policy goals are not always wisely determined. If we want India as an informal strategic partner in the 21st century, the overall approach of U.S. strategy toward India needs to be changed. Only a real policy revolution—a genuine recognition of India's world power status and corresponding foreign policy moves on Washington's part—will bring success.

Worrisome Signs of a Russia-India-China Axis

A more nuanced and realistic policy toward India will not be sufficient; it is too late for that. Other nations are likely to be one step ahead in developing their relations with India. Signs of an emerging Russia-India-China strategic alliance with an unmistakably anti-U.S. bias are causing growing concerns in U.S. policy circles. The proposal to form that triangular alliance was formally put forward for the first time by Russian prime minister Yevgeny Primakov during his visit to India in December 1998. Two pillars of such a triangle already existed by that time: the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership and the Russian-Indian strategic cooperation. The historically uneasy Chinese-Indian relationship began to change in the second half of 1998 and throughout 1999, when both countries (as well as Russia) saw an increasing threat coming from the perceived U.S. bid for global hegemony. The U.S.-led air campaign against Yugoslavia and the U.S.-British air attacks on Iraq were crucial catalytic events. As Jasjit Singh, a leading Indian analyst, wrote, "Ironically, it may finally be the NATO policies that may help create a more cooperative relationship between China and India."¹⁰

The past two years have witnessed dramatic improvement in Sino-Indian relations. Joint working groups met in Beijing in April

1998, where Qian Qichen, China's vice premier, told India's foreign secretary that "China and India can make important contributions in giving shape to a multi-polar system."¹¹ India's foreign minister Jaswant Singh and commerce minister Murasoli Maran visited China in June 1999 and February 2000; however, the breakthrough in the strategic convergence of India and China seems to have occurred during a weeklong visit to Beijing by India's president Kocheril Raman Narayanan (who publicly made highly critical remarks to President Clinton during his visit to India) in June 2000. Warmly received, Narayanan repeatedly discussed with his Chinese counterpart, Jiang Zemin, one of the main problems both countries appeared to be facing: the ongoing creation of a U.S.-dominated unipolar world. As Jiang noted during the talks, "Taking into account the problems of the highest strategic level, we by all means must continue to build the constructive partnership in the 21st century."¹²

Since Russian president Vladimir Putin is scheduled to visit both India and China later this year, some Indian media note that, "despite initial caution concerning the prospects on successful cooperation between Russia, India, and China (the creation of the 'triangle,' in the words of the former Premier Evgeny Primakov), the activities in this direction are being developed with increased intensity."¹³ The backbone of this three-country cooperation is its military-technical collaboration. India and China, the two biggest buyers of Russian military hardware, account for 60 percent of current Russian weapons exports. Indian defense minister George Fernandes returned from Russia at the end of June after completing preparations for signing a \$400 million deal to supply India with 100 of the most advanced T-90 main battle tanks and the license for producing another 200 tanks in India. Fernandes also said that the decision on acquiring the Kiev-class aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov for the Indian navy would be made soon, probably during Putin's visit. Fernandes also reviewed progress on constructing Krivak-

class modern frigates and submarines for the Indian navy at St. Petersburg shipyards.¹⁴

The Indian government and independent analysts also took notice of the new Russian national security doctrine adopted in April 2000 that mandates closer strategic ties with India and China. As the *Hindustan Times* put it, some “sections of the document say that Moscow will take steps to increase strategic cooperation with Asian countries, namely India and China, to counter the growing tendency toward a ‘monopolar’ world led by the United States.”¹⁵

Concerns that a Russia-India-China alliance would have negative consequences for the United States can be heard in Congress, the administration, and the foreign policy community. It is not coincidental that some senators ask questions about the likelihood of India’s cooperating strategically with Russia and China in ways that could be detrimental to U.S. interests. For example, Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, wondered whether the Indians would “engage more with Russia for strategic weapons technology.”¹⁶ At the same hearing, Stephen P. Cohen of the Brookings Institution acknowledged, “In fact, some Indians are contemplating an alliance with China to keep the superpower hegemon out of Asia.”¹⁷ In part because of worries about the evolving triangular alliance, U.S. officials engage China and work hard to make sure Washington’s relations with Russia remain at least manageable. Why do we not engage India with the same vigor? Would it not be easier for the United States to deflect democratic India rather than authoritarian China from a prospective anti-American alliance? Many of Washington’s allies have developed diversified, profitable relations with India. Israel, an especially close U.S. ally, has long cooperated with India against threats posed by Islamic countries.

Indeed, in relations with India the United States is a step behind China (despite past Indo-Chinese confrontations, including

war), several steps behind Washington’s Western allies, and many steps behind Russia. Therefore, if expansion of U.S. political, economic, and military ties with India continues at its current slow pace, there is little chance of developing close ties with that country. For radical change to occur in U.S. policy, policymakers and academics need to discuss not only America’s behavior toward India but also America’s overall behavior in the international arena. Those discussions could increase the number of options for U.S. foreign policy toward India.

India’s Rise as a World Power

Making U.S. relations with India truly beneficial to America will require political wisdom, courage, and vision. Wisdom is needed because for many in the American foreign policy community it is hard to comprehend that building good relations with India, often an uncomfortable partner because of its non-Western culture, is more important for America over the long term than are relations with many of Washington’s current allies. Courage is needed because Washington should abandon numerous stereotypes and shibboleths—for example, the long-standing U.S. opposition to any expansion of the nuclear club. Vision is needed because the U.S. political establishment must look beyond America’s immediate and near-term concerns to consider its long-term foreign policy and national security strategy for India—and how that component fits into America’s overall security strategy.

The Need for a Long-Term Perspective

It is impossible to achieve a dramatic breakthrough in relations with India if the administration and Congress continue to pay most of their attention to what can be accomplished only in the short term. Kosovo and Bosnia may look like pressing issues at the moment, but they are hardly the places where important U.S. national interests reside. By contrast,

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India does not seem to be a top priority for U.S. foreign policymakers, even after recent nuclear tests and Clinton's visit.

With one of the largest economies on the planet, one-fifth of the world's population, booming high-tech sectors, a credible nuclear arsenal, long-range strategic missiles, a sophisticated space program, and a high-tech conventional military, India will be a major factor in global affairs in 10 or 20 years. If India is neglected (or antagonized) by America, will it join an anti-American alliance with an assertive, expansionist China and, possibly, an unpredictable Russia? (If that turned out to be the case, part of the blame would rest on current U.S. political leaders who have failed to see the importance of India's becoming a major world player and the necessity for the United States to treat India as such.) Having India, a global power with democratic values and institutions, as a U.S. de facto strategic partner is in America's best interests. In fact, it should be one of America's main national interests, although most U.S. policymakers have not grasped that yet. Such disinterest is puzzling, since International Monetary Fund data are already telling astonishing things about India. In 1999 India had a per capita gross domestic product of only \$1,720—substantially behind even China, at \$3,600. But given India's enormous population, IMF calculations indicate that by 2006 the country will likely have a larger GDP than will either Italy or Britain. If recent growth rates persist, by 2025 India's GDP is expected to pass those of Germany and France.¹⁸ That would make India the fourth-largest economic power, behind only the United States, Japan, and China.

