



## India and the United States: Security Interests

**A strong relationship with the United States has become a key element in the evolving Indian security policy. India's warm welcome to President Bush's statement on missile defense illustrates this, but the text of the Indian government's statement also shows that meshing the two countries' security agendas will take some work. Visits by India's foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, to Washington and by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Armitage to Delhi, show that both countries want to move ahead. Now the two states need to determine where their strategic interests overlap and what kind of cooperation is feasible. Indian Ocean security would be a good place to start.**

**India's Changing Security Perception:** India's top foreign and security priority is its immediate neighborhood, notably Pakistan and China. Correspondingly, India's military strategy has stressed border defense. Since the end of the Cold War, India's policy outside South Asia has begun to move away from its ideologically grounded Nehruvian origins. It now reflects more pragmatic concerns, including especially economic ties. India seeks recognition as a major regional and world power, and its economic security depends on its being regarded as a responsible international actor. China is seen as a long-term security challenge; Russia, as an enduring friend and source of military supplies, but not, at least for the moment, a major mover of world affairs.

**Key Principles for Cooperation:** Indian External Affairs and Defense Minister Jaswant Singh's April visit initiated India's effort to define strategic cooperation with the Bush Administration. India would like to start from four basic principles. First, India sees itself as a powerful individual player in international politics. Second, it seeks a positive and equal relationship with the United States, not a traditional alliance. Third, India wants the United States to take account of its strategic interests not just in South Asia, but along an arc from the Suez Canal to the Strait of Malacca. Fourth, India will continue to buy most of its military hardware from Russia, a relationship the United States no longer regards as threatening. Implicit in this outline is a fifth principle: that India would prefer a multipolar world to a bipolar or unipolar one.

**Nuclear Missile Defense:** President Bush's May 1 proposal to install a nuclear missile defense shield met with stiff opposition not just from China and Russia, but also from

Japan, South Korea and U.S. allies in Western Europe. Showing new sensitivity to U.S. concerns, India was one of only three countries to welcome it. The Indian press charged that India was abandoning its independent foreign policy voice. The text of the statement, however, was carefully drafted not to convey approval of the missile defense shield. Rather, India applauded proposed unilateral cuts in the U.S. nuclear arsenal and the shift away from "Mutual Assured Destruction" as its concept of deterrence. The warm Indian statement was a gesture of friendship, but the text stressed items that fit within India's traditional policy.

Indian views on missile defense cover a wide spectrum. The conventional wisdom is that U.S. missile defense will intensify China's arms buildup and thus encourage an arms race, with India striving to match China, and Pakistan following suit. Some Indian defense thinkers assume that China's military buildup will take place regardless of U.S. plans. Others, including nuclear hawks and some senior government personalities, believe that missile defense is simply the next logical step in armaments technology. This diversity of views gives the Indian government the flexibility to set policy to suit its broad foreign policy goals. Its relations with Russia, however, will make it hard for India to embrace a U.S. policy that appears to disregard Russian sensitivities on the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty.

**High Level Attention from Washington:** In a gesture that underlined the importance it attached to India, the Bush administration sent a Presidential envoy, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, to Delhi to provide an official explanation of its new strategic approach. Armitage went to Tokyo and Seoul as well; a lower-level official went to Beijing, a fact that did not go unnoticed there or in Delhi. Armitage came to India with the single agenda of spelling out the four pillars of his administration's policy: counterproliferation, nonproliferation, missile defense, and reduction in U.S. warheads. U.S. nonproliferation concerns have shifted significantly from previous policy. The United States now stresses preventing exports of sensitive nuclear materials, and explicitly opposes the development of missiles that could reach the United States. This implies reduced emphasis on short- and medium-range missiles.

The upcoming visit to Delhi by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry H. Shelton, will relaunch high-

level military contacts, suspended after the nuclear tests. Shelton's meetings with Jaswant Singh and the three Indian service chiefs will give both sides an opportunity to understand one another's military doctrine and operational concepts. High-level military contact is critical to a serious security dialogue with the U.S., given the way the military is integrated into U.S. civilian policy-making.

