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Indo-US Defence Agreement: Partnership or Entrapment?

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India and the US have recently entered into a 10-year Indo-US Framework Agreement on Defence Co-operation. The Agreement was signed by the respective Defence Ministers in Washington on July 7, just a few weeks before a summit involving President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh produced a more wide-ranging Joint Statement “to transform the relationship between their countries and establish a global partnership” and covering a range of strategic issues. The timing itself suggests that the defence deal is an integral part of a broader strategic understanding arrived at between the two governments.

Some commentators have described this understanding as pathbreaking, many others have seen the Agreements as mere words of intent whose importance has been exaggerated by both sides to suit their respective domestic compulsions, whereas yet others have viewed the deals as a significant surrender of sovereignty by India signaling its acceptance of Pax Americana.

The mixed reception in India to both the Joint Statement and the Defence Agreement reveals differences in ideology, perception and strategic understanding in the Indian polity, strategic community and media.

A considerable body of opinion has extended an unreserved welcome to the agreements, viewing them as a long overdue bonding between the US and India from which India will gain in economic and strategic terms, enabling it to achieve its deserved status as a major power. There can be little doubt that this perception resonates with the aspirations of an upwardly mobile and increasingly globalized middle-class and also represents the ideological preferences of a section of Indian elites among the bureaucracy, media and strategic experts.

On the other hand, a quite vocal section in the strategic community has strongly criticized the entire package of Indo-US agreements for being heavily weighted in favour of the US and damaging to India’s vital security interests which have been cheaply bartered away in exchange for tit-bits.¹ This section has long favoured an aggressively nationalist projection of India’s interests and power, resents the US for its double standards and tilt towards Pakistan despite the latter’s support for cross-border terrorism in India, and feels Indian security

and sovereignty have been compromised, not only through the present agreement under the UPA government but also by the entire US-centric security strategy adopted by the BJP-led government.

The BJP itself, specifically the architects of its strategic especially nuclear policy Vajpayee, Jaswant Singh and Brajesh Mishra with L.K.Advani thrown in for good measure, and its proxy voice, NDA Convenor George Fernandes, have been vituperative in their criticism of the nuclear deal. These luminaries have accused PM Manmohan Singh and the UPA government of having agreed to terms, such as separation of civilian from military facilities and acceptance of IAEA inspections regimes, that will amount to putting a cap on India's nuclear arsenal and thus having surrendered India's sovereignty. In the BJP perception, as an article of faith, India's security hinges crucially on its nuclear capability, a position rejected by many, not only in the Left and the wider peace movement, but also among security experts and former senior bureaucrats and military officers.

Yet the BJP and its surrogates have remained strangely silent on the Defence Agreement and on other strategic aspects of the Joint Statement emanating from the Indo-US Summit, suggesting that they find these quite acceptable. This BJP stance owes much to the history of the 8 years of NDA government which, as we shall see in the course of this article, witnessed a major shift in India's security strategy and the architecture of Indo-US defence relations, which in turn have definitively influenced the recent Indo-US defence deal and the broader strategic agreement.

The Left and other progressive opinion, while being sharply critical of the nature and direction of Indo-US strategic relations as manifested in the recent agreement, have struck quite a different note.² But most media commentators and strategic experts have, deliberately or otherwise, ignored these or placed them on the same footing as those emanating from the BJP or other voices emanating from the right of the political spectrum such as the "security sovereignty" school. The Statement issued by the CPI(M) in particular,³ was noteworthy for not making a fetish of the nuclear issue and, while rejecting the notion of Indian security being nuclear-dependent called upon the government to remain vigilant as to Indian sovereignty and to ensure measures taken are in strict reciprocity to steps taken by the US as assured in the Joint Statement. On the other hand, the CPI(M) took a view of the Defence Agreement and of other strategic aspects of the Summit Joint Statement as being a dangerous compromise with imperialism. The distinctiveness of the CPI(M) position was completely missed by commentators who lazily put out a "BJP flays PM, CPM criticizes Govt" line.

For their part, Government spokespersons including the Defence Minister and later the Prime Minister himself in their statements before

Parliament, on the one hand claimed a major breakthrough in international relations resulting from the nuclear deal but quite contrarily played down the significance of the Defence Agreement. They claimed that the Agreement entered into by the two countries in respect of multilateral military operations, proliferation prevention or promotion of democracy, all of which implied Indian acceptance of current US perspectives and represented deviations from accepted Indian policy, actually put no obligation on India for practical action but merely conveyed a common sentiment of the two governments and agreement on broad principles. Yet everyone knows that in diplomacy even the most significant developments are usually masked by innocuous phrases and that actions speak far louder than words.

Given all the above, and the interplay of different perspectives and interpretations, it is necessary to analyse in depth, and bring out the real import of, the Defence Agreement which has unfortunately escaped detailed scrutiny having been pushed to the background by the debates over the Summit Joint Statement and the nuclear deal.

Reproduced below is the full text of the Agreement.

NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THE U.S-INDIA DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP

1. The United States and India have entered a new era, We are transforming our relationship to reflect our common principles and shared national interests. As the world's two largest democracies, the United States and India agree on the vital importance of political and economic freedom, democratic institutions, the rule of law, security, and opportunity around the world. The leaders of our two countries are building a U.S.-India strategic partnership in pursuit of these principles and interests.

2. Ten years ago, in January 1995, the Agreed Minute on Defense Relations Between the United States and India was signed. Since then, changes in the international security environment have challenged our countries in ways unforeseen ten years ago. The U.S.-India defense relationship has advanced in a short time to unprecedented levels of cooperation unimaginable in 1995. Today, we agree on a new Framework that builds on past successes, seizes new opportunities, and charts a course for the U.S.-India defense relationship for the next ten years. This defense relationship will support, and will be an element of, the broader U.S.-India strategic partnership.

3. The U.S.-India defense relationship derives from a common belief in freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, and seeks to advance shared security interests. These interests include;

— maintaining security and stability;

- defeating terrorism and violent religious extremism;
- preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and associated materials, data, and technologies; and
- protecting the free flow of commerce via land, air and sea lanes.

4. In pursuit of this shared vision of an expanded and deeper U.S.-India strategic relationship, our defense establishments shall:

- A. conduct joint and combined exercises and exchanges;
- B. collaborate in multinational operations when it is in their common interest;
- C. strengthen the capabilities of our militaries to promote security and defeat terrorism;
- D. expand interaction with other nations in ways that promote regional and global peace and stability;
- E. enhance capabilities to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
- F. in the context of our strategic relationship, expand two-way defense trade between our countries. The United States and India will work to conclude defense transactions, not solely as ends in and of themselves, but as a means to strengthen our countries' security, reinforce our strategic partnership, achieve greater interaction between our armed forces, and build greater understanding between our defense establishments;
- G. in the context of defense trade and a framework of technology security safeguards, increase opportunities for technology transfer, collaboration, co-production, and research and development;
- H. expand collaboration relating to missile defense;
- I. strengthen the abilities of our militaries to respond quickly to disaster situations, including in combined operations;
- J. assist in building worldwide capacity to conduct successful peacekeeping operations, with a focus on enabling other countries to field trained, capable forces for these operations;
- K. conduct exchanges on defense strategy and defense transformation;
- L. increase exchanges of intelligence; and
- M. continue strategic-level discussions by senior leadership from the U.S. Department of Defense and India's Ministry of Defence, in which the two sides exchange perspectives on international security issues of common interest, with the aim of increasing mutual

understanding, promoting shared objectives, and developing common approaches.

5. The Defense Policy Group shall continue to serve as the primary mechanism to guide the U.S.-India strategic defense relationship. The Defense Policy Group will make appropriate adjustments to the structure and frequency of its meetings and of its subgroups, when agreed to by the Defense Policy Group co-chairs, to ensure that it remains an effective mechanism to advance U.S.-India defense cooperation.

6. In recognition of the growing breadth and depth of the U.S.-India strategic defense relationship, we hereby establish the Defense Procurement and Production Group and institute a Joint Working Group for mid-year review of work overseen by the Defense Policy Group,

— The Defense Procurement and Production Group will oversee defense trade, as well as prospects for co-production and technology collaboration, broadening the scope of its predecessor subgroup the Security Cooperation Group.

— The Defense Joint Working Group will be subordinate to the Defense Policy Group and will meet at least once per year to perform a midyear review of work overseen by the Defense Policy Group and its subgroups (the Defense Procurement and Production Group, the Joint Technical Group, the Military Cooperation Group, and the Senior Technology Security Group), and to prepare issues for the annual meeting of the Defense Policy Group.

7. The Defense Policy Group and its subgroups will rely upon this Framework for guidance on the principles and objectives of the U.S.-India strategic relationship, and will strive to achieve those objectives.

This complex Agreement is replete with implicit suggestions, hidden agendas and meanings embedded more in practice than in textual statements. In order to properly understand it, therefore, our discussions must be located within a framework of the major defining parameters viz.: contemporary geo-politics chiefly US imperialism now and as it is likely to play out in the near and medium-term; US strategic policy; history of past Indo-US defence relations; and recent trends in Indian strategic and defence policy.