But one need not wait 10 or 20 years to realize how important it is for the United States to steer its India policy in the direction of closer cooperation. India's economy, although still relatively modest in size, has made noticeable progress since the early 1990s. Moreover, the rate of growth has been accelerating, from a rather anemic 1.3 percent in 1991 to 4.8 percent in 1994 to 6.7 percent

in 1998.¹⁹ India is still a poor country, especially as measured on the basis of per capita GDP, but is clearly becoming a significant economic player. That reflects strong moves since 1991 toward economic liberalization.²⁰

India's Potential Wide-Ranging Contribution

Key U.S. foreign policy goals include economic globalization, advancing liberal and democratic values, and maximizing the number of friendly countries. There will be a significant gap in economic globalization and political cooperation if India does not participate. Also, depending on the status of U.S.-Indian relations, India can be either an influential proponent or a formidable opponent of U.S.-led globalization efforts. The health of the American economy in an era of globalization will increasingly depend on trade and financial relations with overseas markets. India's market, potentially the second largest in the world, presents American companies with invaluable opportunities. India has a vast reservoir of cheap labor, numerous mineral resources, and a growing commitment to a free-market economy. If overall U.S.-Indian economic relations were improved (which would mean decreased Indian tariffs), all of those factors would lead to a manifold increase in American investments in and exports to India.

At present, U.S. companies are happy with their mushrooming economic stakes in China. But if the United States and China reach a point of confrontation (which cannot be ruled out), reliance on such ties with China could backfire. American firms might be wise to consider investing more in India, which has many of the same favorable business conditions that China has (including a large, inexpensive workforce) but offers a safer political environment for doing business and making investments. Indian business leaders are ready to expand their ties with American partners and seem a little puzzled at "the slowness here of usually quick Americans."²¹ Already an emerging high-tech economic power, India has the potential to

become within a decade a world leader in many fields of computer and information technology. The U.S. government should do nothing that interferes with the ability of American businesses to forge strong economic links with such a country.

With regard to liberal and democratic values, America can be proud of its role in the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Making India, a country three times as populous as all the countries that emerged from the Soviet empire taken together, a friend of the United States would be another significant achievement. Turning this nuclear-armed giant into an adversary of the United States would severely weaken American positions not only in Asia but also in the rest of the world. Conversely, making India an informal strategic partner would enormously strengthen them.

India bears directly on several important U.S. national security interests. For example, India's joining ranks with China and possibly Russia in an anti-U.S. alliance would be a disaster for America's global position, since over time U.S. and NATO military dominance will erode. No one can predict how a confrontation between the U.S.-led West and nations accounting for half of the planet's population would end. But the dangers flowing from such bipolar rivalry would be considerable, and in contrast with the Cold War, this time the Western powers might not prevail—much less prevail without a catastrophic war.

India and Regional Security

Even within the Asian region, it is getting hard for the United States to keep in check China's aspirations, which often conflict with American interests. What country has the potential to be a strategic counterweight if China turns aggressively expansionist? Taiwan is a local player that may survive with increased U.S. arms sales, but Taiwan would not be all that militarily relevant in a major U.S.-Chinese confrontation. Russia would be still too weak to confront China in the foreseeable future even if America managed to repair the damage to its own relations with

Moscow that occurred in the 1990s and draw the country into the Western camp. But India, with its rapidly developing nuclear and missile programs, has the potential to counterbalance possible Chinese aggressive moves in Asia. India's cooperation with Japan, whose political, economic, and military relations (including combined naval exercises) with India are already well developed, would be possible. Even possessing strong conventional capabilities, Japan is unlikely on its own to be able to deter China in the region. Moreover, the U.S.-Japanese military alliance (directed largely against China) requires far too heavy U.S. involvement and creates direct risk exposure for the United States. There should be better solutions. Encouraging India to play a more active security role could be the best solution.

India's growing naval power and the sharply increased activities of the Indian navy in the South China Sea this year are strong indicators that the country is determined to assert itself as an Asian power and a serious player in Asian geopolitics. As Fernandes put it in April 2000: "The Indian Navy has a responsibility that goes beyond protecting our borders. . . . The Indian Navy's interests lie from north of the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea." He added that Japan and Vietnam are emerging as India's strategic partners for countering piracy from the Indian waters to the South China Sea.²²

China, which claims large portions of the South China Sea and sees it as vital to its national security interests, has been nervous about another geopolitical player arriving there. In response to the joint exercises of the Indian and the Vietnamese navies in the South China Sea, a spokesman for the Chinese embassy in Washington admonished that any naval exercise "must not violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries in the region."²³ The fact that the Indian navy is cooperating more closely with Vietnam—the country that repelled the Chinese cross-border invasion in February 1979 and clashed with China over the disputed Spratly islands in the South China Sea—

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and collaborating with Japan, which is considered a potential adversary by Beijing, are developments that cause Beijing concern.

More important for the long term, India is successfully creating a blue-water navy that would be able to project power far from Indian shores. Ambitious projects include getting from Russia at least one aircraft carrier, nuclear submarines with ballistic missile capabilities, and other warships with long-range capabilities. China, which still possesses only a green-water, or coastal, navy but is working on getting deep-ocean operational capabilities, is afraid of lagging behind India, which did not remove all ships from the South China Sea after having completed the anti-piracy exercise with Vietnam. With the formally declared goal of patrolling its waters in search of pirates, India left four surface warships, a submarine, and an air-reconnaissance aircraft in the area on a semipermanent basis.²⁴ In fact, India could help counterbalance Chinese forces in the region if a strategic understanding between Washington and New Delhi is reached and American encouragement is provided. Indeed, depending on the nature of U.S.-Indian relations, India could be a geopolitical and military force for America itself to reckon with in Central and South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Thus, it is in America's interests to keep India from becoming a potential adversary, thereby reducing the danger of a military confrontation. U.S. policy should aim to have India be the primary power in a region where so many anti-American forces are concentrated.

India's Global Aspirations

It is often difficult for the West to comprehend the depth of India's determination to "restore" its status as a premier power. Indian civilization is some 5,000 years old, and, for most of that time, India was a great power. For Indians, 200 years of colonial dependency seem a minor episode, a brief, albeit humbling, interruption in their overall move toward greater eminence. For virtually

every member of the Indian elite, as well as the rest of the population, it seems natural that India be among the great powers.

In a little more than 50 years since independence, India has moved from a colony with more than a thousand ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups to a viable, democratic country whose economy is now among the top 10 in the world. Its political and cultural influence is felt throughout Asia and beyond. Its military arsenal includes numerous conventional forces with modern arms, medium-range missiles, satellites in orbit, and nuclear weapons.

