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Community of Democracies:

India Joins America's Ideological Enterprise

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The advent of the BJP to office at the Centre in 1998 marked a major turning point in Indian politics. The character of the BJP, a right-wing pro-imperialist party, was bound to affect the foreign policy of the country. This became apparent very soon after the Vajpayee government assumed office. The Pokhran nuclear tests in May 1998 served as the launching pad for the qualitative shift in policy towards the United States. From the now infamous Vajpayee's letter to Clinton, citing China as the reason for testing nuclear weapons, to the beginning of the endless rounds of talks between Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and US Under Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, the course was set by the BJP leadership to fashion a new foreign policy abandoning non-alignment and embracing the idea of a strategic partnership with the United States. While much attention is focussed on the nuclear and security aspects in Indo-US relations and the burgeoning US stakes in the Indian economy, very little time is spent on recognising that the BJP, given its right-wing character, is entering into a political and ideological venture with the US.

While it is true that the nuclear strategy of the BJP regime is founded on acquiring recognition from the United States for its nuclear power status, even if it is not an official status, the new content in Indo-US relations has deeper implications. The BJP-RSS combine has been remarkably consistent in its world outlook. From the days of the Cold War, it has scorned non-alignment. The RSS is anti-China and anti-Communist and wishes to promote India's "great power" status in conjunction with the US. Its preferred alliance with the United States provided, the imperialist superpower is prepared to rely on India rather than Pakistan. As long as the US kept Pakistan as its military ally, the Jan Sangh and later the BJP could not envisage such a strategic relationship fructifying.

It is only in the 1990s that circumstances changed and the

possibilities for effecting this long held view opened up. The success of the Afghan war waged with the help of America and the end of the Cold War with the dismantling of the Soviet Union resulted in the relative diminishing in the importance of Pakistan for the US. The liberalisation process ushered in by the Indian ruling classes in the nineties and the signals sent out that it is now willing to do business with the US, set the background for the BJP pushing for a regional role as a junior partner of the US. Economic policies hospitable to international finance capital, a *modus vivendi* on the nuclear issue, resumption of military collaboration agreements interrupted by the nuclear tests and acceptance of the US global interests form the basis for India's entry into this new role. In the US global strategy, the US administration places considerable importance to providing an ideological content to its hegemonic order. Democracy is one such construct. How India has been drawn into this ideological venture, is the focus of this article.

The BJP's eleventh month stint in office from 1998 and the return to power in October 1999 have seen this process unfold and reach a point of conclusion with the Clinton visit in March 2000. As in the case of much of the developing Indo-US relations and its different dimensions, there is very little information provided about them by the Vajpayee government and the Ministry of External Affairs. It is from the US side that such information comes out about the current initiatives. This was so in the matter of the prolonged negotiations conducted by the two sides on the nuclear issue and it also true about the brave new venture called the "Community of Democracies" (CoD) that India has entered into under Madeleine Albright's coaxing.

The Singapore Announcement of CoD

The first time Indians became aware of their country's involvement in this American project was a cryptic reference in a statement issued after Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh met Madeleine Albright in Singapore at the time of the Asean Regional Forum meeting in August 1999. The timing was significant. A caretaker government was in place. The Jaswant Singh-Talbott talks had completed eight rounds before the government fell after losing the vote in Parliament. By this time, India had indicated its willingness to sign the CTBT and open the economy further to foreign capital. The announcement signalled the Vajpayee government's readiness to enter into a political-ideological alliance^[i]. Interestingly, the Ministry of External Affairs did not come up with any clarification or information about the CoD. Nor was the Indian mainstream media

and the charmed circle of foreign affairs correspondents unduly interested or willing to go into it. It is a sign of the times that a major step of signing up on America's ideological bandwagon is ignored or treated as an ordinary event. So what is the CoD as put out by the State Department of the US government? For there is no question as to the parentage of this initiative. To begin with, one must go back to the cognities.

The National Endowment for Democracy

During the Reagan Presidency, in the early eighties, alongwith the renewed military offensive against the Soviet Union (in the form of stepped up military expenditure), the ideological counterpart was the campaign for "democracy". It is in this connection that under Reagan's initiative, the US Congress passed an act creating the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Funded by the US government primarily, the NED's motto is "free markets sustain democracy". The NED is a successor to the American outfits such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom which operated in the fifties and sixties. It provides funds to promote "democracy" to anti-China Tibetan organisations, Cuban émigré groups and generally supports organisations which promote market reforms and transnational corporations.[\[ii\]](#)

The NED appears constantly in all the initiatives taken by the Clinton Administration to float the platform called the CoD and to build "a world movement for democracy".