US SECURITY STRATEGY

The dominance of the US in the contemporary geo-strategic scenario, certainly in military terms in the near to medium term future, is self-evident. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc has left

the US as the world's sole superpower with a global military capability unmatched by any rival forces. It is no surprise that the US should have shaped its security doctrines in the light of this new position and role in world affairs.

Normally, security policy in the US is broadly bi-partisan, fashioned through a broad consensus formed across the political spectrum, spanning Democrats and Republicans, moderates and conservatives. There are differences of course in the articulation of strategic and foreign policies by the two major parties, and by different Presidents and their Administrations, but there is usually a common thread of "vital national interests" running through the policy frame representing the core interests of US corporates, financiers and the military-industrial complex. We shall see both the commonalities and the differences play out in the rest of this article, but there can be little doubt that the Bush Presidency has seen a significant shift away from any established consensus and has set new benchmarks for US security policy.

The neo-conservative or neo-con doctrine is markedly different even from the traditional conservatism of the mostly Republican American Right. Conservatism in the US has mostly championed isolationism internationally and small government, states' rights and balanced fiscal policies domestically. In contrast, the neo-con position, drawn up over the years by ideologues such as Vice-President Dick Cheney, former Administration official and now World Bank Director, Paul Wolfowitz, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and others, is stridently interventionist in foreign policy, favours activist domestic policies formulated centrally through the federal legislature and the Supreme Court, and a profligately deficit economy.

The US under President George W. Bush adopted in 2002, partly in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US but incorporating neo-con ideas pre-dating it by several years, a National Security Strategy that specifically recognizes its "unparalleled military strength and great economic and political strength" and lays out goals and strategies for maintaining a hegemonic role for the US.⁴ The various sections of the Strategy Document reveal clearly the determination of the US to assertively leverage its dominance to impose its own agenda on other countries, on global agreements and on multilateral institutions particularly the UN.

Since President Bush first assumed office in 2001, the US has abrogated the Anti-Missile Treaty with Russia enabling the US to pursue its missile defence system with impunity and theoretically negating nuclear deterrence by any other party; refused to sign on to the Chemicals and Biological Weapons Treaty since it would also involve inspections of US facilities; not placed the nuclear CTBT before Congress for ratification thus all but burying the Treaty; refused

to recognize the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Courts; walked out of and actively opposed the Climate Change Treaty or Kyoto Protocol. The US has sought to actively undermine the authority and role of the UN, most notably by initiating military actions unilaterally or through “coalitions of the willing”, either ignoring the UN or interpreting its mandate in a self-serving manner.

Bilateral assistance and foreign aid are to be used to “ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade... [and] expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy”. The Document elaborates the need and intention to pressurize other nations to accept American definitions of what constitutes democracy, human rights, free trade and good governance which are taken to be simultaneously universal values and cornerstones of US foreign policy. This blatant imperialist agenda, a new version of the colonialist white man’s burden, is termed a “distinctly American internationalism”, a phrase coined by George W. Bush himself even before he became President!⁵

The projection of military power too is an integral part of the Strategy towards the goal of achieving an uncontested Pax Americana. Recognizing that “all major institutions of American national security... were designed in a different era to meet different requirements,” the Document asserts “the essential role of American military strength [to] build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge and the need for a security policy that will “dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”

The Strategy also spells out a new US doctrine of pre-emptive action anywhere in the world against state or non-state actors, and against actual or presumed threats to the US and to “global peace and security”.

In pursuit of this Strategy, the US has adopted a far more aggressive military posture throughout the world especially after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 which saw the US launch its infamous “war on terror” beginning with the war on Afghanistan which was termed Operation Enduring Freedom, signifying the unhesitating use of US military force to project hegemonist policies using the cover of defending democracy. The Iraq War saw this idea being further fleshed out, the US asserting its right to bring about “regime change” in any country through military force. In both cases, the apparent “reason” for the US military actions, namely revenge for the 9/11 attacks and the need to eliminate Afghanistan as a base for Al Qa’ida and its Taliban allies in the case of Afghanistan and the imaginary threat from weapons of mass destruction in the case of Iraq, could barely hide the larger strategic objectives of the US.

The Afghan war enabled the US to establish a permanent presence in Afghanistan, strategically located next to Iran and the farther West Asian region and in the “soft underbelly” of the former Soviet Union. The US also refurbished and fully activated its military base in the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, set up new bases throughout Central Asia in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, obtained transit facilities in Turkey and the Gulf States. The US also extracted base facilities from Pakistan in at least three Air Force Stations at Jacobabad, Dalbandin and Pasni, supposedly for “search and rescue” operations only. Presently, the US is reported to be readying itself for a presence in extensive cantonment areas being newly created in the restive Baluchistan province of Pakistan bordering Iran, and some reports suggest even that Special Forces operations are already underway in that country. With the onset of the Iraq War, the US has surrounded West Asia with massive carrier groups, the Seventh Fleet in the Arabian Sea-Persian Gulf area and the Fifth Fleet in the Mediterranean, besides of course its huge military presence within Iraq itself.

With this, the US has come closest to achieving what the European colonial powers were after in the “Great Game” of the 19th and early 20th century, namely an entrenched position in the Central Asian hinterland with a secure land route to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. Except that, in the 21st century, the US grip over the Caspian and Central Asian regions not only gives it access to vast oil reserves but also strategic control over transshipment routes over land to Europe, by sea across the Mediterranean or out towards the Asia-Pacific through the Arabian Sea.

Meanwhile, the notorious “colour revolutions” were being engineered in one Central Asian country after another, using lessons learnt during the Solidarity uprising in Poland and the so-called “velvet revolution” in Czechoslovakia towards the fag end of the cold war. Georgia and Lithuania became victims of “popular uprisings”, openly supported by the US through funding for “pro-democracy” and “human rights” NGOs and by wide publicity propaganda over international TV and other news media. The same model was replicated in Lebanon too but suffered a setback in Uzbekistan.

US actions in this entire region covering oil-rich West and Central Asia have thus been military, political and economic all put together. The “regime change” threat has been openly dangled over Syria, Iran and Libya which, for whatever reason, almost seemed to vindicate the US doctrine of enforcing “democracy” in the region by deciding to forswear its nuclear option, hand over putative nuclear weapons and materials to the US (opening up the entire A.Q.Khan nuclear weapons racket) and pay out huge compensation to families of victims of the

terrorist attack on a passenger plane over Lockerbie, thus buying peace with the US and its European allies.

All this has virtually followed a script written by neo-con ideologues and think tanks in Washington and enshrined in the Security Strategy: "The US will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-distance deployment of US forces", says the Strategy Document which also stresses the need for the US to "strengthen [US] energy security... and expand the sources and types of global energy supplied especially in the Western Hemisphere, Africa, Central Asia and the Caspian Region."

As if to exemplify the enunciated strategy of not allowing itself to be dissuaded from its chosen course by disagreement with its allies, the US has also not shied away from asserting its unilateralist position and riding roughshod on close European allies such as France and Germany. The US has aggressively moved to isolate these powers by co-opting the countries of "new Europe" to the East, and cracked the whip even on more willing countries such as the UK and Italy, not conceding an inch of ground on any of its pet peeves such as the ICC, Kyoto or even prisoners from these countries held in its infamous Guantanamo Bay facility without charges, trial or recourse to legal defence. Human rights and democracy are fine, but can only be what the US defines them to be!

US & SOUTH ASIA

It is through these broad strategic lenses that the US has viewed India, the South Asian region especially Pakistan, and the wider regional contexts within which these appear to fit as seen from the vantage of US strategic policy. The present Indo-US Defence Agreement has not emerged suddenly out of thin air but has a considerable background in both US and Indian perceptions, policies and actions over the past decade or more.

During the cold war, the US had decided that India was in the Soviet camp despite its leading role of the non-aligned movement which the US saw as inimical to its interests, inasmuch as NAM had a core anti-imperialist agenda and as a result of the famous US dictum of "if you're not with us, you're against us". Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and consequently of the close ties that India along with a majority of developing countries had with it, the US started to revise its suspicious if not antagonistic posture towards India.

It is only in the past decade or so that South Asia, as a distinct regional entity, has found a place in the US security horizon, and more so after Afghanistan literally exploded on the US scene. Apart from the US security calculus which placed India in the Soviet camp, India's geographic location was also a factor in its neglect by US policy-

makers. India was seemingly tucked away under the Himalayan barrier, isolated from both the Central Asian land mass and from East and South-East Asia where the US had huge security interests, military bases and entrenched allies. Pakistan provided a geographically and culturally more proximate window to West Asia. Even the Bangladesh war did not bring South Asia into focus since the US saw it as an issue confronting its ally, Pakistan, and threatening to involve the Soviet Union.

For a considerable time, India also did not fit in with the China factor either, except during a brief period after the India-China war in 1962. The US viewed China as an important counterweight to the Soviet Union and used Pakistan's strategic relationship with China as a means to build bridges with it. It is only very recently, after the end of the Cold War and the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse, that the US began viewing China as a major rival power center and started looking at the possibility of India being a regional counterweight to it.