Regaining Great Power Status

For many people in India, including those in the current government, India's becoming a great power is not only a widespread national desire and goal—it is a sacred mission. However, the desire to be a great power is not the type of obsessive mission that has produced mass suffering in totalitarian countries. Indians believe that their economy and their people should benefit from, not be sacrificed to, India's world power status. Military clout means less to Indians than do other indications of great power status; Indians are not dreaming of conquering foreign territories. What they want is to guarantee by sufficient means, including nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, that their unique civilization will make it to the sixth millennium of its existence.²⁵

Reestablishing and maintaining world power status are long-term and unifying goals for India. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, where people spoke approximately 120 languages, was a disturbing example to Indians, since theirs is a country in which 40 major and about 600 minor languages are spoken. There is widespread sentiment that everybody in India must cooperate for the unity of the country.²⁶

India has always approached the subject of security in its larger framework, beyond that implicit in defense strategy and military forces. The concept of security has involved the presentation and the perpetuation of the

core values of the Indian nation state: democracy, a secular society, a federal polity, moral and ethical principles, equal rights, and, last but not least, national strength and power.²⁷ Those core values are enshrined in the Indian constitution (if not always practiced throughout the country). The strength of those values has provided the political resilience and stability that many outside the country find amazing in such a multinational, multilingual, and multicultural entity.

Every major political force in the country supports India's global aspirations, but Indians have been divided on how to restore their country's greatness. There have been two alternative courses taken in India to regain its world power status. The first course was taken by the Indian National Congress, led by the Gandhis, the most powerful family in South Asia. With the exception of minor intervals, the Gandhis ruled India from independence until the mid-1990s.

Under the Gandhis India achieved some successes in restoring its former eminence. Yet a set of complex geopolitical, economic, and social challenges emerged to which the Gandhi family and their supporters failed to respond in a timely manner and to the satisfaction of the nation's elites. India's modest economic achievements and peaceful policy of nonalignment during the Cold War did not transform the country into a world power. Its most powerful ally, the Soviet Union, collapsed, and the United States and other Western nations continued to see India as, at best, a Third World giant and an emerging regional power. As one prominent Indian scholar bitterly wrote: "Unfortunately, the West tends to see national power through the distorted prism emphasizing the primacy of military force—as in the antiquated 'war as an instrument of policy' syndrome. There is thus an excessive emphasis on military power; and seen in the subcontinental framework alone, a completely distorted perspective emerges."²⁸ On the domestic front, economic gains and breakthroughs in high technology did not result in improved living standards for the vast majority of the population.

Those challenges appear to have been better met by the Bharatiya Janata Party, which has presented the second alternative course to great power status. After a series of parliamentary and electoral struggles, Indian voters brought that nationalist party to power in 1998. What does the emergence of this political force and its different strategy to restore India's greatness mean for India and the rest of the world, including America?

First, it means that Washington's habit of neglecting India is no longer a viable option. We are witnessing the birth of a new Indian national security and foreign policy. India will demand respect for and an understanding of its legitimate security concerns—as it sees them—and will be prepared to aggressively defend those national security interests. New Delhi is highly unlikely to bow under foreign pressure, no matter how severe. Although India remains a secular country, Hinduism, the religion of a significant majority of Indians, will play an increasingly greater role under a BJP regime. Policymakers in other countries who might prefer to deal with the more pliable Gandhi government must now learn how to deal with the new nationalist government with its more assertive posture in foreign policy. The BJP's policy corresponds to the wishes of hundreds of millions of Indians, many of whom value the opportunity for their country to become a major world power more highly than material achievements in their personal lives. The Hindu religion, with which the BJP has been strongly associated, helps them believe so.

The first major step taken by the new government proved that India is serious about joining the ranks of world powers. *Newsweek* noted just after the series of nuclear tests in 1998 that, "when Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said last week that his country's bomb was no more than 'the right of one sixth of mankind,' he plainly spoke for most of his people."²⁹ The Indian nation responded to the nuclear tests with an outpouring of national pride. For a majority of Indians the tests meant that the BJP government was

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moving quickly toward a long-overdue restoration of the country's eminence. Indian voters rewarded the BJP by handing the party a victory in the 1999 parliamentary elections.

Dramatic Surge in the Military Budget

The BJP government also secured a 27 percent increase in India's latest military budget. In terms of New Delhi's intentions and future conventional military capabilities, the increased spending has several implications:

- More aggressive defense of national interests: India's national security policy is being shifted toward more aggressive defense of national interests, territorial integrity, and sovereignty independent of what specific adversary the nation might have to confront. India would be significantly less accommodating when another power threatens its national security. Strategic defense will remain India's preference, but the focus may be shifted from "defensive defense" to "offensive defense"—meaning that preventive strikes against a perceived or real aggressor could be launched before the forces of that country would be able to invade Indian territory.
- Enhanced conventional military capabilities: New Delhi wants its armed forces to have the capability to repulse by conventional means any attack by not only an equal or inferior potential aggressor, such as Pakistan or international Muslim radicals, but also a superior force, such as China or even the United States.
- A larger military role in Asia: India is actively asserting a larger military role in Asia aimed at gradually squeezing the forces of outside powers (the United States, China, Britain, Australia, etc.) out of South Asia and the broad oceanic areas surrounding India and its islands that are considered to be of vital importance to its national security.

If the trend of larger military budgets con-

tinues, coupled with the growing Indian economy and high-tech sector, India may have the following conventional military capabilities by approximately 2005–06:

- Indian strategic power could be projected throughout the Indian Ocean and neighboring waters of the Pacific Ocean, such as the South China Sea, by deploying several Russian-built advanced nuclear submarines with missile-launching capabilities, two or even three more aircraft carriers with advanced Russian-made combat planes on board, and other modern combat ships.
- Ballistic missile capabilities (with conventional warheads) may encompass the whole territory of Pakistan and Afghanistan, vital regions of China, Southeast Asia, the Middle East (to Turkey), former Soviet Central Asia, and most of the Indian Ocean. The operational tasks for those Indian ballistic missile forces could be threefold: (1) to hit any important target in Pakistan and most of China; (2) to hit any anti-Indian terrorist bases in the Middle East, Central Asia, or Burma; and (3) to inflict impermissible losses on the naval and the land forces of "outside powers" operating in the Middle East, Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean, South China Sea, Southeast Asia, and other regions surrounding India—in case of their attack on India.
- India's military would secure even more superiority over Pakistan and a guaranteed victory in possible conflicts with Pakistan or Pakistani-backed Muslim guerrillas and make it impossible for China to achieve any meaningful success if it decided to invade India. Such dominance could be achieved through acquisition and deployment of the following: advanced tank forces; modern artillery and tactical rockets; sophisticated command and control systems as well as communications

and intelligence-gathering systems with space-based components; new and upgraded aircraft; and a renewed arsenal of small arms, ammunition, and other military equipment. Many of the required arms could come from Russia and to a lesser extent from France, Israel, and possibly Britain and the United States. Many weapons systems will be produced in India, either by indigenous companies or under license agreements.