The first appearance of the CoD is with an inaugural meeting of the International Committee for a Community of Democracies in 1985. This was followed by All Democracies Conference sponsored by the ICCD at Ann Arbor, Michigan. It was attended by 90 representatives from more than 50 countries termed democracies. Former presidents Carter and Ford addressed the Conference. The delegates included members of Parliament, ministers, businessmen, journalists and professors whose attendance, as private citizens, was funded by grants from various foundations. The conference's chief objective was to develop support for an "intergovernmental association of democracies" that would provide a forum for democratic governments to discuss common problems.[\[iii\]](#) This aim has finally reached fruition with the proposed "Community of Democracies Ministerial Conference" in Warsaw in June 2000. The journey to this governmental level international conference has been reached through various regional level efforts of the US government.

Regional "Community of Democracies"

The first laboratory where the CoD was tested was in South America. In 1993, the Clinton Administration which took office in 1992, called for "a true partnership of the Americans -- a Western Hemisphere Community of Democracies". In a speech delivered to the Council of Americans for the US Secretary of state Christopher Warren, the Acting Secretary Wharton said that this Western Hemisphere CoD is to, apart from strengthening democratic institutions and human rights, "to support economic reforms and free markets".[\[iv\]](#) This is the recurring theme in the American idea of democracy whichever President takes over. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was held up as the US vision of a community of hemispheric countries linked by open markets and democratic values. Wharton also asserted that we have a chance of make North American free trade -- and co-operation on labour and environmental standards -- a model for the rest of the hemisphere and the world".[\[v\]](#) At the same meeting, the US made it clear that it would support a counter-revolution in Cuba by `peaceful' means. It hoped that "Cubans win their freedom through the kind of peaceful transition which has brought so many other nations into the democratic community". Till then, it reiterated its opposition of Fidel Castro's "dictatorship".

The Clinton Administration assiduously peddled its version of democracy in all regions as a step towards launching the global democracy forum. The US setup the New Atlantic Initiative (NAI) which, according to the official press release, is an "independent US initiative dedicated to reinvigorating and expanding the *Atlantic community of democracies*".[\[vi\]](#) This was headquartered at the "American Enterprise Institute" and founded under the auspices of such pro-American stalwarts as Czech President Vaclav Havel, former German Social democratic Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and others. In 1997, the New Atlantic Initiative sponsored a conference on enlarging NATO. The purpose of the European version of the CoD was to consolidate the Eastern European countries under the US-NATO umbrella and provide the ideological support for their difficult transition to a "democratic" system which would open them to western and transnational capital.

In Asia, the grand project for democracy has taken shape with the roping in of India into this global movement sponsored by the US State Department and its outfits like the NED.

New Delhi Conference

The announcement in Singapore that India was ready to be one of the core countries to sponsor the CoD was followed by an international conference in New Delhi called "Building a Worldwide Movement for Democracy" in February 1999. India had finally arrived in the democracy business. It was also the American recognition of India's political role in its strategic interests which the Vajpayee government so avidly sought. This conference was organised by the NED and its affiliates. All the big-wigs of the Vajpayee regime graced the occasion which was attended by 300 participants from 85 countries.[\[vii\]](#) Jaswant Singh, the prime architect of the pro-US line was there, so was Yashwant Sinha, the "swadeshi" Finance Minister and George Fernandes, a person associated with the all democracy ventures of the US since the sixties. To give it a bipartisan look, Dr. Manmohan Singh was the lead speaker on the "political foundations of a market economy".

The NED's local associates for the conference were the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Centre for Policy Research. The CII is the most influential business body in India which advocates fullfledged liberalisation. The CPR is an academic research body which has flourished with funding from American sources.