Overall in this region, focus of US attention was chiefly on Pakistan, not as part of South Asia but as a window to West and Central Asia where the US perceived "vital national interests" to be. The period after the Cold War also saw revisions in the US security calculus vis-à-vis Pakistan with a concomitant impact on Indo-US relations.

Pakistan had been a preferred US partner in the '60s and '70s, indeed a formal ally in the essentially anti-Soviet anti-communist politico-military bloc, the Central Asian Treaty Organization (CENTO).⁶ During a period when the US avidly supported numerous military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes throughout the world so long as they opposed the Soviet Union and communism and supported US strategic goals, decades of military rule in Pakistan were no obstacle, even an added advantage. The US also used Pakistan as a bridgehead in its famous Nixon-Kissinger rapprochement with China aimed at further containment of the Soviet Union. The Soviet military presence in Afghanistan in the '80s and the launch of a *jihad* by Afghan and other Islamist forces (including Al Qa'ida!) to oust them using Pakistan as a logistical and supply base actively supported by the US, saw Pakistan emerge as a "frontline state" and being provided huge amounts of financial and military assistance by the US, then under Democrat President Jimmy Carter.

However, with the cold war winding down, Eastern Europe breaking away from the Socialist camp and the Soviet Union itself on the verge of collapse, the US' strategic reliance on Pakistan declined. Pakistan's not-so-clandestine acquisition of nuclear weapons and missile technologies from countries the US regarded suspiciously or even antagonistically proved increasingly embarrassing and could no longer be defended or concealed as successive US administrations had long

been doing (despite frequent protestations by the State Department and the CIA and numerous leaks in the press) for the sake of the US-Pak alliance considered crucial to vital US security interests. In 1990, President George Bush (senior) finally felt unable to certify that Pakistan did not possess nuclear weapons bringing into play sanctions against military supplies to Pakistan, famously preventing transfer of F-16 fighter aircraft to Pakistan despite payment having been made for them.

US-Pak relations reached their nadir during the Clinton Presidency at the time of Pakistan's tit-for-tat nuclear tests, its military coup under General Musharraf and during the Kargil episode when the US took an unequivocal stand supporting India's position for the first time ever, signaling a major shift in US perceptions and priorities in South Asia. After 9/11 and the war on Afghanistan under President George W. Bush, Pakistan is once again a "frontline state", this time in the "war on terror", designated a "major non-NATO ally", among such US favourites as Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Israel, Egypt and Argentina. However, as we shall see later, contemporary US involvement with and perception of India and the contemporary security scenario, imposes restrictions on the extent and nature of military assistance the US can provide to Pakistan.

These shifts in US-Pak relations, for long the cornerstone of US security policy in southern Asia, bring into sharp relief two major aspects of US security policy: its broadly bi-partisan nature, notwithstanding the ideologically-driven excesses of the neo-cons, and the centrality of US national interests. Ideals such as promotion of freedom and democracy or even strategic alliances struck ostensibly on the basis of "shared values" are either secondary or mere covers for the pursuit of what the US perceives as its vital interests *at a particular juncture*. As we shall see, this unsentimental US approach is in contrast to the mainstream Indian attitude to security policy issues.

US & INDIA

The US started to consciously revise its security relations with India coinciding with the end of its cold war with the Soviet Union and the impending collapse of the latter.⁷ The presence in the White House of Bill Clinton, considered to be an Indophile by some but who certainly had a more than ordinary interest in this country and South Asia in general, also spurred on such a revision.

However, besides entrenched positions in the foreign policy and security establishments in the two countries, a huge hurdle stood in the way of improved Indo-US relations namely India's nuclear weapons programme, its recalcitrance vis-à-vis the NPT and CTBT, and the continued sanctions by the US against transfer of nuclear, space and other high-end and dual-use technologies to India ever since the

latter's first nuclear test in Pokhran in 1974. This US posture was deeply resented in India especially against the backdrop of blatant proliferation of nuclear and missile technologies in its neighbourhood and the long-standing military and other assistance from the US to Pakistan despite it. The Clinton Administration was filled with non-proliferation fundamentalists who resisted efforts to find a pragmatic way around this problem centering around some method by which the US could recognize the reality of India's nuclear form of .

India too, at this time under Congress governments led by Rajiv Gandhi and then by P.V.Narasimha Rao, was going through its own rethinking not only on foreign and security policy but economic policy as well. India was emerging from perhaps its worst ever financial crisis and, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was also forced to rework its international relations. The Indian government, particularly with Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister, was embarking on a programme of economic liberalization, and was looking to better relations with the US to open doors for foreign investment in India. Many accounts of this period speak of the close nexus between India's efforts towards globalization and its attitudes towards improved relations with the US who, in turn, gave primacy to the security dimension of this relationship.

As part of the process of US engagement with India on security, William Perry and S.B.Chavan, Defence ministers of the US and India respectively, signed in January 1995 the Agreed Minute on Defence Relations between the two countries, the precursor agreement to the present one. In terms of general principles and statements of intent such as belief in and commitment to democracy, anti-terrorism and free flow of commerce in areas of common interest, the Minute was not too far away from the kinds of sentiments expressed in the present Agreement, but the geo-political context and the place of India in it appeared quite different when seen from Washington. Nevertheless, the Minute saw the setting up of joint Defence Policy Group, Joint Technical Group and Service-to-Service Cooperation being initiated, although the extent of this cooperation was limited by US legislative restrictions on military co-operation with India.

Despite these barriers, the US efforts to seek improved strategic relations with India continued under the Clinton administration. In 1997, on the eve of the second term of the Clinton Presidency, the US was seriously considering an offer to India, strikingly similar in broad essentials to the present deal, of a "closer strategic relationship" that recognized India as having "the potential to emerge as a full-fledged major power" in exchange for India agreeing not to test, deploy or export nuclear weapons, in other words take a series of concrete non-proliferation actions short of actually signing the CTBT and NPT.⁸

These measured steps by the US were rudely interrupted by India's Pokhran-II nuclear tests by the BJP-led government and its declaration of its nuclear weapons status. The sanctions imposed immediately by the US, over and above the sanctions imposed after Pokhran-I, would cast a dark cloud over Indo-US relations lasting several years, but the US nevertheless pursued the goal of somehow involving India in a long-term security relationship. The extended security dialogue was conducted mainly through the now famous Strobe Talbott-Jaswant Singh dialogues involving as many as eight rounds of talks between July 1998 and June 1999, resumed after the return of the NDA to power after the general elections. The account of these dialogues by Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State and Bill Clinton's point man for South Asia, makes fascinating reading.⁹

While the Indian position under the BJP-led dispensation and other implications of these negotiations from the Indian security point of view cannot be discussed here for want of space, two significant features of this prolonged security dialogue and the follow-up actions by the two governments may be noted for the present.

First, the George W. Bush administration saw these efforts being pursued, with greater vigour if anything and with a greater degree of pragmatism than previously. Even before his assumption of office, key Bush advisors had signaled that India would be accorded high priority in US foreign policy.¹⁰ The Republicans had also taken a categorical position against ratification of the CTBT and were clearly open to bilateral negotiations outside the framework of international treaties to which they attached little sanctity.

Second, the most visible changes in Indo-US relations were taking place in military-to-military relations.

GROWING INDO-US MILITARY RELATIONS

The period after the signing of the Agreed Minute, spanning both the Clinton and the first term of the Bush Presidency, saw a major transformation in Indo-US defence relations. Towards the end of 1999, the Brownback Amendment in the US Congress lifted some of the economic sanctions imposed after Pokhran-II but significantly, the US' International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme was also included in measures exempted from sanctions: institutionalized interactions between the US military and foreign officers clearly seek to bring the latter under American influence, and Indian military officers were directly exposed to US doctrine and procedures for the first time.¹¹ Clinton and Vajpayee signed a "Vision Statement" for Indo-US relations which, though not quite so sweeping as the Bush-Manmohan Singh Agreement, outlined a fairly close Indo-US

relationship given the tensions over India's nuclearisation and the US' non-proliferation concerns.

In May 2002, Indian Commandos and US Special Forces took part in joint exercises named "Balance Iroquois 02-1", the first military exercises involving the two countries in over 40 years. This was followed in September of the same year by "Geronimo Thrust 02" at Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska (note the native American or "red *Indian*" codenames)! The "Malabar" Naval exercises involving flying operations, anti-submarine ops and replenishment at sea, and "Cope India 02" involving air transport followed soon after. In early 2003, a new technology transfer regime was agreed upon, allowing for export by the US of some military technologies such as engines for the Indian Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), mobile target-seeking radars etc. In March 2004, joint exercises were held in Gwalior including mock air-combat operations involving US F-16s and Indian MiGs.

The joint Commando exercises have by now become a quarterly affair, including some held in hitherto secretive and high-value training locations in India such as in the North-East for jungle warfare and in J&K for high-altitude environments. The Malabar exercises are now a hardy annual and exchange visits by military ships/units and high-ranking officers have become regular affairs. The US has even sought to establish a mobile ship repair unit in Kochi to service its 7th Fleet, a facility which will help it maintain extensive reach into the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. India is also deeply engaged in interactions with its US counterparts on military doctrine and operational procedures, especially as regards US tri-service doctrine and commands for lessons that can be drawn for India's fledgling Integrated Defence Command, and seeking to emulate the US National Defence University in a replica proposed to be set up in this country.