India's National Goals and National Security Interests

The BJP leadership is likely to pursue six goals:

- Making India in this decade one of the four world powers, with the United States, China, and the European Union. Specifically, the government will use India's rising political, diplomatic, economic, military, and moral authority to achieve that goal and to get formal recognition of world power status, which would include India's becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council.
- Asserting India's independence while striving to build equal and mutually beneficial relations with the United States. If Washington applies pressure on the country, New Delhi will try to minimize the confrontation; if the United States continues to apply pressure, Indian leaders are prepared to strengthen strategic and defensive cooperation with traditional allies (Russia) and possibly with new allies (e.g., China).
- Maintaining the territorial integrity and unity of the country under any circumstances, which means few, if any, concessions on the Kashmir issue.
- Preserving and defending the uniqueness of India's civilization and culture under any geopolitical circumstances

and by any means necessary.

- Acquiring sufficient military and non-military means to repel any aggressor. In pursuit of that goal, India will maintain strategic superiority over Pakistan, gradually reach strategic parity with China, and eventually achieve the means of inflicting impermissible losses on the United States should it attack India.
- Maintaining a minimal nuclear deterrent despite any U.S. or international pressure until the official members of the nuclear weapons club agree to destroy their own nuclear weapons.

Indians see the beginning of the 21st century as a breakthrough for their country. India's national goals are extremely ambitious, but a majority of them are likely to be achieved.

How High Technology Serves National Security in India

The favorable conditions under which India is striving for world power status are well described by the monthly intelligence reports submitted to the Joint Intelligence Committee of India. Those reports emphasize that India has the best scientific and technical capability in the Third World, ranks third in Asia in nuclear power, and seventh in the world in space technology. The reports also note that India plans to build a spacecraft that could be used about 100 times and launch a manned space mission early in this century.³⁰ India will not resume nuclear tests, at least for a while. But the tests conducted in 1998 have given enough scientific information for Indian specialists to improve the country's nuclear weapons. India will continue building an Inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a range of over 8,000 kilometers and will likely achieve that goal within a few years.³¹ Development of the polar satellite launch vehicle (PSLV) will be accelerated and integrated with the reentry technology already developed in India's intermediate range ballistic missile, the Agni.

India's national goals are extremely ambitious, but a majority of them are likely to be achieved.

Indian booster rockets are considerably cheaper than U.S. launchers. The service time of an average Indian satellite is twice as long as that of its Russian counterpart.

India is also working out new information and communications policies. Representatives from the armed forces must now be included in any Indian delegation on information and communications issues.³² A thriving democracy with top-notch high-tech talent, minimum censorship of information technology, and widespread use of the English language, India is well placed to be a first-rate economic power in the 21st century. Also, India interacts with the Indian diaspora in the West to find solutions for integrating information and related technologies into the mainstream of life in India.³³

However, India's most ambitious program is space exploration. The country is poised to become the fourth space power of the world after America, Russia, and China. But with the deterioration of Russia's space program and possible (albeit, mostly unconfirmed) Chinese failures in space, India could become, within this decade, the number-two space power, behind only the United States. India plans to compete for foreign commercial clients and has some advantages in that competition. For instance, Indian booster rockets are considerably cheaper than U.S. launchers. The service time of an average Indian satellite is twice as long as that of its Russian counterpart. Cooperation in space research, both commercial and academic, will be expanded to France, the European Space Agency, Russia, and other countries.³⁴ The military component in India's space efforts will be increased, although not dramatically, and the Indian Space Research Organization will pursue closer cooperation with the Indian armed forces and the Defense Research and Development Organization.

The major goal in providing the military with various satellite services for 2000-05 will be launching and maintaining more advanced early warning and surveillance satellites in order to prevent a repetition of what happened during the intrusion of pro-Pakistan Islamic militants through the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir in 1999. On that occasion, guerrillas penetrated Indian-held territory unnoticed.³⁵ India is

planning to build and deploy a multiple dual-use aerospace system (similar to the U.S. space shuttle) and is also interested in working with the Russians on that project. The Defense Research and Development Laboratory is to work on the aerospace system between now and 2019.³⁶ In addition, India is working on and plans to launch its first manned spaceship in a few years, most likely between 2006 and 2012.³⁷

The most extensive military dual-use program will develop, produce, and deploy new generations of satellites. The first in the new series of earth-imaging satellites with advanced equipment Cartosat-1 will be launched in 2000.³⁸ The satellite will give more information to the military than is available from Indian Remote Sensing Satellites (IRS). IRS-6, a satellite similar to Cartosat-1, will be launched in 2002.³⁹ Nevertheless, both of these highly sophisticated satellites will not be used solely for military purposes. The Indian National Security Advisory Board calls for creation of space-based high-resolution satellites to provide early warning so that the survivability of the nuclear arsenal and effective command, control communications, computing, and intelligence and information (C4I2) systems is ensured.⁴⁰ New space launching sites and other ground facilities will be created during the next two decades. The launching station on Shriharikota Island (between Lake Pilicat and the Bay of Bengal, 68 miles north of Madras) recently got one more launching pad and follow-up reconstruction is under way. There are calls in India to prepare an affordable long-term plan to build space-based surveillance assets, theater surveillance with unmanned air vehicles, stand-off platforms, stealth capacities, precision guidance systems, and anti-missile defenses.⁴¹

India Will Not Give Up Its Nuclear Weapons Program

For India, the nuclear arsenal is an integral part of world power status. Fortunately for

the rest of the world, India's nuclear weapons program seems defensive. In his comments at signing the vision statement, Prime Minister Vajpayee confirmed that he had repeated in his private meeting with President Clinton India's commitment not to conduct further nuclear explosive tests and not to be the first to use nuclear weapons.⁴² He also added that India's nuclear program "has always been defensive in nature" and would remain so, but that the program is necessary.⁴³

American experts assume that India is developing its nuclear program to check hostile Pakistani (and possibly Chinese) ambitions. But there is much more to it than that. India is developing its "minimal" nuclear deterrence for purposes that for the most part have little to do with Pakistan. India can successfully deter Pakistan, which is no match for India's military, by using its superiority in conventional forces.

New Delhi's real goal is to have a sufficient arsenal to deter *any* aggressor, even the most powerful country in the world. The Indians do worry about a nuclear-armed China. During President Clinton's visit, Prime Minister Vajpayee said it was not "realistic" for India to give up its nuclear weapons in the face of Pakistan's nuclear proliferation and China's nuclear might.⁴⁴ But it is the United States, with its global reach and superior power, that India wants to deter. New Delhi is apprehensive about possible U.S. plans to attack India. Primarily because of that uneasiness India will not give up its nuclear weapons program. That decision is an unspoken truth that Indian officials never publicly acknowledge in their talks with American officials for two reasons: first, because of cultural habits Indians are not accustomed to telling a foreigner something that might be seen as an offense; and second, Indians do not want a public statement about a U.S. "threat" to ruin chances of improving U.S.-Indian relations.

Fear of U.S. Power and Intentions

If one reads between the lines of Indian public statements, apprehension about pos-

sible hostile moves by the United States toward India can be clearly discerned. To give a recent example, President Narayanan visited France in late April 2000. He and French prime minister Lionel Jospin agreed (in a none-too-subtle reference to the United States) that a single superpower should not dominate the world.

