

RAGHU

## *US-India Strategic Partnership: The Security Dimension*

The word “strategic” is used in so many ways by different people in diverse contexts that it is useful to define the scope of the term as used in this article. In common parlance of course the term is used to convey long term rather than short term policies or tactics. In military circles, the term is used to refer to weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, and their means of delivery since use of such weapons are seen as having a decisive impact on conflicts far beyond more immediate theatres of war. In foreign policy, the term is used to convey a holistic framework embracing diplomacy, security in defence, food, energy and trade, in short all aspects that impinge on a nation’s long term interests. As we shall see, the term would be used in each of these senses in this article depending on the context which should make the meaning obvious. However, the major focus will be on the security dimension both for its own importance and also because it is such a dominant part of the US-India “strategic partnership.”

It must be noted at the outset that the US and India have quite different settings within which strategic policies are formulated and put into effect. In the US, security strategies are formally drawn up through institutional mechanisms involving the National Security Advisor and the State Department with inputs from Defence and Intelligence establishments, and usually obtain bi-partisan support across the political spectrum spanning Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals, including as expressed through ratification by the US Congress. No doubt there are differences in strategic and foreign policies between the major political parties or between different Administrations, but there is usually a common thread of “vital national interests” which is broadly agreed upon even while differences may persist on how these interests should be safeguarded or advanced. US strategic policies are thus cast in a pragmatic mould seeking to advance US economic, military and diplomatic self-interests which are enunciated fairly explicitly.

In India, by contrast, structures and mechanisms for formulating strategic doctrines are in their infancy. A beginning had been made by the NDA government which even released a draft National Security Review<sup>1</sup> but failed to finalise it in the absence of a consensus even while proceeding to act upon its core assumptions, about which more later. The present UPA government, while continuing with the office of the National Security Advisor under the Prime Minister’s Office, has continued the old practice of opaque and ad hoc

policies. Indian strategic policy continues to remain mostly reactive, big-power oriented mostly with an eye on the US and the West in the post-Soviet era and overly concerned, some would even say obsessed, with gaining some form of recognition as a "world power." Compared with the pragmatic cast of US strategic policies, those of India appear to be more sentimental, representing wishful-thinking and without any clear vision of vital national interests.

Yet for all these continuities, there is no escaping the fact that the strategic calculus in both countries, particularly with respect to each other, has undergone fundamental changes in recent times. This has been brought into sharp focus by the Indo-US Defence Framework Agreement of June 2005, the Joint Statement of President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in July 2005, and the Indo-US Nuclear Deal stemming from these, all of which highlight the emerging "strategic partnership" between India and the US under which the US is to assist in "transforming India into a major world power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century," a phrase pregnant with all sorts of promises and aimed directly at pandering to the dreams and aspirations of the Indian ruling and elite classes.

Perhaps understandably, the nuclear deal has grabbed all the attention in the media and even in strategic circles, what with all the high-level negotiations in New Delhi and Washington, and all the attendant drama. Much has been written about the nuclear deal, so this article does not propose to add to this body of material.

A previous article by this author has examined much of the US-India strategic relations, especially as revealed through the Defence Framework agreement.<sup>2</sup> The present piece does not intend to cover the same ground in as much detail, but some repetition may be unavoidable where continuity and clarity of the argument demands.

With this background, this article seeks to examine the security dimension of the Indo-US partnership at the present juncture and in light of recent developments which provide the setting not only for the nuclear deal but also for wider security relations between India and the US, and is therefore extremely important to understand. What are the implications of this partnership for India, for the US, and for the regional and global security architecture? What does each country stand to gain, or lose, at least in the short to medium term?

#### US SECURITY STRATEGY

There can be little doubt that the Bush Presidency has seen a significant shift away from previous established consensus in the US. The neo-con doctrine is very different from the traditional conservatism of the mostly Republican Right in the USA which has mostly championed isolationism internationally and small government, states' rights and balanced fiscal policies domestically. In contrast the neo-con position is stridently interventionist in foreign policy, favours activist domestic policies supported pro-actively by a hand-picked Supreme Court, and a profligately deficit economy.

The National Security Strategy adopted under President George W. Bush in 2002 (US-NSS02), partly in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US but incorporating core neo-con ideas pre-dating it by several years, specifically recognized the “unparalleled military strength and great economic and political strength” of the US and laid out goals and strategies for maintaining its global domination in all spheres.<sup>3</sup> US-NSS02 explicitly reveals the determination of the US to assert its supremacy, especially in military terms, and impose its own agenda on other countries, on global agreements and on multilateral institutions particularly the United Nations.<sup>4</sup>

In pursuit of this neo-con vision since president Bush assumed office in 2001, the US abrogated the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty with Russia, refused to sign the Chemicals and Biological Weapons Treaty, did not ratify the CTBT, refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Courts and actively opposed the UN Climate Change Treaty which it adamantly refused to join. The US further moved to undermine the authority and role of the UN, most notably by initiating military actions unilaterally or through “coalitions of the willing” as exemplified in Iraq and in sanctions against Iran, either ignoring the UN or interpreting its mandate in a self-serving manner.