The deep interest of the US in increasing military co-operation with India and enmeshing India within the US security architecture requires some discussion.

At a fairly simple level, it gives the US access to Indian military infrastructure and increases American familiarity with Indian defence hardware and procedures such that these can be utilized to magnify the reach of US forces. Further, argues Retired Naval Chief Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, "all the joint exercises primarily provide windows to probe our electronic warfare and communication vulnerabilities." Admiral Bhagwat elaborates further on the self-seeking motivation of the US: "Friendly countries do not launch almost daily intelligence flights up and down our Western and Eastern seaboard from Diego Garcia and Australian bases, nor would their surveillance aircraft and 'research ships' monitor our exercises, missile firings and take

gravimetric measurements and hydrological conditions on a fairly regular basis off sensitive Indian vital areas..."¹²

The National Security Strategy states that the US "has undertaken a transformation in its bilateral relationship with India based on a conviction that US interests require a strong relationship with India... We have a common interest in the free flow of commerce, including the vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean... and a strategically stable Asia... Differences remain including the development of India's nuclear and missile programs and the pace of India's economic reforms. But while in the past these concerns may have dominated the thinking about India, today we start with a view of India as a growing world power with which we have common strategic interests." Anti-terrorism, protection of sea lanes, counter-proliferation activities are all mentioned as possible areas of cooperation.

An important study by the Net Assessment Office of the US Department of Defence on American and Indian US perceptions on Indo-US military relationships reveals that strategic and military policy makers in the US view "building a strategic and military relationship with India as a long-term process that will help position the United States for future challenges in Asia, ...an investment in the future, ... [and as a] hedge against unforeseen and unfavourable developments in the future." Other recurring themes among Americans were the possibility of the US losing allies such as Taiwan or Japan, facing an increasingly hostile China, both scenarios in which having India on the US side would be of benefit, and the need to deter emergence of axes such as an India-Russia-China alliance which could threaten the US in the long term. It was also recognized that "India sits in the most strategic location in the world, which could give the United States the ability to quickly access many of the unstable areas in the region."¹³

Needless to add, a blossoming defence relationship with India, one of the biggest buyers of military hardware in the global arms market, will bring huge benefits to the US military-industrial complex. The greater the interaction between the two militaries, the more the emphasis on inter-operability and the deeper the "partnership", the more US-origin hardware India is likely to buy. The exercises themselves had led to more than a dozen items of US hardware being placed on an Indian shopping list.¹⁴ Already on the table are offers of fighter aircraft, anti-submarine and maritime reconnaissance aircraft, anti-missile systems, fire-finder radar, ground-movement sensors and so on. Implications of Indian acquisition of such and other hardware, and for balance of power in the region would be discussed subsequently, but we can see that from the US point of view, a strategic relationship with India with military-to-military relations at its core, is viewed as a long-term goal and one which would significantly advance US interests.

Ashley Tellis, a leading US strategic analyst and former advisor to Robert Blackwill when he was US Ambassador to India (and now serving in the National Security Council), made a highly influential presentation to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June 2004 on US-India relations, presaging many of the provisions in the Defence Agreement and Summit Joint Statement. Tellis argued that it was in US interests that “Indian military power... have a projectable navy and air force as well as capabilities for inter-operability with other similar forces”. Tellis added that the development and deployment of such Indian capability would be a desirable US outcome even if the two countries do not enter into a formal alliance.¹⁵

One key factor for the importance the US attaches to a military and strategic relationship with India, but which is scarcely spoken publicly by US officials, is an increasingly felt need for containment of China. (Incidentally, Pentagon officials are reported to have told American reporters off the record that some of the potential sales of US military hardware to India have a China-specific focus, such as the PC Orion maritime reconnaissance aircraft which can keep track of Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean and the Aegis radar system for Indian naval vessels operating in the Malacca Straits which can monitor Chinese military movements in the area).

Leading US military and strategic thinkers believe that while the United States and India both have strategic concerns regarding China, the US views China as a long-term threat. “Many US military officers acknowledged that China played a central role in their thinking about India, but emphasized that China is not the only reason to engage India”, a typical statement being: “As the US military engages India... we cannot separate our thinking on India from our thinking on China. We want a friend in 2020 that will be capable of assisting the US military in dealing with a Chinese threat. We cannot deny that India will create a countervailing force to China.”¹⁶

INDIAN STRATEGIC THINKING

Indian foreign policy which, for the most part doubles as India’s strategic policy as well, took time to adjust to the dramatically changed international security scenario after the collapse of the Soviet Union, India’s traditional security partner. While the US emerged as the world’s sole superpower, India’s estrangement from it for many reasons, including but going far beyond US proximity to Pakistan and US double-standards regarding proliferation and terrorism as manifested in US sanctions against India while being munificent in its support of Pakistan, inhibited improved relations with the US. The absence in India of institutions such as a National Security Agency or even of a National Security Strategy or Document like in the US, UK or

Australia, also came in the way of a cogent reassessment of Indian strategic options. For much of this early period, therefore, India tended to respond in an ad hoc manner to US initiatives rather than forging and following up on its own independently formulated strategy.

In the early '90s, as we have seen, successive Congress governments gradually factored the US into their foreign policy calculus. Viewed from India, moves by the US reaching out to India starting from the first Clinton Administration were seen as positives not only vis-à-vis Pakistan but also as an overdue if belated recognition of India's standing in the region and the world. The Clinton Administration's shift away from the traditional pro-Pakistan tilt towards a more even-handed approach towards India, and the US willingness to work with India looking beyond the nuclear and missile issues, albeit within a framework of US-dictated parameters, saw the Indian government respond with some alacrity to a window of opportunity to improve relations with the US, not only to redress a perceived imbalance in South Asian power equations but also to bolster its own clout in the wider Indian Ocean region. The eagerness of India to expand military-to-military relations with the US as manifested in the Agreed Minute, the precursor to the present Defence Agreement, marked a significant shift in Indian foreign and defence policy. Indo-US defence relations thereafter have followed a continuously upward trajectory and a dramatically altered dynamic.

It was the BJP-led NDA government, however, which really strove to redefine the Indo-US relationship and which broke from the traditional foreign policy consensus that had prevailed in India for close to five decades, a break no less dramatic than that of the US under George W. Bush.

As soon as they came to power, the BJP-led government fulfilled a long-standing dream of the Hindu Right, namely to make India a nuclear power. The NDA also constituted a National Security Council and promised but failed to bring out the country's first-ever Strategic Defence Review, a draft of which was brought out under the aegis of the National Security Advisory Board. After the Kargil conflict with Pakistan, and pursuing a recommendation of a Review Committee set up by it, the government prepared and published a Report on Reforming the Security System in September 2001.¹⁷ In the absence of a Strategic Review, this Report remains the definitive statement of that government's security policy. Insofar as the present UPA government has not brought out its own Strategy Document or revised the earlier one, one can only draw inferences regarding the views expressed in the NDA's Report or draw conclusions based on actions on the ground.

The NDA government's Report, unlike its counterparts in the US and especially the UK after which it is confessedly modeled, is not foreign-

policy led and thus does not contain any elaborate analysis of the geopolitical scenario and India's role in it. Instead, it sums up the international strategic environment in a single paragraph which recognizes the US pre-eminence in the world order, the unlikelihood of its pre-eminence diminishing in the foreseeable future, the prospects of a multi-polar world order having greatly diminished since the end of the Cold War. The Report therefore lays out the guiding framework for Indian strategic policy to be a "meaningful broad-based engagement with the United States" while simultaneously warns that "an adversarial relationship with that State can have significant negative repercussions". Throughout its tenure, the BJP-led government followed-up on this analysis by fashioning a completely US-centric foreign and strategic policy, currying favour with the US at every opportunity and all but declaring itself to be a formal ally of the USA.

The NDA government was silent during the US invasions of or assaults on Afghanistan, Iraq and Yugoslavia when even staunch US allies in Europe were cringing at the US' naked aggression and assertion of military might. India was the first country in the world to support the US National Missile Defence programme much to the surprise and considerable worry of a majority of nations which rejected this US policy for its potential to spur a new arms race. The NDA government established close ties, including in military and intelligence areas, with Israel, again to the consternation of its traditional friends in West Asia and the developing world, prompting much speculation about an impending India-US-Israel axis. The NDA government cited China as a major factor in its security calculus that prompted it to go nuclear, hoping to endear itself to and win support from the US by doing so.

The NDA approach was also as much Pakistan-focused as US-centric. It tried extremely hard to get the US to drop Pakistan as its regional ally in favour of India and to help induct India into the high table of global diplomacy. When the US launched its war on Afghanistan, India eagerly offered transit and refueling facilities for US ships and aircraft. For obvious reasons, the US preferred the base facilities offered by Pakistan for its special forces and for "reconnaissance" aircraft both for logistical reasons and for the extra leverage this gave the US over the Pakistani military and ruling establishment, the kind of leverage they could not expect from India, even under a fawning BJP-led dispensation.