**India's Place in U.S. Security Concepts:** These high-level exchanges make clear that the United States wants a strategic dialogue with India. The dialogue itself will shape how the two countries ultimately deal with each other on security issues. The United States expects to maintain indefinitely a strong security presence in East Asia and in the Persian Gulf. It would like this presence to be regarded favorably by India, and it would like India at least to understand and preferably to share its view of how to strengthen the security of the region around the Indian Ocean.

In contrast to the network of alliances that characterized the Cold War, the United States is developing a set of strong relationships without the formal or military character of an alliance. It recognizes that it will have important policy differences with the countries in this network, like India, but expects to isolate the problems and work cooperatively on shared interests. The United States sees no reason why countries at odds with one another cannot both maintain good relations with the United States. The United States looks on the Indo-Pakistani dispute, with its nuclear dimension, as the biggest threat to the region's security, with the dangers of terrorism and of a weak Pakistan close behind. In all these issues, India's policies are crucial to regional peace.

**A New Security Paradigm:** U.S. views on how to achieve a stable nuclear order also seem to have shifted, away from international treaty regimes like the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and toward a looser set of informal, unilateral or bilateral understandings. Strategic thinkers close to the Indian government see this change as an opportunity to develop a new basis for cooperation with the United States. They expect the Bush Administration, which opposes the CTBT, to welcome India's stated willingness not to conduct further nuclear tests, without pressing for CTBT signature. Similarly, agreement between India and the United States on nonexport of nuclear weapons material will be made easier if the issue is removed from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) framework, which India regards as discriminatory. India hopes that the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) might also be rendered obsolete, but this is far less likely to happen.

**Areas of Cooperation:** One especially promising subject for Indo-U.S. cooperation is security in the Indian Ocean. The safety of sea-lanes is of vital long-term importance to both countries. In the past, discussing this issue ran quickly into Indian sensitivities about the presence of major powers in the Indian Ocean. In recent years, however, the Indian Navy has come to regard the United States as an inevitable, some say

even benign presence in the area, and has become the primary advocate within the Indian security establishment of an active dialogue with the United States on the sea-lanes.

Both countries also share an interest in a stable Pakistan, and in increasing nuclear stability in South Asia. They have begun to talk about cooperating on antiterrorism. In practice, this is often a thinly veiled effort to persuade the United States to designate Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism. A more effective terrorism dialogue might focus on resolving the problems in Afghanistan, Kashmir and Sri Lanka, and on the sharing of carefully selected intelligence.

**Technology Transfer:** U.S. restrictions on technology transfer will be, in Indian eyes, an early test of the effectiveness of the new relationship with Washington. Restrictions on the transfer of even the most innocuous nuclear-related items to India have been a sore subject for years. Several technical cooperation agreements (on the Indian Light Combat Aircraft and supercomputers, for example) foundered on internal policy differences in the U.S. government and an opaque and complex bureaucratic process. The 1998 nuclear tests added some new restrictions, in particular the "Entities List," which enumerates organizations involved in the Indian nuclear program to which sensitive items cannot be shipped without a hard-to-obtain waiver. Major change in this area may be difficult for the United States, but with all the excitement over improved U.S.-Indian relations, the disappointment will be severe if nothing changes.

**A Virtuous Cycle with China:** India and the United States both seek a productive relationship with China against a background of considerable suspicion. India sees China as its major long-term security rival, but is keen to normalize relations and does not want a highly nationalistic China on its borders. India's major current concern is China's support for Pakistan, especially its nuclear and missile programs. This may be tempered by the fact that China does not want a potentially nuclear war on its borders. India will be carefully watching U.S. relations with China, and vice versa. In the past, improving U.S.-Indian ties have at times encouraged Chinese efforts to strengthen its relations with both. A well-crafted Indo-U.S. security dialogue and subtlety in dealing with China could encourage this kind of "virtuous cycle."

**The Pakistan Trap:** Ironically, India's hopes for a security vision grounded in an expanding international role and for stronger ties to the United States will remain beyond reach unless it can sustain a serious effort to resolve its problems with Pakistan. Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee's invitation to Pakistan's Chief Executive General Musharraf to come for talks on Kashmir to New Delhi is a good step. It needs to be followed up. With improved U.S.-Indian relations, India may be more receptive to discreet American encouragement for this process.

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