The US National Security Strategy of 2006 (USNSS06)<sup>5</sup> is of more immediate interest for several reasons, chiefly as it represents the crystallized neo-con thinking after several years in power, well into the second term of the Bush presidency and with the benefit of lessons learned from the US invasion of Iraq, its confrontation with Iran and its aggressive engagement with North Korea. USNSS 2006 also completes a series of policy exercises that together form the US security strategy. It was preceded by the Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) of the same year, the first QDR to be drawn up exclusively under the leadership of former Defence Secretary and neo-con ideologue Donald Rumsfeld. A series of significant and related foreign policy pronouncements were also made in January by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Additionally, US-NSS06 throws light on the blossoming US-India strategic engagement leading up to the nuclear deal. Various policy statements issued by high-ranking administration officials prior to and during the visit of President Bush to India during which the nuclear deal was clinched, including his speech at the Purana Qila in Delhi, had whole passages lifted directly from US-NSS06.

In some basic aspects, US-NSS06 is an extension of US-NSS02, guided by the same neo-con vision of the US as a unique superpower, with a “military without peer,” leading a worldwide crusade to advance “freedom and democracy.” US-NSS06 claims to be “founded upon two pillars” namely “promoting freedom..., effective democracies..., free and fair trade” and “[forging] a growing community of democracies... [which] America must continue to lead.” Empha-sising that US-NSS06 is “a wartime security strategy” since “America is at war,” NSS06 adds further to the messianic zeal and pro-active stance of neo-conservatism: “We seek to shape the world, not merely be shaped by it.” With this perspective, US-NSS06 reiterates the policy framework first enunciated in 2002 that shifted US strategy away from

deterrence and containment towards a more aggressive stance, and introduced the notorious doctrine of pre-emption.<sup>6</sup>

Every military commander, combatant or even street fighter knows the value of striking first and seizing the initiative instead of waiting for the other's impending attack. Pre-emption is good tactics but, as numerous experts have pointed out, elevating it to a strategy or making it central to policy is fatal, as has been amply borne out by the Iraq invasion and the consequent instability if not chaos in that country as well as in the entire region. In fact, the US doctrine of pre-emption is simply a deceptive term to disguise naked military aggression, turning Clausewitz' famous dictum on its head by adopting a strategy of war as diplomacy by other means!

In any case, as US-NSS06 itself declared, the US strategic goal of "ending tyranny" is not to be achieved by military means alone and are not linked only to WMDs. US-NSS06 names North Korea, Iran, Syria, Cuba, Belarus, Burma and Zimbabwe as the "despotic states" where, put simply and without all the verbiage, the US would seek regime change.<sup>7</sup> Then there are other states which "have regressed, eroding the democratic freedoms their people enjoy" (read Russia), or which "have not delivered the benefits of effective democracy and prosperity to their citizens, leaving them susceptible to or taken over by demagogues peddling an anti-free market authoritarianism" (read Venezuela) or "seek to separate economic liberty from political liberty, pursuing prosperity while denying their people basic rights and freedoms" (read China). US-NSS06 spells out the various non-military pressure tactics and open interference envisaged in the affairs of other countries "to promote effective democracy," including "publicly supporting democratic reformers in repressive nations," "using foreign assistance," "forming creative partnerships with non-governmental organizations and other civil society voices to support and reinforce their work" etc. No one can any more doubt, or ascribe to conspiracy theory, the direct US hand in the so-called colour revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, which NSS06 hails as successes of US policy, and the on-going assistance to subversive activities of NGOs in Belarus and Russia.

#### US STRATEGIC VIEW OF INDIA

Whereas the US-India nuclear deal is not mentioned as such in US-NSS06, the document reveals the broad US thinking. In different places in the document, US-NSS06 speaks of a policy orientation to "develop agendas of cooperative action with the other main centres of global power" and on the US having "set aside decades of mistrust and put relations with India, the world's most populous democracy, on a new and fruitful path" through the "bold" Indo-US Strategic Agreement between president Bush and prime minister Manmohan Singh in July 2005 through which "India now is poised to shoulder global obligations in cooperation with the United States in a way befitting a major power."

Besides the US-NSS06 and the QDR06, all other recent US official reports such as the National Intelligence Council Report entitled "Mapping the Global Future" (2004) and the National Defense Strategy (2005), the Quadrennial

Defense Review Report (2006) and the National Security Strategy (2006), all starkly bring out that the US is committed to retaining its global “leadership” and domination in all respects — political, military, economic, technological and cultural.

Recognizing that many countries and peoples would resent this dominance, high priority is to be given to shaping the choices of “countries at strategic crossroads,” and to ensure that all major and emerging powers are integrated as “constructive actors and stakeholders” into the international system, meaning under US leadership.

The NSS and the QDR06, whose main points the Indo-US strategic agreement of 2005 incorporates, throw interesting new light on the US strategic views of India. In economic terms, the US vision is to push India, along with “other nations that serve as regional and global engines of growth” such as Russia, China, Brazil and South Korea, further along the road of “reforms to open [up] markets” obviously to penetration by US capital. In military terms, the QDR discusses three powers “who find themselves at strategic crossroads” and who have the potential to become “near-peer competitors” of the US, namely Russia, China and India.<sup>8</sup> The QDR characterises Russia as a potential threat if it chooses to move in an authoritarian or nationalistic direction, China as a real long-term rival if it seeks hegemony in East, Southeast and Central Asia, (this perceived threat being used in QDR to justify increased US expenditure on a new generation of conventional weapons) and India as a key strategic partner. With China and Russia thus seen as at least medium-term strategic rivals, the US strategy is to drive wedges between these Eurasian landmass powers, and India appears to fit the bill.