To cap it all, Deputy Prime Minister reportedly promised deployment of Indian troops in support of the US occupation of Iraq, a promise reneged on by the Cabinet back home in the face of domestic outrage and leading to considerable disappointment in Washington which had by now gotten used a follow-the-leader position from India. India under the BJP thus not only more than met the US half way in its efforts to rope India into a security partnership but indeed assiduously wooed

the US towards an intimate relationship that the US was simply not yet ready for.

The point to be underscored here, and of immense importance for our understanding of the present Indo-US Defence Agreement, is that none of these developments above, of enormous strategic and military significance for India, could have been anticipated by the letter of the Agreed Minute which the Congress government had signed but which the NDA government adhered to. Nor could they be interpreted as violations of the agreement! Wordings of such agreements are always broad enough, cover a few basic principles and leave it to the parties to follow through on them depending on how far they want to go, on the policy imperatives as each see them and, of course, on secret parleys and tacit understandings that are not minuted or made public.

Thus, when the UPA government replaced the NDA, a pattern of Indo-US defence collaboration had already been established. Whatever correctives the Congress-led dispensation may have made as regards some of the foreign policy excesses of the NDA period, as far as Indo-US defence relations were concerned joint exercises, exchange visits, seminars and meetings were all proceeding apace. However, there was growing perception on both sides that merely keeping relations on the same level was not sustainable. Yet a few hurdles remained in the way of taking the relationship to the next level.

INDO-US MILITARY RELATIONS: NEW PHASE

The second term of the George W. Bush Presidency began not too long after the Congress and its allies, to the surprise of many international observers, regained power in the elections, setting the stage for the two sides to recalibrate their relations.

On its part, the US was increasingly signaling its desire to raise the bar of Indo-US relations. In keeping with past trends, the focus was on strategic and military aspects.

The old problem of India's nuclear programme remained. The US still required to somehow get India into a framework of international safeguards and monitoring vis-à-vis its civilian energy programme and a non-proliferation framework for its nuclear weapons and missile programmes. India still wanted de facto if not de jure recognition of its nuclear weapons status and lifting of sanctions against it, and only then would accept any of the obligations of NWS and would certainly not take any actions merely under US pressure. The Bush Administration was more prepared to engage India on these issues on a pragmatic basis than the earlier Clinton administration was.

In January 2004, the US and India entered into the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership which envisaged Indo-US cooperation with India in civilian nuclear energy, civilian space programmes and high-technology trade. President Bush soon announced a compression of

the envisaged schedule amidst discrete exchanges and visits to explore the possibilities of regulating India's nuclear programme so as to address US concerns. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice confirmed the US thinking along these lines and US spokespersons declared soon after her visit to India in March 2005 that the US was keen to evolve a "decisively broader strategic relationship" with India and US interest lay in "helping to integrate that world power into the... existing power structure in the world."¹⁸ All these were clearly preliminary moves leading up to the summit meeting between PM Manmohan Singh and President Bush in July this year.

The Agreement entered into between the two countries' Defence Ministers acquires new significance not just for what it says, but perhaps even more because of the context and the setting of Indo-US strategic relations in which it was signed. The broader Indo-US Agreement resulting from the Summit meeting addressed and resolved precisely those strategic issues that had prevented both sides, each for their own reasons, from cementing a long-term security relationship that the ruling establishments in both countries had been pursuing for over a decade. Under the Agreement, the US agreed to recognize India as a de facto NWS, supply fuel and technology for India's civilian nuclear power plants, lift sanctions on military and dual-use technologies after obtaining requisite approval of Congress and also to persuade the Nuclear Suppliers Group to act similarly while, on its part, India agreed to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities, place the former under full-scope international safeguards and also reiterated its already declared moratorium on further nuclear tests thus conforming with the NPT and CTBT again on a de facto basis. If these decisions are actually implemented on a reciprocal basis, and there is little reason to believe that President Bush will be unable to persuade a Republican-dominated and even otherwise compliant Congress and its major international allies to follow the US lead, then, unfettered by the earlier obstacles, Indo-US military relations are poised for a major transformation.

Many troubling questions are raised by the Agreement, again based not just on its text but upon the entire unfolding dynamic of Indo-US relations. What does each side stand to gain or lose? What are the implications of what has been agreed upon? What is the future trajectory of military and strategic policy of each nation?

What is also deeply worrying are the repeated comments by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee that this government is only continuing with the policies initiated by the BJP-led NDA government. This may be merely a debating point intended to deflect the BJP criticism of the Indo-US Agreement but may equally indicate, as indeed appears from the text and the follow-up actions taken, that the

Congress has indeed moved towards the BJP position on Indo-US relations and on strategic policy in general.

CLOSER LOOK AT THE AGREEMENT

With the above detailed discussions on key aspects of the Indo-US strategic and military relationship, we can now take a closer and more informed look at the details of the Agreement.

The most striking feature of the Defence Agreement are its main formulations and terminology which closely follow US rather than Indian language in such matters. The opening paragraph or preamble statement on “common principles and shared interests” speaks of “political and economic freedom, democratic institutions, the rule of law, security, and opportunity”: these are famously American sentiments standing for the spread of capitalism and Western-style democracy and as code words for dictating terms to other countries. The US Strategy Document in fact lays down US policy as using American judgments on these values as yardsticks by which US bilateral assistance to other countries would be calibrated.

Lest anyone thinks one is making a fetish of linguistic usage, let it be pointed out that it would be near impossible to find any Indian strategic or foreign policy document containing these as vital Indian national interests. By contrast, Foreign Minister Natwar Singh, speaking in London on the eve of the signing of the Indo-US Defence Agreement said India’s vision was “a much broader collaborative regional and multilateral agenda for India, regionally and multilaterally. Our approach emphasises dialogue, partnership and cooperation. It aims to reinforce the principles of democracy, pluralism, secularism, economic development and multilateralism”, sentiments quite at variance with those of the Agreement where multilateralism, pluralism or multilateral agendas find no mention whatsoever.

Another give-away as to the dominant drafting hand in the Agreement is the mention of shared interests in “defeating terrorism and *violent religious extremism*”. The italicized expression is the latest Washington terminology, seeking to widen its concept of the Islamist threat by taking into account acts of fundamentalist-inspired violence that may not fall within a strict definition of terrorism. US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has been repeating the phrase on numerous occasions, although his efforts to change the common “war on terror” to “the struggle against violent religious extremism”, attempting to convey to a war-weary US public that not all confrontations with terrorism or Islamist threats would be wars, has met with little success!

There would be those who object that this is mere hair-splitting, and it should not really matter whose terminology is used so long as both countries share the same sentiments and goals. But do they?

One of the clauses that have attracted sharply critical reaction here in India is the one (Clause 4B) stating that the defence forces of the two countries shall “collaborate in multinational operations when it is in their common interest” without mentioning under whose auspices.¹⁹ Another clause, one which has not attracted as much attention but must be read along with 4B is 4J calling for “building worldwide capacity to conduct successful peacekeeping operations”. Neither clause mentions the UN.

It has been the stated policy of India that Indian forces would operate only under UN auspices and this was the reason given for not sending Indian forces to Iraq. The US position is to operate multinational forces of the “coalition of the willing” as in Iraq, or NATO forces as in the former Yugoslavia or in Afghanistan: in all such cases, these forces are under overall US command. While the US maintains this is essentially for reasons of operational efficiency and to avoid having “two fingers on the trigger”, the US allergy to operating under the UN flag and preferring US-led coalitions is well known.

Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee has tried to defend this clause by asserting that the Agreement is only a framework, does not compel or commit either nation to specific actions and, in any case, also has “out” phrases such as “when... in common interests” under which India can always insist on sending its forces only under UN flag. He also said that, after all, the Agreement was a joint document which must reflect points on which both parties agree, implying that the US would have rejected an insistence on UN mandate or command. But this cuts both ways, and India signing on to the Agreement as it stands implies agreement with the US position.

A more charitable interpretation could be that India wants to please the US and is prepared to bend over backwards to do so. If true, this is truly worrisome as it suggests that the dominant voice in the Agreement is that of the US and sets a pattern of behaviour for the future. And as this article has emphasized from the outset, actions speak louder than words.

One concrete instance of Indo-US joint military operations comes to mind that exemplifies the dangers involved. In 2003, the BJP-led government sent Indian naval vessels to escort US merchant ships through the Straits of Malacca, one of the prime examples setting a precedent for “protecting the free flow of commerce via... sea-lanes” (Clause 3). The littoral states of Malaysia and Indonesia were extremely unhappy with this intrusion by a foreign navy with US support, although Singapore which, along with Australia and the US, is a member of the US-sponsored Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI), then and now welcomes operation of the US navy in these waters while other ASEAN countries prefer keeping patrols within a regional framework.

The Agreement also provides for the two countries to “strengthen the abilities of our militaries to respond quickly to disaster situations, including in combined operations (Clause 4-I) recalling the so-called and short-lived “Core Group” of the US, India, Australia and Singapore announced by the US after the recent Indian Ocean tsunami. While India sent a naval hospital ship to Aceh, it was US and Singaporean forces that had an extended stay in the affected area.

