



“U.S.-INDIA STRATEGIC DIALOGUE”

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS OF MET AND UNMET EXPECTATIONS IN U.S.-INDIA DEFENSE COOPERATION STEPHEN BIEGUN

In the decade plus of warming U.S.-Indian relations, many policy makers in both countries hoped for a better relationship between the superpower of North America and the rising power of Asia. India's geography, its democratic traditions, its increasing devotion to rules-based market economics, all would suggest a basis for warmer ties with America. The United States' power, influence, technologies and markets offered opportunity for India to grow to its full geopolitical and economic potential. With this promise, and through the efforts of a succession of U.S. and Indian governments (and despite a few setbacks along the way), the U.S.-Indian relationship has reached a point that even the most optimistic proponents would have been reluctant to predict.

Today, the United States and India cooperate with regular visits at the highest level of government. U.S. and Indian foreign policy and defense officials regularly consult and cooperate on a broad range of issues. The two nations' militaries now participate in joint planning and exercises. The U.S. business community now constitutes a significant portion of India's foreign investment and burgeoning commercial considerations are a major underpinning of the U.S.-Indian relationship. In sum, an astonishing degree of cooperation has developed over a very short period of time.

ARMS SALES

The recent completion of the U.S.-Indian *End Use Monitoring Agreement*, which removes a significant impediment to U.S. arms sales to the Indian military, will undoubtedly expand the level of defense cooperation between the two countries. While U.S. armaments will increase the military capabilities of the Indian armed forces and consequently make India a more potent partner and ally in defending common interests, the use of similar weapon architecture in the two countries will reinforce defense cooperation in other, more subtle ways as well.

At the most basic level, anticipated U.S. arms sales to India, and the likely steps that U.S. companies will take to offset the Indian capital expenditure, hold promise to further deepen the level

of U.S.-Indian commerce in a manner that intertwines with the two nations' national security establishments. U.S. companies will depend upon the Indian market for significant revenues and thus remain devoted to or even increase efforts to influence U.S. policies in favor of deeper U.S.-Indian cooperation. Indian enterprises, benefitting from the offsets of the U.S. contractors, will become heavily invested in future commercial opportunity that will flow from future sales.

Furthermore, common weapons platforms will facilitate the planning and execution of military exercises between the two countries—exercises that will also create real world interoperability in the case of a conflict that engages both India and the United States. And, once begun, defense sales tend to become somewhat self sustaining as new technologies, upgrades and embellishments are designed to complement the existing platform architecture. Hence, barring some consequential external factor, the Indian armed forces will undoubtedly seek to maintain a sizeable procurement relationship with U.S. companies for years and even decades to come.

BEYOND ARMS SALES

Arms sales are only one pillar of the U.S.-Indian defense relationship, though additional areas of cooperation are quite likely to emerge. While it would be a real stretch to suggest that the two nations have in place a common approach, the United States and India do share common, regional concerns with the military and defense implications of the Afghan insurgency, instability in Pakistan and the rise of China. It stands to reason that in time, and as a consequence of a burgeoning relationship in other spheres, the United States and India would likely at a minimum discuss these shared concerns, if not begin a level of cooperation that in time could even involve joint operational capabilities.

U.S.-Indian cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts, which expanded rapidly in the wake of last year's horrendous attacks in Mumbai, represents an established area of growing defense cooperation between the two countries. The recent Christmas Day airline bombing attempt in the United States is a vivid reminder that terrorism is a transnational threat—a young, affluent Nigerian, educated in Britain, trained and likely armed in Yemen, took a flight from Lagos, was screened in Amsterdam and sought to explode his device in the air over Detroit, Michigan. And, just recently, co-conspirators in the Mumbai attacks were arrested—in Chicago, Illinois. In order for the U.S. and India to truly cooperate in combating the threat of transnational terrorism, the two nations will need to undertake a high level of diplomatic, intelligence and defense cooperation on a worldwide basis.

AREAS OF FRICTION

As was the case over the past fifteen years, the U.S.-Indian defense relationship will see an occasional bump along the way. Despite reassurances from the U.S. government and defense companies, the Indian government remains suspicious as to the willingness of the United States to permit unimpeded access to arms sales. The U.S. government, and specifically the U.S. Congress,

has placed restrictions on arms sales on numerous occasions to express U.S. opposition to, and influence, policy decisions by other countries. Many in the Indian defense establishment worry that, once they are on the hook, the United States will gain increased leverage over India's national security decisions.

With the rapidly approaching Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference to be held in the Spring of 2010, the Executive and Congressional Branches in the U.S. have signaled a push to ratify the languishing Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In order to come into force, and in order to be meaningful, many consider India's membership in the NPT and the CTBT as non-negotiable. To state the obvious, India is likely to have zero interest in a permanent, zero yield nuclear test ban. Hence, some calls in the U.S. Congress can be expected for the use of diplomatic, defense and nuclear cooperation-related leverage to influence the Indian government's position on the Treaty.