In a new strategic formulation, the US-NSS06 postulates that “US relations with the nations of South Asia can serve as a foundation for deeper engagement throughout Central Asia” with Afghanistan fulfilling its “historical role as a land-bridge between South and Central Asia, connecting these two vital regions.” This US vision which even tenuously links India with Central Asia, viewed by the US as “an enduring priority for [its] foreign policy,” apparently places India in a vital position on the US strategic map while also seeking to pull India in a direction opposite to that of China, and Russia, in the nascent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. A policy of containment of China reminiscent of US strategy during the cold war, an era that US-NSS06 begins by arguing was past! Yet, this very placement of India within the US geo-strategic map circumscribes the role that the US envisages for India and, as we shall see, constitutes a major obstacle to deepening of the US-India strategic relationship even from a narrow Indo-centric vantage, a point that Indian foreign policy mandarins have not noticed, blinded as they are by the mirage of achieving glory riding on the shoulders of the world’s sole superpower.

#### INDIA-US STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT: EARLY YEARS

For all its limitations, which are discussed further below, such a strategic vision of India is a long way from earlier US perceptions. During the

Nehruvian decades and the cold-war, John Foster Dulles, then President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, had termed non-alignment immoral and the US saw India as part of the Soviet camp. The US had then chosen to enter a "strategic partnership" with Pakistan with which it cemented military alliances including in CENTO. For long the Indo-US relationship was plagued by the fact that both nations were on "best terms with each other's principal enemy."<sup>9</sup> Even after the China war in 1962 when Nehru abandoned non-alignment and asked the US for military assistance, India continued to be basically strategically irrelevant to the US.<sup>10</sup>

The US view of India, South Asia and the region in general, began changing in the '90s after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war. The USA's strategic reliance on Pakistan declined with the withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Afghanistan. The emergence of China as a major economic and military power had become a serious concern and Pakistan could not be expected to join any effort in countering its "all weather friend." Pakistan's not-so-clandestine acquisition of nuclear weapons and missile technologies from countries the US regarded with suspicion or even antagonism proved increasingly embarrassing and could no longer be defended or concealed as successive US administrations had long been doing 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-test 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, signalling a major shift in US perceptions and priorities in South Asia.

Against this background, the so-called Kicklighter proposals of 1991<sup>11</sup> outlined a "strategic vision" of US-India relations which ultimately led to the Agreed Minute on Defence Co-operation between India and the US signed by the then Congress Government during Secretary of Defence William Perry's visit to India in 1995. Strobe Talbot recalls that India figured repeatedly in Clinton's conversations as an important nation on the US strategic radar. Despite its severe reaction to the Pokhran-II nuclear tests by the India under the NDA dispensation in 1998 including the imposition of sanctions, the Clinton administration soon sought and obtained waivers for transfer of select dual-use items or World Bank aid from the US Congress on several occasions including a Defence Appropriations Bill in October 1999 that granted the President the authority to waive all sanctions against India.

Yet for all the excellent atmospherics, the Clinton administration could not get past the non-proliferation fundamentalism and old ideas about India and the sub-continent so dominant in US strategic thinking for over two decades, under which India was to be denied access to advanced technologies especially in defence, space or dual-use areas. Assistant Secretary of State Tom Pickering offered India a strategic dialogue which, without any tangible progress on the nuclear issue, proved to be a non-starter. Under Secretary of

State Robin Raphel continued to be hostile and even questioned Kashmir's accession to India, an opinion echoed in different ways by other Administration personages!<sup>12</sup> It came as no surprise when General Musharraf recently appointed Raphel Pakistan's chief lobbyist on Capitol Hill!

The next step, literally, was left to be taken by President George W. Bush in getting India to sign on to the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP). Some commentators feel there is more continuity than otherwise in the Bush era policy towards India.<sup>13</sup> But NSSP was indeed a departure from traditional US strategic thinking and bore the now well-known neo-con stamp in that regard, "turning Washington's long-standing approach to New Delhi on its head."<sup>14</sup> The Bush administration decided that India should be drawn into an inner circle of allies where it would be a part of the solution rather than part of the knotty problem of nuclear non-proliferation. In such a dispensation, India would be offered more, not less, advanced and dual-use technologies. On its part, the BJP-led government in India, spurred on by its well-known pro-US orientation and over-eager to take advantage of the opening offered by the growing US disenchantment with Pakistan to isolate the latter, declared that the US should be befriended as the sole superpower and a "natural ally." India thus signed the NSSP more or less formally bringing to an end the traditional policy of non-alignment. In getting India on board the NSSP, Washington had thus "placed its biggest bet on New Delhi, expecting that transformed bilateral relations will facilitate the expansion of Indian power *in a manner that will ultimately advance America's own global interests.*"<sup>15</sup> [emphasis added]

The UPA government when it took office did not lag behind, despite its promise in the National Common Minimum Programme to maintain an independent foreign policy. NSSP was not only renewed by the US and Indian Defence Ministers for 10 years in June 2005 but was also re-christened the Indo-US Defence Agreement, not only emphasizing its true purpose but also taking it to a new level. This scope was further enlarged in the Joint Statement signed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Bush in July that year which also contained the foundation of the Nuclear Deal as the icing on the cake of this burgeoning strategic partnership. Seasoned Indian diplomats and foreign policy experts acknowledged that "politically, the July 2005 agreement is by far the most significant and far reaching understanding that India has reached with any major power, not excluding the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation of 1971."<sup>16</sup>