The issue is, India has to decide where its interests lie: in encouraging deeper US involvement in the region or collaborating with other like-minded ASEAN states to keep imperialist and allied military forces out of the area. The preference of the BJP-led government was clear, now the Congress-led UPA needs to clarify its position.

Another controversial clause in the Agreement is 4H on “collaboration relating to missile defence”. The BJP-led government, as we have seen, welcomed the US Missile Defence Programme with alacrity indeed undue haste and pursued Indo-US collaboration in this regard which, though, was inhibited by US reluctance to part with sensitive technologies and hardware, and also due to Pakistani sensitivities. The brief history of actual US responses to Indian moves in anti-missile defences are instructive as to US intentions and interests.

India under the NDA sought to acquire the Israeli Arrow anti-missile system but the sale has been blocked by the US invoking US co-development rights requiring US permission and also by interpreting the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) designed to control of proliferation of certain categories of missiles in such a way as to prohibit export of the Arrow system. On the other hand, there have been reliable and persistent reports of the US itself offering to sell India the PAC-3 Patriot anti-missile system to India. The PAC-3 is an advanced version of the original Patriots which did not perform well during the first Iraq war, but is nevertheless a very expensive system whose effectiveness has been questioned by many experts.

These Patriots seek to knock out incoming enemy ballistic missiles in the final or terminal phase of their flight rather than the systems under development by the US which aim to intercept and destroy incoming missiles either close to launch or in mid-flight out in space, both still highly experimental.²⁰ US defence spokespersons have always been at pains to assert that anti-missile systems are purely defensive and therefore will not spur an arms race but such arguments are highly specious. Systems such as Patriot or Arrow can, quite easily and at much lower cost without any additional research, be overcome by adversaries by the simple stratagem of simultaneously firing multiple missiles overwhelming the anti-missile batteries. Not surprisingly, Pakistan’s military command met soon after the signing of the Indo-US agreement to discuss reconfiguration of its missiles and

has, at the time of going to press, also supposedly tested a cruise missile against which Patriot/Arrow-type systems are ineffective.

The issue here is that while the hugely expensive Patriot/Arrow systems may have fitted in with the BJP-led government's militarist perspective, and while US companies such as Raytheon would make millions from such a deal, do they really have value for Indian security? Such anti-missile systems have relevance only in an Indo-Pak context where, too, their efficacy is highly questionable. As such, Indian security would derive far greater benefit from an investment in better Indo-Pak relations including a negotiated curtailment and roll-back of nuclear and other lethal weapons. As for the more esoteric star wars type anti-missile systems in whose R&D India is being invited to participate, these have been described by some as "belonging in science fiction" and are best left to the US to waste its money on if it wants. Thus, while the US stands to gain from commercial contracts and from Indian endorsement of a programme widely regarded as non-feasible, over-expensive and only likely to trigger an arms race, India benefits little if anything.

Clause 4E to "enhance capabilities to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) along with other aspects of the Agreement has also prompted deep concern in India and among its neighbours.²¹ An expression of concern about WMD proliferation may not have attracted attention in, say, a foreign policy dialogue or elsewhere. Indeed, as part of the Indo-US dialogue leading up to the Summit Joint Statement, India had already adopted legislation tightening export controls over fissile and other WMD-related materials or technologies. Therefore, this Clause being part of a *military*-related agreement can only suggest Indian willingness to collaborate with the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in which the US has roped in 10 of its closest allies such as fellow-NATO members, Australia, Japan and Poland. Under the PSI, member-nations could stop and search air, sea and land-based cargo including on the high seas and over neutral airspace on mere suspicion that these could be carrying WMD-related materials. Once again the US, in keeping with its Bush doctrine disdain for international law has brushed aside objections that such interdiction in sovereign waters would violate the Law of the Sea. Why would India want to join in such overtly aggressive acts?

India is having enough problems even checking smuggling, infringements of its rights in the Exclusive Economic Zones off its coastline or acts of piracy in and off Indian waters. It is difficult to see how such an agreement with the US would help India increase its capability for interdiction of any kind, leave alone of WMD on the high seas, except by hanging onto the coattails of the US Navy. The Clause appears to be yet another example of India agreeing with a US policy and unilateral action framework not for any benefit it is likely to bring

India but for the sheer sake of agreement, to show the US that India is a more than willing partner.

These Clauses providing for greater interaction between the two militaries, especially the joint exercises and any actual joint operations, are directed towards achieving what is known as greater “inter-operability”, that is, a greater mutual familiarity with each others’ capabilities, operational procedures and particularly hardware promoting the ability of the two militaries to undertake joint actions. The Agreement specifically therefore envisages that US-India “defence transactions... will achieve greater interaction between our armed forces, and build greater understanding between our defence establishments” (4F).

The phrase “inter-operability” also implies, in the extreme, the two forces being able to work as one, perhaps the best example being NATO. Clearly, if this is to be achieved, hardware of the two militaries should be as similar, compatible or inter-changeable as possible. British naval aircraft can, at a pinch, also operate off US aircraft carriers, as Harriers in fact do with some slight modifications. The two armies can operate closely together because of common equipment. By contrast, US ships found it difficult to even berth at Kochi because the water hose connections were of Soviet type! Inter-operability could clearly give US forces an added outreach capability leveraging Indian facilities and capabilities but India can, at best, ride piggy-back on US forces — if allowed to!

Considering together with other Clauses on anti-missile collaboration, joint patrolling of commercial sea lanes and collaboration in multinational including peacekeeping operations, the Agreement is tantamount to declaring a formal military and strategic alliance with the US in all but name.

Spokespersons of both sides, and several commentators here in India, have made much of the Agreement’s provision to “expand two-way defence trade” (Clause 4F) although few have pointed out that this essentially means the US selling and India buying. Indian media has been highly taken in by the prospect, dangled by visiting US dignitaries and responded to favourably by Indian Ministers, of the US offering India such hitherto taboo military hardware as fighter aircraft which, by some inference, the Indian lay public was expected to believe was high-tech stuff far superior to anything India has or was likely to get. Much was also made of the fact that the US has agreed not merely to sell such equipment but also to “technology transfer, collaboration, co-production, and research and development” (4G).

Even before the Agreement had been signed, US F-16s and F/A-18 Hornets were offered to India to meet its globally advertised requirement for multi-role combat aircraft. The US government gave licenses to Lockheed Martin and Boeing, the respective manufacturers, to formally make the offer and requested the Indian

government to include them in its short-list which India promptly did. Almost immediately, representatives of these companies arrived in India for negotiations and talked as if this was virtually a done deal! Yet it gradually transpired that co-production may only mean only local assembly rather than any actual technology transfer, that this would be applicable only to F-16s not to the Hornets, and that too only if the order size were substantially larger! It later transpired that only the aircraft were being offered at this stage without any mention of the armaments it may carry which would later be taken up “as per need”.

It has been argued in far greater detail elsewhere²² that these aircraft are neither what India requires nor are they the latest technology as one may have been led to believe. The F-16s are being phased out by the US Air Force, the assembly line is ready to be shut down and order books are empty. The US record on reliability of supply and spares is extremely poor and political interference is well known as dramatically revealed by US withholding of the F-16s Pakistan had paid for. And Malaysia is still to receive any armaments for the F-16s it bought from the US which is still assessing the buyer’s needs thus rendering the aircraft just so much flying junk! As Americans say, India needs such deals like it needs a hole in the head!

Lots of other hardware have been on offer from the US such as P3 Orion anti-submarine aircraft. Again, these are not full-fledged early-warning target-acquisition and guidance systems like the E2C Hawkeye or the Phalcon which India wanted but the US would not allow Israel to sell. The US Administration has also made clear that such systems were not being considered since they would “upset the balance of power in the sub-continent.” In short, the military hardware the US is likely to offer to India would be second-rate stuff of the kind already available in the neighbourhood whereas India could buy far better equipment, without strings attached, from a number of sources. Further, co-production leave along technology transfer are highly unlikely. In any case, the US would take care to see that any regional balance of power was not tilted in favour of India. So much for “helping India to emerge as a world power”, a large part of which is hype, deliberately aimed at Indian vanity and the longing of its establishment for praise from the West.”

It would be naïve in the extreme to expect that the US is making all these apparently “generous” offers out of the goodness of its heart. Tying up India as a military ally serves US interests pure and simple, and why should anyone be surprised or shocked by any country wanting to look after its own interests? Is India doing that?

US INTERESTS DOMINATE

The Indo-US Defence Agreement clearly caters disproportionately to US rather than to Indian interests. Even clauses that are apparently

intended to benefit India are seen to benefit the US more in commercial or strategic terms. The greater strength of the US and its correspondingly greater force in the negotiation process has certainly been one of the factors but a clearer US strategic vision and policies have contributed hugely to the Agreement being weighted in favour of the US while Indian policies, such as they are, have taken a back seat, not least because the Indian side have enthusiastically gone along with US formulations.