The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, continuing U.S. missile attacks on Iraq, and missile strikes on targets in Sudan and Afghanistan have all served to reinforce India's fears. It should be noticed that India considers not one but three foreign countries (Pakistan, China, and the United States) as potential adversaries. The United States, the most powerful and dangerous from India's perspective, has moved to the head of the list of "priority" threats because of the U.S.-led military coercion of Serbia over Kosovo.⁴⁵

Thus, at its core, India's determination to keep its nuclear weapons until universal nuclear disarmament has little to do with Pakistan, much to do with China, and everything to do with America. This Indian view may seem entirely unreasonable to most Americans. But if the United States wants to dramatically improve relations with India, it cannot build them on false assumptions. The United States must recognize that Indian leaders (and much of the population) consider America the most serious potential foreign threat and that Washington cannot dismiss such Indian security concerns and conduct a successful policy in South Asia. Many discussions held by the author throughout India with various representatives of India's political and military elites during the 1990s have one thing in common: Indians still distrust the United States and fear that one day they may be subject to an American attack.

An examination of what Indian strategists and the military think about U.S. global plans, especially those regarding India, confirms that point. According to India's Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies, the flagship of Indian national security research, the United States is becoming increasingly bent on "coercive diplomacy"

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and interventionism while shifting its main focus from Russia and Europe (since the fall of the Soviet Union) to a few key Third World countries, including India. Indian national security specialists interviewed by the author in 1999–2000 have especially underlined that their predictions about such a trend in U.S. policy made just after the end of the Cold War are coming true. As far back as 1990, Jasjit Singh wrote:

Two important factors will need to be borne in mind. Firstly, Western doctrines are intended for application in the Third World, where they expect a “broader range of challenges.” Secondly, Western strategies rely heavily on “coercive diplomacy” and interventionism where technologies would offer greater opportunities with long-range “surgical strikes.” U.S. strategists are worried that “a Third World with three or four major global military powers would confront American strategic planners with a far more complicated environment.” And India in their calculations, is one of those three or four.⁴⁶

Ten years later, those concerns have not disappeared. To the contrary, they have increased since the BJP government has come to power.⁴⁷

Indian military planners on a strategic, and often on an operational, level pay their main attention not to Pakistani and Chinese strategies but to U.S. national security and military strategies, such as the “Airland Battle 2000” and “Discriminate Deterrence.” As Singh put it, “The realities of such doctrines (besides reliance on nuclear weapons) and the technologies supporting them have to be taken note of not only because of the potential threat of great power intervention (which has taken place in the past against India) but also its influence and impact on other countries, like Pakistan, with close military and strategic links with the USA.”⁴⁸ Indians suspect that, despite suspension of

direct military ties with Pakistan, the United States still has extensive security links with that country, in particular in the area of special services cooperation. Singh noted that

even professional serious studies prepared for the U.S. Congress fail to notice the existence of China [in regard to India] or Indian security concerns other than those related to Pakistan. Such distortions are even welcomed by India’s smaller neighbors who then claim sympathy and even linkages of advantage with the great powers for legitimate security needs against the big “regional” power. . . . In India, of course, people have found it difficult to understand why other countries with core values similar to ours have preferred to support those with contradictory value systems, at times with detrimental and deleterious effect on our security environment. A very large number of examples could be cited.⁴⁹

India is organizing rather extensive, sophisticated intelligence operations for gathering as much information as possible on U.S. military plans, actions, and programs. The Indians are well aware of the achievements, scope, and sophistication of U.S. military programs. For example, the extensive and mostly successful use of space in the U.S.-led interventions against Yugoslavia and Iraq has shown India that satellites can secure domination of an attacking side over a defending one.⁵⁰

Since the Kosovo conflict, Indian policymakers have come to believe that U.S. missiles and bombers, navigated from orbit by satellites, may well threaten India. In India there are several “Kosovo-style” regions with long-existing separatist movements: Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Mezoram, Tripur, and Tamilnad. So India’s ultimate national security goal is to be ready for a U.S. attack with missile and bombing strikes; however, India currently is not ready to

repulse even a mid-scale aerospace attack conducted by a developed nation. Thus, for Indians the crucial matter is whether they will be able to prepare their air defense, missile defense, and space component before a hostile power attacks them from the skies.⁵¹ The Indian military elite believes that with no credible air defense against that threat the only viable option for India is to develop a strategic deterrent capability of its own. However, India may be willing to give up this program if ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons can be eliminated universally.⁵²

India's military, including strategic analysis institutions and space-missile weapons developers, has subjected NATO's use of space in Yugoslavia to scrupulous analysis. The preliminary results: the U.S. military space system, including point navigation, command and control, surveillance-intelligence, and communications, is impressive but not infallible. Indians believe they are learning from the actions of both sides in Yugoslavia, in particular how defenders can deceive an attacker's satellites and aircraft. Even guided missiles can lock onto a false target.⁵³

Like the Chinese, the Indians are proactive, continuing their priority missile and space programs adopted before the Yugoslavia conflict. However, there appear to have been two changes: first, demand is increasing for quality of resolution and other characteristics of the new-generation Indian satellites; second, since Kosovo the project for creating the Indian multiple aerospace system seems to be receiving a boost.⁵⁴

India is also concerned about U.S. plans to develop a national missile defense (NMD). Indian military calculations show that neither rogue countries nor India, even after deploying an ICBM with a more than 8,000-km range, would be able to seriously threaten U.S. territory for at least 30 years. The Indian conclusion is that NMD is part of a U.S. strategy to escape retaliation after a first strike. (India has also noted that the United States and NATO have not repudiated the concept of a first nuclear strike.)⁵⁵

That pervasive fear and mistrust is the

main problem in U.S.-Indian relations; more specifically, how can the United States convince Indians that it will never attack their country. Some Americans might say that it is absurd even to imagine a U.S. missile attack against India. However, such a flat dismissal would be unwise. To Americans the notion of such an attack is absurd, but for India, it is a serious fear. If the United States is to dramatically improve relations with India, work must begin on alleviating India's fears. It could be done directly, at confidential talks that would reassure Indians that they need not fear the United States and that would result in confidence-building measures. For example, the following ideas for confidence-building measures in the military could be considered:

- Implementation of regular U.S.-Indian consultations dealing with the military and security situation in the region. The goal would be to offer the respective governments suggestions on how to reduce troop levels and naval forces as well as tensions due to misperceptions on both sides.
- Mutual advance warning for launching ballistic missiles over the Indian Ocean.
- Mutual advance information on large- and mid-scale naval, air, and land exercises in South Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.
- Mutual timely information on troops, aircraft, and ship movement within and out of the "region of mutual concern" (South Asia and surrounding areas of the Middle East and East-Southeast Asia that are agreed to be included in the region of mutual concern).

Other countries of the region and world powers active in the region could be persuaded to participate in the above-described measures, thereby further decreasing regional tensions. Moreover, improving relations could be done indirectly, through U.S. for-

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India worries that the United States might use its vast military power to impose a solution to the Kashmir dispute.

eign policy initiatives proposed below. The more a sense of partnership can develop, the more an atmosphere of trust will grow.