#### CENTRALITY OF DEFENCE RELATIONS

The "strategic partnership" between the US and India has been actively projected as a multi-faceted, truly all-embracing relationship. The US and India have since then signed and acted upon a Science & Technology Cooperation Agreement, a US India knowledge Initiative on Agriculture, Agreement with US Trade & Development Agency, US India High Technology Cooperation Group (covering nanotechnology, information technology, biotechnology and defence) and a US India Maritime Security Cooperation Framework besides a CEOs' Forum and several meetings of the Defence

Policy Group set up earlier under the NSSP. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss these different areas but it cannot be denied that in most areas actions have barely if at all exceeded what would have transpired in normal engagement between two friendly nations while in some other areas such as trade and agriculture, the US has been actively pushing US corporate interests and policies that the US generally favours.

It was obvious to all but the most obtuse observer that defence and security-related issues were at the heart of the putative “strategic partnership” between the US and India. If the nuclear deal was the show-piece of the new relationship, then strategic in the sense of defence relations were central to the new engagement. In a break with the past, the US had agreed to “help India become a major world power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” a phrase that was to be repeated numerous times in the months preceding and following the signing of the Defence and Strategic Agreements, and US administration spokesmen repeatedly clarified that they “fully understand the implications, including military implications, of that statement.”<sup>17</sup>

In numerous documents of the US State Department, Defence Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, as well as in statements offered in testimony before the US Congress by high-ranking administration officials, the US made no secret of the fact that it sought a strategic alliance with India so as to bolster its own reach in the Indian Ocean and in South and South-West Asia, as well as to counter the rising influence of China in the region and beyond. In presenting the Indo-US Nuclear Deal too before the US Congress and a sceptical US strategic community brought up on years of non-proliferation fundamentalism, these were the very arguments that the US administration put forward.

The Defence Framework Agreement too is explicit as to the military dimensions of the new US-India relationship while also making clear that India would be expected to play its due role within the global security and foreign policy architecture of the USA. Since the US-India defence pact has been analysed in great depth in a previous article,<sup>18</sup> the Agreement itself will not be discussed further here except to highlight some points relevant to the discussion.

The defence pact explicitly states that it “will support, and will be an element of, the broader US-India strategic partnership.” With such a perspective, the pact commits India and the US to “collaborate in multinational operations” with no mention of United Nations auspices thus following the US lead on unilateral overseas interventions. It also promises to “expand collaboration relating to missile defence” thus lending support to the highly controversial missile defence programme of the US and dragging India into it. Perhaps most importantly, the Agreement commits both countries to “expand... defence trade,” meaning of course sale of US hardware to India since nobody believes that such trade may also involve the US buying Indian equipment, with the understanding that such transactions will be “not solely as ends in and of themselves, but as a means to... reinforce our strategic partnership.”

All these are clear deviations from the national consensus on maintaining an independent, non-aligned and non-interventionist military policy, and



have therefore not surprisingly attracted adverse attention from traditional friends of India such as Russia as well as from neighbouring countries in the Asian region.

The 2002 US National Security Strategy of the United States (US-NSS02) simply said that "U.S. interests require a strong relationship with India." It is a testimony to how far India has moved to forge closer ties with the US that the 2006 version of the strategy document US-NSS06 claims that "India now is poised to *shoulder global obligations in cooperation with the United States* in a way befitting a major power." [emphasis added].

If the Indian political leadership and its strategic and foreign policy advisors should have thought that the US was going to fulfil these promises of helping India become a "world power" and throw open its doors to transfer of high-tech defence and space technologies to India out of the sheer goodness of its heart, exposes their gullibility, naiveté or worse. On the contrary, it is becoming increasingly clear that the US is only dangling a few carrots at which it occasionally permits a nibble or two, while continuing to maintain a complex web of technology denial regimes, all designed to draw India closer into and make it more dependent upon its own military-strategic orbit to the serious detriment of Indian security, diplomatic and strategic interests.

The nuclear deal was of course the biggest carrot of them all, but the entire scenario as seen from Washington was one of entrapment in which India would be drawn into the US strategic web and made to serve US strategic interests. US point man for the nuclear deal negotiations Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns stated, in his on-the-record briefing of the Press after the draft 123 Agreement was signed by the US and Indian negotiating teams in Washington: "... now that we've consummated the civil nuclear trade between us, if we look down the road in the future, we're going to see far greater defense cooperation between the United States and India: training, exercises, [and] we hope, defense sales of American military technology to the Indian armed forces."<sup>19</sup>

The actual unfolding of US-India military relations and transactions discussed below leave little room for doubt as to the trajectory of this relationship.

#### JOINT EXERCISES

One of the most visible manifestations of the growing military links between India and the US has been the increasing frequency and complexity of the military exercises between the two. Of added concern is the fact, especially of late, these exercises have also involved militaries of different US allies, giving such exercises the complexion of an incipient military alliance.

Since the signing of the "Agreed Minutes on Defence," there have been around 15 major exercises involving the army, air force, navy and, significantly, the special forces of India and the US, most of these having taken place in the past 5 years or so. In September 2006, India participated in the largest ever such Army exercise along with US and NATO forces in Alaska. In November 2005, India and the US conducted their hitherto largest

naval exercise involving aircraft carriers, guided missile destroyers, frigates, helicopters, spy planes and fighter aircraft. But even this was dwarfed by the recent quadrilateral Bay of Bengal naval exercises involving the US, Japan, Australia, Singapore and India involving two US carrier groups and a series of anti-submarine exercises. A far cry from the earlier consensus in India that the Indian Ocean should be seen as a zone of peace and neutrality!