Asian Centre in Delhi

Though it was not known at that time, the partnership of the US State Department outfit and the big business organisation, the CII, was meant for a more enduring relationship. Before the Clinton visit, Madeleine Albright made a significant announcement -- the setting up of an Asian Centre for Democratic Governance in New Delhi.[\[viii\]](#) Typically, this was announced in Washington on the eve of the visit, with no information from the Indian side. Albright termed this a joint-non-governmental initiative. The NED would jointly organise the Centre in New Delhi. The Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training, an affiliate of Indian Parliament would partner the CII in implementing the activities of the Centre. Thus, a private business organisation is used to rope in a parliamentary body for an American government sponsored project.

Jaswant Singh has got India to play a key role in the Asian CoD. The NED sponsored centre would provide the institutional support for its activities. According to the NED press release:

"Focusing on democratic development in Asia, with an emphasis on problems of governance, the Center will organize conferences and workshops that will engage practitioners of democracy, business leaders, and professional executives throughout Asia. The Center's other activities will include training young men and women with leadership potential in public and corporate life.

"The conferences will introduce participants to the latest thinking on democratic governance through presentations by leading scholars and practitioners from India and the region's other established democracies, the newer democracies such as Thailand, Mongolia, and Nepal, more transitional countries such as Indonesia, multilateral development institutions, and the United States and other relevant democracies.

"Workshops will be designed to facilitate active and forthright discussion among practitioners of democracy, businessmen and professional executives in the region. Participants in the workshops, mainly from the continent, will have an opportunity to interact among themselves as well as with a small number of international experts on democratic governance and economic development issues. Although the first major conference and workshop will be held in New Delhi, the Center will seek out other centers in Asia to host the two subsequent workshops in the series."[\[ix\]](#)

An Indian, Gautam Adhikari, recruited by the NED will be one of the key functionaries of the Centre in Delhi. Adhikari is a former executive editor of the *Times of India* and has had stints with various American research institutions.

Poland: Venue of CoD Meet

The stage is set for the next step: India being a co-sponsor of the international conference of the CoD in Warsaw, Poland in June 2000. After the Singapore announcement when it was said that eleven countries, including India, would constitute the core democracies, it was stated in the vision statement by Clinton and Vajpayee that India would be among the seven co-sponsors. The others are USA, Poland, Czech Republic, Mali, Chile and South Korea.

The hand of Madeleine Albright is evident in this strange club. Mali is an African country which has recently found favour with the US. Albright visited Mali in October 1999. According to a commentary: "The visit was perceived to reflect the good image which Mali had won in the USA through its political and economic reforms over the

previous seven years."[\[x\]](#) The Czech President Havel considers the US the torch-bearer of freedom and democracy. As for South Korea, it is a good example of the type of democracy the US favours in Asia; strong authoritarianism with periodic elections. Poland the host country, is a striking example of how efforts at US sponsored democracy first met with success in East Europe.

The Warsaw conference will be a ministerial level conference. The Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh will be the Indian representative. Alongside the governmental meeting, there would be a World Forum on Democracy attended by business groups, ngos, civic leaders and so on. This conference is being hosted and funded by the American organisation, Freedom House and the Stefan Batory Foundation of Poland.

Some details about these two organisations will throw light on the motives of this conference. The Freedom House is a high-powered organisation approved by the State Department. It is funded by big foundations such as Eurasia, Scaife, Ford, Unilever and Carthage. It also gets support from the ubiquitous NED and the US Information Agency. The Stefan Batory Foundation was setup in Poland in 1988. It is part of a network of 31 'open society' foundations setup by George Soros, the billionaire financial speculator in all the former East European, Balkans and Soviet Socialist Republics. In Poland, it is the Stefan Batory foundation which is dedicated to the development "of a free market and democracy in Poland". In 1998, the Soros Foundation Networks spent 574 million dollars which level was expected to maintained in 1999 and 2000.[\[xi\]](#) The latest addition to the network is the Kosovo Foundation for an Open Society. Together with the World Bank's Post Conflict Trust Fund, the Kosovo venture is to help the Kosovo Liberation Army to entrench themselves in local government. This is being undertaken in territory which is nominally still in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.[\[xii\]](#)

The Warsaw Ministerial Conference on the CoD will be discussing the following: i) Co-operation Among Democratic Governments in Strengthening Global, Regional and Specialised Institutions; ii) Democracy and Human Right: Sharing Best Practices; iii) Responding to Threats to Democracy; iv) Looking Ahead on Issues of Democracy Assistance: Strengthening Democratic Institutions through Mutual Support and Partnership.