Kashmir as a “Hot-Button” Issue

India especially worries that the United States might use its vast military power to impose a solution to the Kashmir dispute. Why are Indians so sensitive to the Kashmir issue that they will not agree to either U.S. or international mediation? Because multinational India is afraid that it might follow the fate of the multinational Soviet Union and fall apart. Indian elites consider Jammu and Kashmir, the only Indian state where the majority of the population is Muslim, to be the weakest link in a Hindu-majority country. They fear, and with some reason, that should India be weakened, Kashmir would be the first territory lost.

U.S. policymakers tend to forget that India was already humiliated over Kashmir in 1947; Pakistani troops pushed Indians off a large part of this restive region and ceded some of the conquered territory to China. Consequently, India now holds only 45 percent of Kashmiri territory, while China occupies 15 percent and Pakistan controls the rest. With their commitment to peace and self-restraint, Indians got over that bitter experience. India has not put forward any demands for Pakistan (or China) to return the occupied territories. Even the current nationalistic BJP government does not claim those lands. But it seems that the West, including America, has not given New Delhi much credit for such restraint. Pakistani and international Muslim media have been very adept at drawing the world’s attention to Indian repression of Muslim guerrilla supporters, while Pakistan’s role in the conflict goes largely unremarked. India, which had all of Kashmir at the time of the declaration of independence but now has only 45 percent, stubbornly resists outside pressure to vacate the rest of the territory.

It should be remembered that India has never instigated incidents to disrupt the status quo in Kashmir. It has been either

Pakistan or its proxies that have unleashed hostilities, in both numerous border skirmishes and the large-scale wars fought between India and Pakistan.

Also not appreciated in the West is the cautious nature of India’s military strategy and tactics, as reflected in India’s campaigns against Muslim guerrillas in Kashmir. When the latter have made their incursions, such as the last big incursion in the Kargil area in 1999, Indian forces have confined land battles to the Indian-controlled part of the region. Even the Indian air force’s operations outside of India’s air space have been rare and limited to bombing Pakistani-backed guerrillas’ rear positions and reinforcements no more than a few miles inside Pakistan or Pakistani-controlled Kashmir territory. Indian air force officers bitterly told the author that their combat aircraft would have been able to prevent or eliminate at the outset many incursions by Muslim rebels had the air force used “Israeli tactics” (i.e., destroying guerrillas wherever they could be found, as exemplified by Israeli military operations in Lebanon).

Furthermore, although they were reproached by Western media for repressive measures in Kashmir and the resulting flow of Muslim refugees, Indians were surprised to find almost no sympathy in the West for the plight of Hindu and other non-Muslim populations of Kashmir. Few people in America are aware that most of the Hindu population of Jammu and Kashmir has been forced into exile by a terror campaign conducted by Pakistani-backed Muslim guerrillas who systematically kill non-Muslims for the purposes of “cleaning Kashmir from infidels.”^{5 6} In another part of the world, such tactics are called “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing.”

All the above factors, especially the forced emigration of non-Muslims from Kashmir, have made this region a “hot-button” issue for India. It should be added that Kashmir is also extremely important to India in geopolitics and geostrategy. First, possession of Kashmir secures India’s stake in geopolitically important Central Asia, where the former

Soviet Central Asia, western China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—in addition to Kashmir—are also located. Second, preserving control of Kashmir enables India to mount a reliable defense of its extensive northern border. Third, Kashmir is even more strategically crucial in case of foreign invasion: should the region be lost, its mountainous areas located far above New Delhi and other important population centers would provide excellent locations for adversaries to place missile-launching positions and air bases.^{5,7} Fourth, Kashmir has enormous mineral resources that are yet to be determined and explored. Fifth, the region is a hub of strategically and economically important transit routes going in both east-west and north-south directions. India would strongly benefit from controlling that nexus—especially if the situation in the region were to become peaceful.

The United States should trust India's commitment to democratic norms. However gradually and painfully for itself, India will likely resolve the Kashmir problem on its own. Washington's willingness to tread carefully around the Kashmir issue is extremely important for improving the U.S.-Indian relationship. Washington needs to make it clear to India that the United States will not look at the India-Kashmir problem as it has looked at the Serbia-Kosovo conflict. Otherwise, America and India will never improve their relationship.

An Impasse in U.S.-Indian Relations

The United States has been “losing” India since that country became independent. Despite President Clinton's visit in March 2000, that trend is likely to continue if not corrected by strong foreign policy moves. If the trend is not reversed in the near future, Americans may soon be asking who lost India.

Mistakes Have Been Made

The fundamental mistake made by Washington has been to underestimate the

degree to which India's political, economic, and military potential can either enhance or seriously undermine U.S. position in the world. Because of that underestimation, no solid, long-term strategy seems to have been worked out for developing U.S. relations with India. The Clinton foreign policy team's strategy toward India is too modest in its ambitions, too narrowly focused in its scope, and too limited in its goals.

Treating India on an equal basis with Pakistan and looking at India only through the prism of the Indian-Pakistani relationship are unrealistic. Washington cannot befriend both archrivals; it must choose—and better sooner than later. (President Clinton's criticism of the Pakistani military regime in his speech to India's parliament was a step in the right direction.) For the sake of preserving good relations with Pakistan, some U.S. policymakers pretend not to, or really do not, understand that Pakistan has been behind the Islamic rebels in Kashmir not only politically and ideologically but also militarily. Beyond that consideration, Pakistan is a midsize power with an authoritarian track record. India is a democratic, rapidly emerging great power. Relations with India should clearly take precedence over those with Pakistan.

America's opinion makers neglect India most of the time. Just a month after President Clinton's visit to that country, American newspapers recall India only on occasion, such as when tensions flare up over Kashmir. Indeed, the president's visit itself might not have taken place had it not been for India's becoming a nuclear power.

Except for diplomatic niceties expressed during official visits, the United States does not really accept India's world power status and New Delhi's insistence on a voice in global affairs. Instead, U.S. officials treat India as a regional power only.

Insisting that India dismantle its nuclear weapons program is a critical mistake of U.S. policy. That goal is “mission impossible” for this or any future U.S. administration. Because of myriad factors vitally important to India and its national security, that coun-

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Complaints about human rights abuses committed by the Indian military have some justification, but the question is whether U.S. punitive measures would really make India more receptive to American goals.

try will never give up its nuclear weapons unless all nuclear powers, including America, agree on a complete ban of nuclear weapons. Demanding that India liquidate its nuclear arsenal unilaterally will merely cause further problems in the U.S.-Indian relationship.

Bankrupt Competing Policy Options

It is apparent why the administration's policy has led to an impasse in U.S.-Indian relations. But alternative options that have been put forward by some U.S. political forces on the right and the left would produce no better results. Some conservatives still cannot forgive India for perceived Cold War-era sins. The worst of those sins was India's friendship with the Soviets. (Even that belief is not entirely fair. Washington's shortsighted alliance with Pakistan gave India little choice but to counter that move by tilting toward Moscow.)