While the rationale advanced for such exercises is that the defence forces of India and the US would share experience and advance their capabilities to combat piracy, safeguard commercial shipping and tackle terrorism, the use of such heavy naval vessels, air power and armour belie such claims. Pirates and terrorists on the high seas would hardly be expected to use technologies that would necessitate deployment of aircraft carriers, anti-submarine manoeuvres! Clearly, these exercises aim at promoting closer military-to-military ties, greater familiarity with each others' equipment and operational systems, and above all inter-operability in joint operations. Visiting US Pacific Commander Admiral Timothy Keating said as much during the quad exercises and raised concerns across the region by adding that India and the US shared a mutual interest in the security of the Malacca Straits.

There are other worrying trends too in these exercises.

Till 2001, India had jealously protected its high-security specialised camps for jungle warfare in Mizoram and for mountain warfare in Ladakh from prying eyes. In a volte face, both facilities were opened up by the NDA-government to the US, a policy continued by the UPA government. US special forces have trained with their Indian counterparts in Ladakh, in the words of one US spokesman, in "high altitude, dry and rocky terrain... that would otherwise not be available... in the United States." The same one-sided benefit is to be seen in the exploitation of the Vairangte, Mizoram facility for training of US special forces in counter-insurgency jungle warfare, drawing upon the vast Indian experience in this area. These exercises are clearly aimed to provide immediate assistance to on-going US special forces operations in Afghanistan and South-East Asia.

The joint air exercises, especially the Cope India series and the recent Kalaikunda exercises raise other issues of concern for both India and its friends. Specifically upon US request, India fielded its Russian-origin Su-30 fighters in these exercises "against" US F-15, F-16s and F/A-18s. The US previously had no experience of the Su-30s which are also used by China and India provided the US valuable insights into this frontline aircraft used by both China and Russia, much to the displeasure of old friend and trusted military supplier, Russia.

Is India thus moving decisively towards a military alliance with the US, even perhaps an "Asian NATO" as some have suggested? Would this be at the cost of traditional friends such as Russia? Would this antagonise friendly nations in the Asian region and detract from improving relations with China? While the US is evidently benefiting from these burgeoning military ties by extending US strategic depth in the Indian Ocean region, do these exercises bring India comparable benefits? And would these outweigh the negatives of abandoning non-alignment and shaping of a multi-polar security order in the region?

## US EYES INDIAN DEFENCE MARKET

One of the more direct benefits to the US from increased joint exercises and promotion of inter-operability is the stepped-up Indian demand these are likely to trigger for US military hardware.<sup>20</sup> The more the two countries exercise together, the greater the rationale to provide India with compatible equipment, communications and technologies.

Sales of US military hardware to India are an extremely important part of the US-India defence partnership. The Defence Framework Agreement speaks of expanding "defence trade between our countries" and sets up a Defence Procurement and Production Group to "oversee defence trade" which, as noted above, are to be seen not merely as transactions but as a means to strengthen the strategic partnership. While the Defence Agreement speaks grandiosely of "technology transfer, collaboration, co-production, and research and development," it was always clear that the major goal was the sale of US military hardware to India and expansion of military exercises and joint operations, building towards greater integration between and inter-operability among the defence forces.

As unfolding events would further show, the carrot of advanced military technologies and know-how was being dangled by the US only to entice India while in actuality holding back in order to obtain ever greater concessions from India in allying itself with US strategic designs and kowtowing to US diktats on a range of issues. In the meantime, the US would do India the big favour of selling various military hardware while just incidentally raking in money from what is a truly mouth-watering market.

According to defence ministry projections, India is expected to acquire about US\$ 30 billion (Rs.135,000 crore) of military equipment during the 11th Plan period 2007-2012, making India the largest arms purchaser in the developing world in the coming years. Part of these huge acquisitions are undoubtedly due to long-overdue replacements of ageing and obsolete equipment, but a substantial part is because of an ambitious Indian military doctrine beyond its traditional defensive orientation.

This huge market has been closed to US defence contractors since the 1960s initially because of US antagonism to India's friendly ties with the Soviet Union and later due to formal sanctions imposed by the US in response to India's nuclear test of 1974 and the weapons tests in 1998. These sanctions were lifted by the US only very recently in 2001 when the NSSP was initiated. After decades, therefore, US defence firms are drooling at the prospect of multi-billion dollar contracts in the lucrative Indian defence market which has suddenly opened up for them. And this at a time when the US military-industrial complex is concerned at a projected slowdown in US defence acquisitions.

The first major sale of US military hardware to India has been the refurbished American warship, the USS Trenton renamed INS Jalashwa or "water horse," soon to join service with the Navy. This ship, now India's second largest naval combat vessel after the aircraft carrier Viraat, is meant for force projection far away from Indian shores, capable of carrying amphibious assault vehicles and large numbers of troops. The ship along with

6 ship-borne helicopters has been acquired for around US\$ 480 million (Rs.2160 crores). Significance of this acquisition lies not only in its size but also in the military doctrine it embodies, namely the US doctrine of external intervention.