The US has roped India into its strategic orbit, tying India into a close partnership if not at least an informal alliance, while actually giving away very little. The major US concession has been its de facto recognition of India's nuclear weapons status and, instead of allowing this to be a hindrance, factoring this reality into its security calculus and foreign policy. Especially to a neo-con Bush Administration quite comfortable with ignoring or deliberately flouting international treaties, and which itself has refused to ratify the CTBT, this pragmatic approach to the NPT means little.

The US wants India to be a strategic partner so as to serve its own long-term interests of befriending an emerging major power and, directly or indirectly, containing China which it regards as its principal long-term rival and potential security threat. It is interesting to note that even an informal "partnership" with India rather than a formal alliance is quite adequate to serve the US purpose. Indeed, staying away from a formal alliance or pressing India into one may bring its own benefits.

We have referred earlier to Ashley Tellis' prescient testimony before the US Senate wherein he made several policy prescriptions with respect to Indo-US relations virtually anticipating many aspects of the Summit Joint Statement such as supply of nuclear fuel to India by the US, facilitating Indian participation in ITER and other international nuclear research programmes, roping India into the PSI and obtaining Indian support for President Bush's idea of a Democracy Fund to be administered by the UN. An article in the *Washington Post* written after the Summit and welcoming the US intention of helping India become a major power, went so far as to argue that the US should "consider granting India the same 'Major Non-NATO Ally' status as Pakistan... as a significant gesture in reaffirming the commitment of the United States to India."²³

Tellis on the other hand, with far greater understanding of Indian sensitivities (India would of course have bristled at such an "equation" of India with Pakistan) and a more sophisticated policy orientation recommended, quite differently, that "it would be unrealistic to expect that New Delhi would become a formal alliance partner of Washington... Rather, India will likely march to the beat of its own drummer, at least most of the time... [but] a strong and independent

India nevertheless represents a strategic asset to the United States, even if it remains only a partner and not a formal ally... Consequently, transformed ties that enhance the prospect for consistent — even if only tacit — ‘strategic coordination’ between Washington and New Delhi serve American interests just as well as any recognized alliance.”²⁴

The US Administration, as is only to be expected, has been more hardnosed and pushy than this more academic advisor and has driven a hard bargain dragging India far deeper into its strategic net than the above recommendation would suggest. Yet Tellis’ core idea remains valid, that a formal Indo-US alliance is not essential for US interests for which greater strategic coordination is sufficient. For Indian government spokespersons to defend the Defence Agreement on the grounds that it does not represent a formal alliance is therefore disingenuous. Formal alliance or not, the Agreement places the Indian fly deep in the US spider’s parlour on the latter’s tempting invitation.

Many Indian commentators ranging across the political spectrum have aptly termed the Defence Agreement a US trap into which India has allowed itself to fall.²⁵ The all-important question is Why? Is the UPA going the NDA way? Does the Congress-led UPA believe India would gain from such an alliance, formal or otherwise?

LACK OF INDIAN STRATEGIC VISION

As suggested earlier, at least part of the problem stems from India not having a properly worked out and enunciated strategic policy. Some preliminary attempts were made during the BJP-led regime but what emerged was half-baked, a knee-jerk response to US geo-strategic dominance and guided blindly by traditional Sangh Parivar ideologies. No attempt was made to build a wider consensus around this dramatically new policy orientation, or different aspects of it, and there was only a random chorus of assent from some strategic experts and media commentators who appeared to have been eagerly awaiting such an overtly pro-US strategic and foreign policy orientation.

The lack of a coherent strategic vision in India, and the absence of a broad consensus across the political spectrum, has been noted by many and some have ascribed this to a political culture that inhibits the development of such a consensus. While it is no doubt true that most bourgeois parties lack a distinct and consistent foreign policy vision, and that parties sing different songs when in power and in opposition, not losing any opportunity to score brownie points off each other even if this hurts India’s interests, the reasons must be sought not merely in behavioural traits of political parties but in fundamental class terms.

The mainstream Indian polity represented by different national or regional bourgeois parties is torn between many fragmented forces. The Indian State is still under contention and its character is subject to pulls and pressures from different contending forces representing different class interests. To expect a coherent and consensual definition of “national security” or “national interest” in foreign policy to emerge is therefore perhaps over-optimistic at this stage of India’s development. Nevertheless, an effort by the different political forces and by strategic or foreign policy experts, commentators and concerned others to each spell out a coherent strategic vision, consistently follow it through and allow the same to be subject to critical scrutiny will assist the gradual emergence of the desired vision of vital national strategic interests.

In the absence of such a vision, Indian strategic policy orientations are subject to whims of this or that political dispensation which happens to be in power at given points of time, none of which have a clear strategic vision themselves, tend to respond in an ad hoc manner to transient geo-political shifts and are therefore vulnerable to external pressures especially from powerful forces such as the US. Nowhere in recent memory has this been more visible than in the recent Indo-US Defence Agreement.

We have seen the articulation of a strategic vision by the US, broadly bi-partisan but with a substantial change introduced by the neo-con Republican Right, given shape to over several years and working systematically to shape the Agreement in such a manner as to advance US strategic interests, not just over the next few years but with a long-term scenario in mind. What has been the counterpart strategic vision or idea of vital national interests from the Indian side that has, or has not, shaped the Agreement?

Some impulses, however vaguely spelt out, are discernible from Indian policies as they have evolved over the years. India sees itself, if not today then in the medium-term, at least as a regional power not just in South Asia but in the wider Indian Ocean region spanning a vast area from the African coast to East and South-East Asia and with vital interests in West and Central Asia.²⁶ Guided by such a vision, India has shaped a “look-East” policy towards greater engagement with E/SE Asia; has become a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum; has tried to forge broad fledgling partnerships such as with South Africa and others in the Indian Ocean Rim; the BIMSTEC economic grouping with Myanmar, Bangladesh, SriLanka and Thailand; the Mekong Ganga Cooperation involving Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam (with which India has an old and recently renewed military relationship) and Thailand (with which India has stepped up its military co-operation). The establishment by India of an integrated multi-service Far-Eastern Command in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands adds muscle to its

strategic moves towards east Asia. India has also managed to push itself into observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization involving China, Russia and the Central Asian republics (except Turkmenistan).

If India were to seriously examine its security interests in this scenario, it would view the US not so much as a supporting force in the short-term but as a potential hindrance to the medium-term emergence of a larger role for India and even as a long-term threat certainly to its ambitions if not to its security itself.

While recognizing a potential emergence of India as a major power, and even declaring that it would help India achieve this ambition, the US actually works actively to limit the extent of India's power.

Even within the confines of South Asia, the US will not allow India to achieve a decisive military superiority vis-à-vis Pakistan. The US has repeatedly invoked its policy of "not upsetting the balance of power in the region" in denying India advanced military aircraft or force multipliers such as early-warning systems like the E2C Hawkeye. F-16 sales to India, if they take place, would be used by the US to facilitate and avoid any embarrassment about the sale of F-16s to Pakistan. In South Asia, the US would like an Egypt-Israel scenario wherein it arms both, earns huge sums for its military-industrial complex and sustains an appearance of even-handedness while always being guided by its own strategic interests. If the US is able to achieve all its strategic goals in West and Central Asia and Pakistan outlives its usefulness as a strategic ally, one may see some change in this scenario, but this is extremely unlikely even in the medium term. The US may like the world to think that "the orientation of US-Pakistan relations for the foreseeable future is... likely to be focused on avoiding the *summum malum* [i.e. worst outcome], the opportunities offered by the transforming US-Indian relationship provide hope for reaching the *summum bonum* [i.e. best outcome]..."²⁷ But this is wishful thinking at best. US policy towards Pakistan is not guided simply by trying to save a failed state situation, or avoid a take-over by Islamist forces or even shoring up a relatively moderate regime but by the strategic assets it has in and the strategic leverage it can exert from Pakistan.

If this is the US position with respect to India in the limited confines of South Asia, would it really countenance an India flexing its muscles in the blue waters of the Indian Ocean or in the Central Asian steppes? Just as the US believes, in its own interests, that it ought to "deter/dissuade the emergence of a military competition in the region that could emanate from different centers — unification of Korea, China-Taiwan, resurgent Japan, or emergence of India",²⁸ India too should, without hesitation or embarrassment, spell out its perception that a hegemonic and overbearing US will seek to throttle India's regional aspirations and security interests.

All the above alliances and groupings that India has either forged or has become associated with either overtly seek to create regional power groupings or have the potential to emerge as major power centers in their own right or even possible as different poles in a long-term multi-polar world order. Whatever the strategic dominance of the US in the near or even medium-term, there is no reason why emerging regional or even global powers such as India should not envisage or start pushing towards the emergence of such a multi-polar scenario. India has not even formulated a perspective that comes near the position of ASEAN, most of whose members are old US allies, that “the bipolar global structure of the Cold War era has given way to one of transition in which unilateral impulses coexist with as yet tentative expressions of multi-polarity.”²⁹ US hegemony and efforts to rope in India and other emerging powers into alliances with it as junior partners go precisely contrary to such a vision.