Americans who still harbor a grudge against New Delhi embrace a policy that would maintain a tough line toward India and treat it as a potential adversary. Concerns about the Indian missile programs have been regularly raised at congressional hearings. The hearing before the Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in May 1999 illustrates such concerns. In his testimony, Karl Inderfurth, assistant secretary of state for South Asia, reported that the United States "regretted the decision last month [April 1999] by India to test an extended range version of the Agni ballistic missile. While we have a much better understanding after eight rounds of dialog of what motivates India's strategic thinking, our concern about further missile tests by India . . . remains."⁵⁸ Answering senators' questions about India's missile program at the same hearing, Cohen told about

those [in the Indian government] who would like to go to the sea for a Triad

nuclear deterrent, not simply an air deliverable and a missile deliverable capability but to build submarines and put missiles on the submarines, which has grave implications for America, because a submarine possibly could reach the United States. In fact, a few Indian strategists have argued that they should be able to attack the United States just in a way of demonstrating to the U.S. that we cannot intervene in their region any more. . . . Some Indians have thought it necessary to acquire a capability of keeping the U.S. . . . out of South Asia.⁵⁹

Yet India's nuclear program seems more defensive than aggressive. (A former Indian minister of defense termed India's national security strategy a "defensive defense.")⁶⁰ India's desire to prepare an asymmetric answer to a perceived American threat cannot really be considered a threat to America. Doing so would equate India with rogue countries, and that would be both unfair and a serious blunder. Treating India as a potential enemy would risk creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Another policy option toward India is advanced especially by some in the Democratic Party. Their main point is that the United States should insist on higher liberal and democratic standards for India as a precondition for improving U.S.-Indian relations. Calls for more Indian openness to globalization, in particular to American exports, and for respecting human rights in Kashmir are often heard.⁶¹ Complaints about human rights abuses committed by the Indian military certainly have some justification, but the question is whether U.S. punitive measures would really make India more receptive to American goals. Such measures are unlikely to do so. That does not mean Americans should always placate India; however, Americans should ask what the United States' overriding goal toward India should be. If it is to make a strategic breakthrough in U.S.-Indian relations and turn

India into a strategic partner, then some accommodation is required. Besides, current U.S. policy options toward India, including the one pursued by the administration, are counterproductive.

A Russia-India-China Strategic Triangle

The mistakes of U.S. policy toward India have contributed to India's drifting toward forming a Russia-India-China axis, which would be implicitly aimed at checking U.S. power. The idea of a counterhegemonic quadrangle—Russia-India-China-Iran—is also floated. Discussion about the latter idea, put forward by members of the Russian elite (including Col. Gen. Leonid Ivashov, director of the International Military Cooperation Directorate, Russian Ministry of Defense), is still in an embryonic stage.⁶² But the proposal has already been well received by some government circles in India, China, and Iran, because the creation of such a strategic quadrangle would fit well with the goal of curbing U.S. hegemony embraced by all four proposed participants of a multipolar world.

In India, the related proposal of reformist Iranian president Mohammad Khatami for “the dialogue of civilizations” received an especially warm welcome.⁶³ India, enjoying long-term cooperation with Russia and currently improving its relations with China, is starting to build ties with Iran too. The Indians did not proceed with that initiative until the reformer Khatami came to power. There is a strong connection between the success of democratic change in Iran and India's attitude toward that nation.

Yet, there is still no firm anti-American alliance involving the four “quadrangle” countries. Iran remains wary of the United States, and China harbors fairly substantial anti-American sentiment. For example, the military attaché office of the People's Republic of China Embassy in Moscow stated that “America remains the main adversary of all peace-loving nations.”⁶⁴ Postcommunist Russia is still choosing its geopolitical stance. India is also considering various options. Given the defensive nature of India's national

security and defense strategies, the likelihood of New Delhi's participation in an anti-U.S. alliance will depend almost entirely on how the Indian government assesses Washington's geopolitical designs toward India. Accordingly, the less the United States engages India in dialogue and cooperation, the less New Delhi will trust U.S. policy toward India.

Unfortunately, much U.S. policy toward India—especially that portion mandated by Congress—is dominated by the language of sanctions. Some of the measures, including the ban on U.S. military aid and the development of U.S.-Indian military ties, have been imposed since India's nuclear tests in May 1998 and have yet to be canceled. Sanctions might work with a small, weak country such as Iraq (although the record is murky even in that case), but they will never work with a great nation such as India. What is worse, congressionally mandated sanctions will deteriorate U.S.-Indian relations and push India toward strategic alliances with anti-American goals. Advocates of sanctions should remember that most target nations have other options. For example, when Congress bars the U.S. military's contacts with its Indian colleagues, the latter strengthens ties with the Russian and the Chinese militaries.

America has long worked to undermine the Indian ballistic missile program as if it were as threatening to U.S. security as the North Korean program. That inflexible approach has resulted in three important consequences. First, India's suspicions about U.S. plans regarding India have increased. Indians see Washington's opposition to their country's missile program as an American attempt to leave India disarmed in the face of a possible U.S. missile attack.⁶⁵ Second, U.S. resistance to the Indian ballistic program's development has inevitably drawn India closer to Russia and even China. Beijing has begun to view the Indian program more as an anti-U.S. rather than an anti-China deterrent.⁶⁶ Third, with their considerable high-tech talents and resources, Indians are building ballistic missiles—including long-range missiles.

Much U.S. policy toward India—especially that portion mandated by Congress—is dominated by the language of sanctions.

The most radical move the United States could make for dramatic improvement in its relations with India would be to unconditionally accept India's nuclear status.

Washington's policy has not only annoyed the Indians; it has also been futile.

Despite long-standing U.S. resistance, India has acquired sophisticated Russian cryogenic engines for the first rocket stage. At the insistence of the United States, Russia stopped transferring the technology in May 1992. The Russians may well have succumbed to Washington's pressure, but that did not stop the Indians. On receiving the first-stage cryogenic engine in a complete form, Indian scientists have been able to create second- and third-stage cryogenic engines.⁶⁷ Those engines were successfully tested in March and April 2000, and Indians believe that accomplishment should not be lost on the United States if it possibly believes it can checkmate India's space program by persuading Russia not to transfer cryogenic technology. Turning out a final product is hardly beyond the ingenuity of the scientists of India's Satellite Research Organization.

The Winning Way: Accept India's World Power Status

A reactive policy toward India (e.g., New Delhi tests a nuclear bomb, Washington imposes sanctions) is easy to conduct but regrettably shortsighted. A proactive policy—building a long-term strategic relationship with India—is hard to pursue but the only approach likely to succeed. There is no quick solution for improving U.S.-Indian relations. The only feasible way for improvement is for America to accept India's world power status. That, in turn, will require daring foreign policy moves designed to bring India closer to the United States and its national interests.

Rogue Countries, India, and Nuclear Weapons

The most radical move the United States could make for dramatic improvement in its relations with India would be to unconditionally accept India's nuclear status. The United States should formally recognize

India's joining the nuclear club and ask all other members of the club to do the same.

The U.S. official statement on the matter should be explicit. The statement should emphasize the defensive nature of India's nuclear weapons program and the lack of any Indian offensive threat to other countries. An explicit dividing line should be drawn between democratic India and rogue countries whose weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threaten the world. Moreover, it should be specified that America's formal recognition of India's nuclear status is an exception to Washington's general opposition to proliferation.