The other large recent transaction has been the acquisition of 6 US-made Hercules C-130 J military transport aircraft with an option for buying an additional 6. The US\$1 billion deal (Rs.4500 crore) is India's hitherto largest order for US armaments. Although the basic Hercules transporters are of early post-WW II vintage, the version being acquired is a contemporary aircraft that entered service in the US itself only a few years ago. The transporters mark a shift from the traditional Russian-origin transport fleet used by the Indian defence forces. The Hercules C-130J's are quite heavily armed, are equipped with advanced avionics and electronic counter-measures and are to be used to air-lift special forces modelled after the US special forces such as the Green Berets used for offensive often covert operations far from home. This growing tactical convergence is an integral part of the growing military synergy between India and the US especially in the light of possible joint operations. The US Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), when seeking approval of the US Congress for the sale to India, informed the Congress that "the proposed sale will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to... strengthen the US-India strategic relationship... [and] by providing the Indian Government with a credible special operations airlift capability that will... ensure interoperability with US forces in coalition operations."

There have been other US arms sales as well although not of the same scale, such as 12 Weapon Locating Radars from US arms manufacturer Raytheon at a cost of \$200 million. Discussions are underway by Lockheed Martin of the US to sell India 8 P3 Orion maritime surveillance aircraft at a cost of US\$ 650 million, with a sweetener of 16 multi-mission MH-60R Sikorsky helicopters costing about \$400 million. In fact India had earlier ordered 2 P3 Orions but the deal fell through due to delivery delays, although some observers felt there were other factors as well, such as the US sale to Pakistan of the same system.

Such sales, although not very large in themselves, are seen by the concerned manufacturers as entry points in order to position themselves well for the really large orders expected in the coming few years with considerable strategic significance. The likely P3 Orion acquisition itself arose out of a high-level meeting in the US involving Australia, Japan, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia in which India was called upon to play a major policing role against sea-piracy in South-East Asia. India has also recently set up a radar post in Madagascar and has undertaken maritime patrolling responsibilities off Mozambique. Other advanced maritime reconnaissance aircraft, such as Boeing's P8 Multi-role Maritime Aircraft with offensive capabilities are also being dangled before India, the potential "rewards" being intelligence-sharing and resources/operations pooling with Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan and others, as well as co-development of an India-specific version provisionally designated the P8-I.

The US is of course playing its cards carefully, offering military hardware selectively and in carefully calibrated doses in terms of both quantity and quality. And the US is most definitely holding back cutting-edge technologies and weapons systems until India firmly and unequivocally commits itself to the US strategic embrace. Thus, the US has not yet cleared sales of Raytheon's Patriot anti-missile systems or even sale of the advanced US-Israeli Arrow missile defence systems. The US is also offering only the quite limited P3 Orions rather than the more advanced force-multiplier E2-C Hawkeye airborne early warning aircraft which can not only monitor and track numerous targets simultaneously but also link up with satellite-based systems to guide attack aircraft with precision. The US refused to sell India these systems citing "potential imbalance in South Asia." The US made even close ally Israel wait for several years before granting it permission to sell to India 3 Phalcon Airborne Early-Warning (AEW) radars to be mounted on Russian Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft, which is incidentally Israel's biggest military contract so far at \$1.1 billion.

In all these developments, what is clear is that US and even Israeli companies are beginning to exercise inordinate influence on India's massive defense purchases, known to be highly susceptible to extraneous considerations. Although the US entered the race very late, its companies are openly being spoken of by French and Russian rivals as front-runners for the huge fighter deal due to the pressures of the nuclear deal.

India had almost finalized a long-delayed \$600 million contract with the European consortium Eurocopter for supply of 197 light helicopters, but the entire acquisition appears to have been suddenly put on hold due to US pressure in favour of US manufacturer Bell. In May 2007, US administration officials and Bell executives are said to have met with India's Ambassador in Washington, Ronen Sen, to express their reservations about the deal going to Eurocopter and their voices seem to have been heard. At the end of last year, the Indian government officially announced the cancellation of the entire tender amidst outraged protests especially by the French leading the European consortium.

It is also no wonder that Russia, India's long-standing military hardware supplier, is upset at this increasingly visible trend. Of late Israeli firms have been preferred even for retro-fits, avionics and armaments on Russian-made aircraft and ships. Many believe that recent Russian demands for IPR protection and more money on the Gorshkov aircraft-carrier and Sukhoi aircraft deals, and its question as to why it should not sell arms to Pakistan if India does not respect vital Russian interests, are indications of Russia's displeasure.

The point is not that India should not diversify its arms purchases or should not purchase from this or that source. But it is becoming painfully obvious that India is increasingly shifting its acquisitions towards the US and its Israeli surrogate, clearly under pressure from the US and for the sake of a junior role in the US strategic theatre. In the process, India is running the dire risk not only of getting dragged into the US strategic orbit and losing its sovereignty but also of dangerously putting all its military acquisition eggs

into the US-Israeli basket to the severe detriment of its own long-term defence interests and self-reliant capability.

#### LOGISTICS SUPPORT AGREEMENT

India is also being pressured to sign a so-called Logistics Support Agreement (LSA) with the US which would provide for the respective militaries to use each other's facilities for logistics support such as refuelling and to borrow specified "non-lethal" defence equipment for use elsewhere, all on credit. Whereas a spin is being put upon the LSA being simply an agreement governing "minor" courtesies extended by one friendly country to another, extension of such support services have a clear military purpose including and indeed designed for use during military operations. Even without such an Agreement, when Chennai played host to the USS Nimitz in July this year on an ostensibly "harmless" visit, the aircraft carrier was refuelled and re-supplied, and promptly rejoined active duty in the Persian Gulf where the US fleet is engaged in gunboat diplomacy.