Both the United States and India see Afghanistan as a major defense concern, with obvious connections to the instability in neighboring Pakistan. In order to defeat the Afghan insurgency and bring stability to the sub-continent, there is and will remain a temptation by some in the United States to seek a lasting regional solution that involves discussion of all outstanding regional disputes—a non-starter in New Delhi. As for U.S.-Indian defense cooperation in the broader continent of Asia, efforts to shape India's defense orientation toward the established U.S. allies in the region—South Korea, Japan, and Australia—could quickly push India well past its historic comfort zone of non-alignment and neutrality. Likewise, both India and the three U.S.-allies in Asia are likely to place a higher emphasis on developing their own economic, diplomatic and defense relationships with China rather than with each other. And, to the extent that any of the aforementioned perceive that they are being molded into a regional counterweight to hedge against China, some U.S. policy makers are likely to see their aims frustrated.

Finally, U.S.-Indian defense cooperation will likely be tested by the level of defense cooperation by the two nations with third parties such as Pakistan, Iran, Russia and others. As the U.S.-Indian relationship deepens, both sides will likely seek a greater insight and a greater say in the considerations that guide these decisions—considerations that could quite possibly expose the fact that, despite the deepening cooperation, the two nations' interests also diverge in significant ways.

GLOBAL OR REGIONAL PARTNERS?

It is a useful point of discussion to test expectations of what is the end state of U.S.-Indian defense cooperation—not only in coming years but in coming decades as well.

U.S. expectations for India's role in the world probably significantly exceed the intentions of most Indian policy makers. The United States will look to India to rise above its own, particular national interest in places like Iran and Afghanistan in order to create a basis for stability and peace in South and Southwest Asia. Already engaged in the fight against terrorism, India will be expected

to throw its political weight behind global efforts to combat nuclear proliferation. India's military capabilities will be sought for peacekeeping, and India may at some future moment be pressed to contribute troops to a Desert Storm like operation to respond to a shared threat to U.S.-Indian interests.

As a consequence of deepening U.S.-India defense ties, many strategic policy makers in the United States will also look to develop a relationship with India that can serve as a counterweight, and a hedge, against the rise of China. No doubt, there are many who would eventually envision a full U.S.-Indian military alliance that would optimize India's strategic location to include joint exercises and "soft" basing (port calls, joint planning cells, pre-positioning, etc.). In short, the natural evolution that the U.S. will seek is for India to be a strong regional ally with the willingness and ability to project force globally to support common U.S. and Indian interests in the world.

As for Indian expectations, first and foremost India is seeking a level of military capabilities that permit it to fully defend its own territory. This will necessarily involve capabilities to defeat terrorist attacks, to deter and if necessary defeat a Pakistani military attack, and the ability to deter any future conflict with China. To achieve these aims India will seek the most capable defense technology possible, preferably but not necessarily at the best price available. India will seek to do so without becoming overly dependent on the decisions made by other governments (i.e. the United States), and in turn will seek to leverage its business for greater say on how the United States develops its relationship with third parties (i.e. Pakistan).

India will likely seek to develop capabilities that will allow the protection of regional commerce through open sea lanes and ensure access to the raw materials and commodities that must be imported to fuel India's economic growth. In order to demonstrate global responsibility and to gain valuable operational experience, the Indian government will likely remain willing to deploy troops regionally and, in time, quite possibly globally, in narrowly-defined, internationally-mandated peacekeeping missions. Unless attacked themselves, Indian policymakers will, for the foreseeable future, be loathe to join any conflict in a war fighting manner, regardless of its legitimacy.

In short, the natural evolution that India will seek as a consequence of a deeper defense relationship with the United States is a greater deterrence against threats to its own territory, with the ability to protect commerce on a regional basis and an occasional foray into peacekeeping. Indian policy makers will also seek a greater U.S. sensitivity and deference to Indian interests in South Asia.

Ultimately, what may most sorely test the evolving U.S.-Indian cooperation on defense matters is whether the two nations are able to more closely align their regional and strategic objectives in the coming decade. The United States is a global superpower with interests, and the capability to project force to advance them, in virtually every corner of the world. India is just now evolving as a global economic power with a growing level of defense capabilities that ultimately will

beg the question as to their purpose. At present, Indian ambitions appear to be set upon regional interests.

While this fundamental misalignment between a United States imbued with a global defense mission and an India that is properly concerned with its neighbors will challenge the deepening of defense cooperation between the two countries, differences in ambition are not necessarily permanent. The U.S.-Indian defense relationship has already been bolstered and buffeted by global developments such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Islamic extremism. Undoubtedly, the relationship will be further affected and quite possibly advanced by the pace of global, nuclear proliferation, the future behavior of a rising China, developments in Pakistan, perhaps the unexpected outbreak of war or collapse of a government in some corner of the world, and many other diplomatic and economic developments near and far.

The challenge to policy makers in both the United States and India will be to develop the defense relationship on a trajectory that does not allow differences in ambition to overtax or undermine practical steps toward deeper cooperation. Both sides should understand the differences in expectations, and respect them, without being bound by them. The relationship should develop without artifice—with neither side imposing limits nor requirements that will impede future opportunities to evolve. In that spirit, the possibilities are by definition limitless.