The rationale for the emerging architecture for global democracy is spelt out by the specialists associated with State Department. Penn

Kimble (Special Representative of the Secretary of State for the Community of Democracies Initiative) states that: "Ten years after the Berlin Wall fell, 'The Community of Democracies Initiative' aims to take advantage of this period of opportunity by providing a forum for discussing the revitalisation of democracy in the international system."[\[xiii\]](#) James Robert Huntley, author of the book, '*Pax Democratica -- A strategy for the 21st century*' has provided the main elaboration for the restructuring of international affairs around the American version of democracy which he terms '*Pax Democratica*'. He argues that there were three earlier periods, the phase of empire, the phase of the balance of power and the current phase of partial international institutional cooperation. In the future such cooperation will be transcended by community building. He holds up the European Union and NATO as advances towards community building which is superior to the earlier phase.[\[xiv\]](#) Human rights and democracy override national sovereignty for building a community based on the democratic principle. According to him: "mature democracies" don't have any real national interests of their own any more. They have only common interests. The common interests are democracy and the open markets which sustain them, as the NED would put it.

The ideologues of the CoD claim that it is not *Pax Americana* that should be pursued by the US but *Pax Democratica*. Neither "hegemony" nor "isolationism". This is some sort of a variant of the third way. It can't fool many people. Except those like Jaswant Singh who are in a hurry to make up for the "wasted decades" in which India failed to convert itself into an American ally.

Portents for India

The impact on Indian foreign policy has been immediate. Attending the non-aligned foreign ministers' meeting at Cartagena, Colombia in April 2000, Jaswant Singh proposed the democracy principle as a criterion for membership of NAM. This would effectively disrupt the non-aligned movement which is based on the commonality of interests of third world and developing countries. By Jaswant Singh's criteria, Cuba, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Iraq, Libya and a host of other countries would be ineligible for membership of NAM. To get India, a founder-member of NAM, to propose this has been a coup of sorts for the US and its western allies.

The ideological trappings to legitimise American hegemony are now manifesting itself through the leitmotif of democracy. The nineties saw the US and its western allies move into secure the gains from

the success in the Cold War. The relentless drive to establish the neo-liberal order is accompanied by the ideological justification for free markets which alone, it is claimed, can sustain democracy. The denigration of national sovereignty and disregard for the real content of human rights marks this discourse on democracy. India, under the BJP regime, has formally joined this American enterprise. A government which accepts the economic doctrine of the imperialist superpower is falling in line with its political and ideological ideas as well. Paradoxically the democracy venture, portends a further siege on democracy in India. The demands of international finance capital are relentless. The government wants fixity of tenure for Parliament and legislatures to ensure stability for capital. It has recently declared that enterprises in the special economic zones to be setup will be treated as public utilities to enforce discipline on labour. The rights of minorities are being effectively curtailed by sustained terror and intimidation. Acceptance of the global democracy package of the US signifies fresh attacks on democracy in India.

[i] L.K. Advani, BJP leader and Union Home Minister declared around that time that the year 1999 "has become a turning point in the history of Indo-US relations".

[ii] See Vijay Prashad: "National Endowment for Democracy -- Instrument of US Policy". *People's Democracy*, 18 April 1999 for a comprehensive profile of the NED.

[iii] "Democracies try to establish global organisation", USIA Text Link 59638 dated 6 December, 1998.

[iv] "US calls for 'Community of Democracies' in Americas", USIA Text LEF 117 dated 3 May 1993.

[v] "US calls for.....". Ibid

[vi] "NATO Conference at Alpbach", USIA press release dated 17-19 October 1997

[vii] For details, see "An American Movement for Democracy" -- Prakash Karat. *People's Democracy*, 18 April, 2000. The second session of the World Conference for Democracy is to be held in November 2000 in Sao Paulo in Brazil.

[\[viii\]](#) NED press release, 16 March 2000.

[\[ix\]](#) NED press release. Ibid.

[\[x\]](#) Record of World Events, Keesings Archives, November 1999.

[\[xi\]](#) On Soros national foundations.
<http://www.soros.org/natfound/index.html>.

[\[xii\]](#) Michael Chossudovsky: Opening Kosovo to foreign capital

[\[xiii\]](#) Secretary of State's Open Forum, 10 November 1999,
www.state.gov

[\[xiv\]](#) Secretary of State's Open Forum. Ibid.