It should come as no surprise that US strategists and policy advisors would recommend that India should “give up the chimera of a multipolar world” since, for all practical purposes, the US predominance will not be challenged for another 50 years at least and therefore simply accept this reality and merely learn to “maneuver within the interstices of the international system.”³⁰ What does surprise is the apparent facility with which successive Indian governments appear to be going along with this.

Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee has tried to pass off the Agreement as just a set of broad intentions, a mere framework, and not any commitment to anything concrete. Such dissimulation does not go far and tends to rebound. The Minister would have us believe, with a nudge and a wink, that even though he signed an Agreement to collaborate in multinational operations he really meant “under UN auspices” but he didn’t say so because it would upset the Americans. Peace-keeping operations? Proliferation Security Initiative? Well, you know... Anyone dealing with the US knows that if given an inch, the US will take a mile. Everyone knows how the US unilaterally announced a Core Group in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, even as Indian naval vessels had already moved out to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, yet India said nothing to disabuse the notion that this was some US initiative. One can understand the silence of Australia and Singapore, old US military allies. But India? Why should India be apprehensive about not revealing its true opinions and actual security assessment of its national interests?

Who is the Defence Minister fooling anyway? Surely not the Americans, with whom by all accounts detailed discussions have been held covering a lot more ground than is revealed by the text of the Agreement. Or is he trying to pull wool over the eyes of regional and other partners, such as for instance, China with which India has

recently entered into another “strategic partnership”? Regrettably, the Indian foreign policy establishment has a hoary tradition of trying to be too clever by half in its wordplay and attempting to hide real intentions behind a smokescreen of fine-sounding and highly general statements. India has been entering into or planning “strategic partnerships” by the dozen including, only half in jest according to some commentators, with the Vatican! India is in real danger of not being taken seriously or at face value by other countries and therefore of doing severe damage to its ambitions in her extended strategic neighbourhood.

Most important, how long can the truth be kept from the Indian public? Does India seriously wish to play a role on the world stage or does it hope to only play a bit part by tagging on to US apron strings?

While India is signing bombastic-sounding Defence Agreements with the US and pretending that this is a deal between equals, India’s own defence preparedness and strategic strength, not including hopefully never-to-be-used nuclear weapons and delivery systems, have been woefully neglected, again by successive governments including the much-vaunted “nationalist” BJP-led NDA. For all its tall talk, India has not been able to establish clear military ascendancy in the region even vis-à-vis Pakistan. Its Air Force is in shambles, with an ageing and obsolescent MiG fleet, a couple of squadrons of Jaguars and Mirages, delayed induction of SU-30s from Russia, and a two-decades overdue acquisition of Advanced Jet Trainers. The less said about the indigenous LCA programme the better, with the entire project being more than 15 years behind schedule and the military expressing serious doubt as to the usefulness of the aircraft when it is finally inducted into service. Unconscionably, the LCA has been forced to finally be dependent on US-supplied engines which had been denied due to US sanctions. The Navy, which should have been at the heart of any Indian effort to emerge as a genuine regional power, is perhaps the most neglected arm of the defence services. Again, hugely delayed acquisition of new submarines, not likely to see service under Indian colours for another decade at least, indigenous ship-building lagging behind for want of orders and funds where it could have been the launch pad for enormous commercial activity as in the case of South Korea. And an Army which is forced to still believe in the superiority of numbers and to live with World War II vintage equipment, unable to invest in force-multipliers or meaningfully take advantage of the “revolution in military affairs”.

For all these reasons, it is high time the Government undertakes and makes public a Strategic Policy Review clearly identifying vital national interests, say in the form of a White Paper, and strives to build as broad a consensus as possible around a truly independent and forward-looking Strategic Policy. Perhaps India can then begin to take concrete actions domestically and with genuine strategic partners

abroad to give shape to her ambitions, and destiny, to emerge as a major power in its own right.

NOTES

- 1 See for instance Bharat Karnad, "India's Vision Void", *The Indian Express*, July 2, 2005; Brahma Chellaney, "US can be India's best friend" in http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/showArticle3.cfm?article_id=11636&topicID=69.
- 2 See "Indo-US Nuclear Deal" by Raghu, *Peoples Democracy*, July 31, 2005, for a detailed examination of the nuclear deal and a refutation of the arguments of the BJP and the "security sovereignty" critics. See also "Some caveats on a Constructive Deal", Editorial in *The Hindu*, July 22, 2005 for a cautious welcome to the nuclear deal which is described as "positive" and arguing that disagreements with other strategic aspects of the Indo-US deal should not be allowed to detract from the gains that could accrue from the former.
- 3 "Unbalanced and Inequitable", *Peoples Democracy*, July 24, 2005.
- 4 "National Security Strategy of the USA", June 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html>.
- 5 This is the title of a work written by George W. Bush in 1999 when he was Governor of Texas in which he argues that the US has overlooked India in its strategic calculations and should work to ensure that India is a force for stability and security in Asia. (Quoted in Ashley Tellis' Testimony to the US Senate cited below.)
- 6 CENTO began as the Middle-East Treaty Organization or the Baghdad Pact involving Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Britain and the US with the goal of containment of the USSR, like its sister organizations NATO and SEATO. The CENTO base in Pakistan was used to launch the notorious U-2 spy plane shot down and its pilot captured by the Soviet Union to the huge embarrassment of the US. Considered the least successful of these anti-Communist alliances, CENTO collapsed after numerous blows such as the withdrawal of Iraq after its republican revolution, neighbouring Arab countries Egypt and Syria getting closer to the Soviet Union, unwillingness of the alliance to get involved in the Arab-Israeli and Indo-Pakistani wars and finally Turkey's invasion of Cyprus leading to UK withdrawal.
- 7 See Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India*, Viking/Penguin, India, 2004, pp. 24-25.
- 8 Talbott (2004), p.41 and Report of Council on Foreign Relations, NY, Jan 1997.
- 9 See also <http://meaindia.nic.in/foreignrelation/usa.htm>, July 1, 2000, for official Indian account of the security dialogue and India's view of the Indo-US relations.

- 10 See Sumit Ganguly, "The start of a beautiful friendship? — the United States and India" in *World Policy Journal*, Vol.XX, No.1, Spring 2003. Ganguly discusses the views of several Bush advisors notably Condoleezza Rice.
- 11 IMET provides for exposure and training programmes for foreign military personnel in US institutions. It has a notorious past including training of personnel for covert operations in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cuba and elsewhere.
- 12 Vishnu Bhagwat, "Indo-US Military to military relations: who will benefit?" April 26, 2005, in <http://stangoff.com/index.php?p=74> and countercurrents.org.
- 13 Juli A. MacDonald, "Indo-US Military Relationship: Expectations and Perceptions", (henceforth OSD/NA), Office of the Secretary of Defense —Net Assessment and Booz Allen Hamilton, October 2002. While an extremely interesting and revealing compilation of US and Indian views, this is not an official US government document although viewed as such by several Indian commentators. See also Siddharth Varadarajan, "America, India and outsourcing imperial overreach", *The Hindu*, July 13, 2005, for a critical analysis of this study.
- 14 B.S.Raghavan, "Indo-US Defence Pact - II: Commitments may fetter judgement" in *The Hindu Business Line*, July 14, 2005.
- 15 Ashley Tellis, Testimony to Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 2004, (henceforth Testimony to Senate), <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications>.
- 16 OSD/NA Report, p. 37.
- 17 See Raghu, "Security without Policy: a critical appraisal of the Report on reforming the Security System," *The Marxist*, Vol.XVII, No.2, April-June 2001, for a detailed analysis of this Report.
- 18 <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2005/43858.htm>.
- 19 See for example, "Reject this Indo-US framework", text of Speech by Prakash Karat, General Secretary, CPI(M) at Left Parties Meet, in *Peoples Democracy*, July 17, 2005.
- 20 See Bharat Karnad, "India's Vision Void" in *Indian Express*, July 2, 2005.
- 21 See for instance "Indo-US Strategic Pact", Agha Shahi, *The Dawn*, Karachi, July 28, 2005 in <http://www.dawn.com/2005/07/28/op.htm#1>.
- 22 Raghu, "No to US F-16s for India", *Peoples Democracy*, May 22, 2005.
- 23 "Dafna Linzer, "Bush officials defend India nuclear deal", *Washington Post*, 20 July 2005 http://www.indianembassy.org/US_Media/2005/July/WP4.htm.
- 24 Ashley Tellis, Testimony to the US Senate (cited above).

- 25 see for instance Sumer Koul, “A dubious defence pact India can do without”, <http://samachar.com/features/150705-features.html>; Praful Bidwai, “Eyes wide shut, India enters military alliance with US” in <http://www.antiwar.com/bidwai/?articleid=6465>.
- 26 See for instance the Speech of Foreign Minister Natwar Singh cited above, the OSD/NA Report on strategic perceptions in India and the US and other Reports.
- 27 Ashley Tellis in “Senate Testimony” cited above.
- 28 OSD/NA Report (cited above), p.19.
- 29 ASEAN Security Review 2000.
- 30 Ashley Tellis, <http://www.ceip.org/files/pdf/futurefire.pdf>.