The justification for making an exception in India's case should not be based on the fact that India already has nuclear weapons, since that justification could be used as an excuse by some so-called nuclear threshold rogue countries to justify their nuclear weapons programs. Instead, the reasoning should be based on the undeniable fact that India is a stable democracy with a solid record of aversion to the use of military power for aggression. The statement should also emphasize that this well-deserved international reputation, and the moral authority it garners, puts India beyond any reasonable suspicion that it would use nuclear weapons for purposes other than retaliation against a nuclear attack.

The concerns that such a move would invite increased nuclear proliferation do not seem justified. Rogue countries currently working on acquiring nuclear weapons will continue to do so independently of U.S. recognition of India's nuclear status. Moreover, many states, especially in the Third World, would welcome a conciliatory move as evidence that the United States wishes to pursue an equitable foreign and international security policy for all nations, not merely for developed countries. Britain, France, Russia, and China, the members of the nuclear club, are likely to follow the U.S. move. Russia and China would be outmaneuvered, since a crucial foreign policy and international security initiative dealing with

India would have passed from them to America. That move would also deal a heavy blow to those in China, Russia, and India itself who dream of building the tripartite strategic alliance to oppose the United States.

U.S. recognition of India as a nuclear power would remove the main obstacle to making America and India friends and de facto strategic partners. Such an initiative by Washington would likely mean India's acceptance of U.S. proposals on nonproliferation of WMD technology and fissile materials. India would join international talks on ending the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and would install effective controls for nuclear-related materials. Those measures would reduce the threat of proliferation from India and begin U.S.-Indian cooperation on counterproliferation.

UN Security Council Membership

At the same time that America admits India to the nuclear club, Washington should formally recognize India's world power status. In a major foreign policy statement Washington should formally recognize India's world status and global interests. Further, the United States should propose, and wholeheartedly support, India's candidacy for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Such actions would cause positive reactions around the world, since India is regarded as a leader of developing nations. Not only would U.S. international prestige increase, but countries such as Russia, China, and France would lose the initiative in the diplomatic struggle for India's favor.

America should also advise the G-7 industrialized nations to invite India to become a member of that elite international group. India could become a member of the political side of G-7 (as Russia is). The other G-7 members would certainly accept this move, since it would correspond to economic reality: as shown above, India may overtake Britain, Canada, and Italy—all G-7 members—in size of GDP by 2006.

The United States should immediately stop dealing with India only in the context of

U.S. policy goals in South Asia. We would better serve our global interests if our policy took India out of the subcontinent context and if Washington conducted relations with New Delhi in the same way it conducts relations with China, Japan, Russia, and other world powers. In this light, Clinton should have confined his South Asia trip to a visit to India only. The administration should quickly set up regular meetings between the U.S. president and the Indian prime minister, as well as between the U.S. secretary of state and the Indian foreign minister and the U.S. secretary of defense and the Indian defense minister.

Perhaps most important, all remaining sanctions against India should be canceled. Abolishing sanctions would allow the resumption of U.S.-Indian military ties, an important step for promoting regional and global stability.

The Kashmir issue should be left to India. America should back democratic India, not dictatorial Pakistan. With the Cold War over, America gains nothing by supporting Pakistan. President Clinton noted during his visit to India, "I believe that there are elements within the Pakistani government that have supported those who engaged in violence in Kashmir."^{6 8} Human rights issues in Kashmir—even when the Indian military might be culpable—should not overshadow India's astonishing achievement: securing democracy and human rights for more than one-sixth of the world's population. Moreover, the biggest perpetrators of human rights abuses in Kashmir are the Pakistani-backed insurgents.

The United States should seek greater cooperation with India in combating international terrorism, including threats by WMD. As the *Hindustan Times* recently noted, there are many virulently anti-American terrorist groups based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in addition to Kashmiri militant factions based in Pakistan, that may be interested in acquiring a radiation weapon.^{6 9} Those in the region working against America and India often have the same sponsors as well as the same funding sources and weapons. Osama Bin Laden, the

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international terrorist at the top of the U.S. most-wanted list, finances and trains both anti-American and anti-Indian Muslim extremist groups. Moreover, some of those groups work on two fronts, against both America and India.

India and the United States should realize that they have a common geopolitical enemy, international terrorists, who will not disappear and whose defeat will require significant coordination between special forces and other agencies of America and India. The United States should not take offense at India's refusal to let a CIA technical intelligence-gathering center be opened in India; it takes time for both sides to become less suspicious. It would also be wise for the United States to carefully consider whether establishing such a center in neighboring Bangladesh would be worth possible worsening relations with New Delhi, which is likely to misinterpret the move as directed against India.

We need to further open the U.S. market to Indian goods—especially steel and textile imports. In addition, U.S. immigration laws should be changed so that more Indians with computer skills can be invited to the United States. Such a move would alleviate the shortage of information technology specialists in the U.S. labor market. Unlike the Chinese, Indians have greater practical and experimental knowledge in information technology, primarily because Indian scientists and engineers are better trained and hence more capable. It is not by chance that scientists and programmers of Indian (and Russian) origin far surpass in number all other foreign colleagues at U.S. laboratories and research centers.

Radically reforming U.S. policy toward India will not be easy. We must accept the modest goal of gradual improvement of U.S.-Indian relations. Real friends cannot be made overnight, especially when decades of ingrained suspicions on both sides must be overcome. Although India will likely never become America's closest ally, it may well become a reliable de facto strategic partner in resolving many global problems.

The Winning U.S. Policy on India

What would such a policy win for the United States? America would get a strategic partner of the highest caliber. Most important, such a policy would dramatically shift the global, geopolitical, and geostrategic balance in favor of the United States.

The geopolitical balance in Asia would be especially tilted in America's favor. India could help the United States contain expansionist threats from China to maintain order and stability in East and Southeast Asia. In addition, America would move further from the brink of nuclear confrontation with China over the Taiwan issue and other potential sources of friction. China would be less able to contemplate a confrontation with either its neighbors in East Asia or with the United States if Beijing had to worry about India's response.

Benefits to U.S. national security interests would occur on a global scale if the United States and India became strategic partners. Most notably, there would be no chance for an anti-U.S. Russia-India-China alliance. Preventing that outcome alone would be a huge geopolitical success for the United States. Further, effectiveness of U.S. intelligence and special operations against major international terrorist groups located in Afghanistan and Pakistan would significantly increase thanks to direct U.S.-Indian cooperation.

In response to eliminating sanctions and further opening our market to Indian goods, India would likely decrease import tariffs, securing easier access for American goods there. The American economy would benefit from enhanced trade and investment with India.

A foreign policy and national security strategy based on Washington's willingness to accept India's world power status, including accepting New Delhi in the nuclear club, is the only realistic way for a breakthrough in U.S.-Indian ties. The current bankrupt U.S. policy will merely extend stagnation in relations to the point of irrevocably losing India.

The potential benefits of a more enlightened policy are enormous. The potential perils of Washington's current shortsighted policy are equally enormous.

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