Even the term LSA has been coined to disguise the real intent of such an arrangement between military allies. The LSA is merely a different terminology for Access and Cross-Servicing Agreements (ACSA), which itself is only another version of the NATO Mutual Support Act modified in 1986, 1992 and 1994 for US dealings with non-NATO countries. All the goals and operational requirements remain the same, namely, inter-operability with provision for use of base services, logistics support and borrowing of equipment for urgent use. The US has such Agreements with several allies in different parts of Asia and Latin America, some of whom like the Philippines have also felt compelled to rename the ACSA (in this case termed the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement) so as to deflect domestic criticism.

That the LSA to be signed between US and India, brought up in bilateral negotiations in for the first time in 2004, is basically the same was clear from the Press Conference held by Lt.Gen. Jeffrey Kohler, director of the US Defence Security Cooperation Agency during his visit to India in mid-July this year. US Under Secretary of Defence, Douglas Feith, also admitted in 2003 that the purpose of such Agreements is to allow U.S. forces to "move smoothly into, through, and out of host nations... [as part of] military operations."

Facilities used under ACSA or LSA could be virtually the same as what would be available in a permanent military base. The US has hitherto only the Diego Garcia base in the Indian Ocean, which was the focus of much objection by India once upon a time, and would dearly love base facilities in India. Whereas India is yet to sign this Agreement, for fear of the domestic storm this would stir, it has turned a blind eye to the US entering into an ACSA with Sri Lanka whose Trincomalee port has long been a focus of US desire. The studied Indian silence on, indeed acquiescence with, the US-SriLanka deal is itself a sign of the times, no doubt prompted by the new US-India strategic partnership and is in sharp contrast to earlier times when, even as early as 1987, India had strongly objected to and resisted even the installation of Voice of America transmitters in Sri Lanka or the presence of

US oil firms to manage coastal fuel oil tanks on the grounds that such activities were prejudicial to Indian security.

So, has the strategic partnership between India and the US already matured into a military alliance in all but name? Is India poised to become another "major non-NATO ally" in the region?

#### US DOUBLE-DEALING

It is noteworthy, however, that in all the current or prospective sales of US military hardware to India, the US has been very cagey as regards both the quality or type of equipment it sells and the extent of technology transfer involved in such transactions. It is also becoming clearer by the day that, far from fulfilling the pledge to facilitate sales of "transformative systems in areas such as command and control, early warning and missile defence"<sup>21</sup> and thus assisting India to become a "major power," the US has kept such high-tech systems away from India while also seeking to constrain Indian military capabilities within a highly limiting South Asian "balance of power" framework. It seems clear that if India wants the US to go beyond these constraints, India would have to kow-tow to US diktats.

This would not have come as much of a surprise if the Indian political leadership and its security advisors had made a realistic appraisal of US strategic perceptions rather than being swept off their feet by sweet words and promises about great power status. That the US has in fact maintained its own strategic interests and priorities in the region, even to the detriment of India's security interests, without India baulking at such duplicity shows the extent to which the Indian political leadership has allowed itself to be led up the garden path and also the extent to which India feels restrained in expressing its displeasure or take counter measures for fear of displeasing the US in this new relationship.

It may be recalled that, even when the Clinton administration had first sought and obtained Congressional waiver on Pokhran-related sanctions to India, it did so at the same time as seeking and obtaining a waiver for selling F-16s to Pakistan. Fact is that since the terrorist attacks of September 2001 on the US when the US arm-twisted Pakistan into becoming a frontline ally for its assault on Afghanistan, the US has once again placed Pakistan on a pedestal as its main ally in the region. The US' own security perception dictates that it places greater reliance on the US-Pak relationship certainly in the short to medium term. Whatever the longer-term advantages India has to offer as a "strategic partner," the Pak proximity to Afghanistan and Iran, its location ahead of the Gulf, the closer military-to-military relationship the US has with it, all preclude the US sidelining Pakistan in favour of India. Indeed, even when then Prime Minister Vajpayee sought to curry favour with the US and offered the US basing and transit facilities for its attack on Taliban-led Afghanistan post-9/11 in 2001, the US preferred to go the Pak route. Vajpayee's best efforts and bending over backwards to persuade the US to sever its Pak links in favour of one with India, with the latter even kow-towing to it in so many ways, went in vain.

India wanted the force-multiplier E-2C Hawkeye early-warning aircraft but was only offered the much weaker P-3C Orion maritime surveillance aircraft which had already been sold to Pakistan. The US has inordinately delayed India acquiring the Phalcon early-warning system and is even now preventing the acquisition of the Arrow anti-missile system, both from close ally Israel. Very recently, the US has offered Pakistan a fresh \$5 billion package of F-16 aircraft, anti-tank and anti-ship missiles to Pakistan, none of which can conceivably be used in the "war against terror," all to keep the Pakistani military happy! Two highly influential United States Congressional leaders from both Parties, Democratic Party Co-chair of the India Caucus, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and Republican Party co-chair Gary Ackerman wrote a letter to President Bush in 2004 arguing that "US proposed arms sales to Pakistan have moved further and further from the requirements of the war on terror," that they are "gravely concerned that the systems being provided to Pakistan are intended to be used against Indian capabilities," and that "if the US provides F-16s to Pakistan, planes inherently capable of delivering nuclear weapons, the message will be that our true strategic partner in South Asia is Pakistan."<sup>22</sup>

The point is not that Pakistan should not acquire defence equipment from any source or that India should view its own defence requirements with Pakistan-tainted glasses. But the important question is, what is the "strategic partnership" with the US worth while the US continues seriously arming Pakistan, selling it force-multipliers and assuring it that it would do nothing to upset the balance of power in the region?

Pakistan is key to US strategic thinking in a way that India is not and perhaps never will be. What else but Pak-centrality of US strategic policy can explain the astounding US silence if not complicity with nuclear proliferation to and by Pakistan. "Pakistan's future is too vital to our interests and our national security to ignore or to downgrade," declared US Deputy Secretary of State and former Director of national Intelligence John Negroponte with regard to maintaining continuity in US-Pak relations despite General Musharraf's recent "second coup."

It is easy to see why it is in the US interest to claim that it is de-hyphenating the India-Pakistan relationship whereas it is actually not given the "military balance" approach of the US. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice has publicly spoken both about wanting to influence the regional dynamics in South Asia by maintaining strong relations independently with India and Pakistan, and about ensuring peace through a "military balance" in the region. This relieves any pressure on the US to make difficult choices between India and Pakistan, each fitting into the US strategic calculus in its own way. Such an approach ignores or even militates directly against India's security interests in the neighbourhood and in the wider region. Proclaiming India a "strategic partner" while simultaneously designating Pakistan a "major non-NATO ally" is completely duplicitous and nothing short of the old zero-sum game that should have been seen through long ago.



While it may be a zero-sum game for the US vis-à-vis India and Pakistan, for India this so-called strategic partnership is a net loss, not just in sub-continental terms which is or should be only a small part of India's security perspective but more importantly in regional and global terms as well.

India has already lost a considerable amount of goodwill among key allies, friends and a wider constituency of nations due to its having lost its true non-aligned status since entering into the US-India strategic partnership. The more its security and foreign policy are seen to be influenced by the US, the greater will be India's loss of whatever international stature and "major power" status she now enjoys. Indeed, this newfound role as a US ally will limit India's ability as an international player.

By abdicating its independent security and foreign policy, and tying them to US apron strings, India may well wind up aiding the US in its long-held ambition to dominate the Indian Ocean to the detriment of its own security and that of all littoral states. If the US-India security cooperation develops a heavier strategic tone, especially in joining up with the US in containing China, even more dangerous scenarios may unfold.

Fact is that there are intrinsic contradictions between the strategic impetus of the US and that of India. The former seeks unipolar global domination, the latter a multi-polar world of many major powers with India being one. One sees this contradiction play itself out in one arena after the other in international affairs where the US and India are "natural antagonists" rather than "natural allies": the need for restructuring the UN, the IMF and the World Bank commensurate with contemporary geo-political realities, the contentious terrain of international trade and the WTO, climate change. For the foreseeable future therefore "US-India strategic partnership" will remain an oxymoron.

#### NOTES

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4 For a more detailed analysis of US-NSS 2002, see Raghu, "Indo-US Defence Agreement."

5 National Security Strategy 2006, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>.

6 For a more detailed discussion on US-NSS06 see Raghu, *People's Democracy*, March 2006.

7 President Bush recited the same list of countries in his Purana Qila speech but somehow forgot or otherwise omitted Belarus!

8 US Quadrennial Defence Report 2006, available at [www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf).

9 Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb*, New Delhi: Viking, 2004, p.7

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11 So named after its author Maj. Gen (retd.) Claude "Mick" Kicklighter, Assistant Secretary of State to President George Bush (Sr.)

12 Various sources, e.g. Jagmohan, "It didn't begin last May," *Indian Express*, August 17, 1998.

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14 Ashley Tellis, "India as a New Global Power: An Action Agenda for the United States," Carnegie Endowment Report, July 2005, p. 12, available at [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/CEIP\\_India\\_strategy\\_2006.FINAL.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/CEIP_India_strategy_2006.FINAL.pdf). This highly influential paper formed the

basis of a presentation to the US Congress and played an important role in the formulation of the Bush administration's strategic policy towards India including the Bush-Manmohan Singh Agreement on Strategic Partnership encapsulating the nuclear deal. The Bush Administration, in fact, went beyond even the quite radical recommendations of this important essay.

15 Ashley Tellis, "India as a New Global Power," p. 15.

16 Lalit Mansingh "Indo-US strategic partnership."

17 Various sources cited in Ashley Tellis, "India as a New Global Power."

18 Raghu, "Indo-US Defence Agreement."

19 [www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2007/89559.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2007/89559.htm).

20 This sections reproduces portions from or relies heavily upon an article by this author; see Raghu, "123=126," *People's Democracy*, September 9, 2007.

21 Various sources cited in Ashley Tellis, "India as a New Global Power."

22 Reproduced in many sources, e.g., *The Indian Analyst*, December 15, 2005, available at [http://www.whatisindia.com/editorials/wis20041215\\_congressional\\_leaders\\_oppose\\_f16\\_sale.html](http://www.whatisindia.com/editorials/wis20041215_congressional_leaders_oppose_f16_sale.html).