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**The China-India-U.S. Triangle:
Strategic Relations in the Post-Cold War Era**

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Foreword

In the post-Cold War era, relations among countries in Asia have undergone a dramatic change. A new strategic triangle overlays the region. Old rivals China and India have emerged as strong regional powers, as evidenced by impressive economic growth, the development of nuclear arsenals, and demonstrated ambitions for influence in the Pacific and South Asian theaters. While China's role as an economic and geostrategic player is more widely recognized, India is now a regional competitor to be taken seriously. And with the unprecedented U.S. military presence in South Asia due to the war against terrorism, a third player—the world's remaining superpower—is now involved in the historic Sino-Indian rivalry. As long as the United States retains this position and stays engaged in the region, managing this emerging U.S.-China-India strategic triangle will be an important issue for U.S. strategic thinkers.

In this issue of the *NBR Analysis*, Dr. John Garver, professor of international relations at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at the Georgia Institute of Technology, traces the origins and possible future of the new triangle. According to Dr. Garver, while concerns about China have frequently driven relations among the three countries in the last decade, Beijing understood the rules of the triangular game long before Washington or New Delhi. Chinese leaders learned early that playing the United States against India, particularly on issues of nuclear armament and nonproliferation, was a means to gain favor with Washington, while diminishing New Delhi's role in international politics. As U.S. leaders realized that relations with the Northeast Asian giant had consequences for relations with the South Asian giant—and vice versa—they grew more sensitive to the triangular dynamic.

America's strategic reengagement with Pakistan, key role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and military presence for the first time in Central Asia significantly increase its ability to benefit or injure the interests of India and China vis-à-vis one another. As both China and India seek geostrategic advantage in Southeast and South Asia, U.S. support for democratic India (or for India's efforts to subordinate Pakistan) will fan Chinese nationalism and fears of containment. Conversely, U.S. acquiescence to greater Chinese presence in India's perceived realm of influence will alarm leaders in New Delhi.

According to Dr. Garver, there are few, if any, short- to medium-term catalysts that would convince China and India to align against the United States, especially as both countries see cooperation with Washington as vital to economic growth. Dr. Garver asserts that Beijing may periodically pursue Sino-Indian cooperation on a given issue, but only because it will “cost India much more than China in terms of U.S. goodwill.” The deep geopolitical rivalry between India and China, combined with the expanded influence of the United States, makes U.S. support of one Asian rival against the other an extremely important strategic factor. Dr. Garver concludes that, unless Beijing softens its generally abrasive policies of the 1990s, the coming years will witness closer relations between the United States and India, among China’s other neighbors.

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The Post-Cold War China-India-U.S. Triangle

John W. Garver

A new strategic triangle among the United States, China, and India emerged from the flux in international relations created by the end of the Cold War. The new triangle had taken clear form by the time of the South Asian nuclear tests of 1998, and is being consciously and enthusiastically “played” by strategists in all three capitals. Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi more frequently perceive each of their national interests as being adversely affected by an alignment of the other two against it, and thus a minuet of strategic triangular relations has resulted. Extant and emerging issues of concern to the strategic triangle are the India-China border dispute, establishing nuclear deterrents, the war on terrorism, relations with Pakistan, and political and economic influence in the South Asia-Indian Ocean region. The deep geopolitical rivalry between India and China, combined with the expanded influence of the United States, makes U.S. support of one Asian rival against the other an extremely important strategic factor. At the same time, there are leaders in both China and India who resent the U.S. global position and find attractive, if impractical, the possibility of identifying issues on which they might cooperate against the United States. Despite its potential importance, the origins, dynamics, and implications of this strategic triangle are not well understood and have already led to controversies over U.S. policy. This article examines the dynamics of the rapidly developing Sino-Indian-U.S. triangle and traces the process by which all three actors have learned the rules of the new strategic relations.

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The Emergence of the Post-Cold War Sino-Indian-U.S. Triangle

A distinctive pattern of triangular interaction has emerged in relations among China, India, and the United States during the post-Cold War period. This pattern became increasingly distinct as the 1990s progressed, and by 2001 was quite strong. India and the United States had to learn the rules of the new game, while China seems to have understood those rules all along. This article traces the origin, evolution, and operation of the new pattern of triangular relations between India, China, and the United States. While this paper does not demonstrate that issues involving China were the sole or even the most important factors driving the new India-U.S. relation that emerged in the 2000s, it does suggest that China was one significant factor in the emergence of the new Indo-U.S. relationship.

The crux of the new triangle is that each actor fears alignment of the other two against itself. This fear exists for all three actors but is especially strong for the two weaker state actors, China and India. China and India have each taken action to counter a perceived link-up of the other with the United States. When those actions were unsuccessful, the resulting apprehension added new strain to relations of the “out” power with the United States. Reduction of interstate interactions to a triangle rather than another multi-sided polygon arbitrarily limits the number of national actors considered. This is justified if the simplified model of three-sided interaction is frequent enough and strong enough to make isolated analysis useful, and if it provides significant insight into the pattern of interaction among the three actors isolated for analysis. The following analysis will demonstrate that this has been the case with post-Cold War China-India-U.S. relations.

The post-Cold War Chinese-Indian-U.S. triangular relationship differs in several ways from the Sino-Soviet-U.S. triangle of the Cold War era. First of all, the new triangle is *weak* in the sense that the dominant issues in each dyad of the relationship do not relate to the third power. The dominant issues in India-China relations are the unresolved border issue and China’s military links with Pakistan—issues that touch only indirectly on the United States. Similarly, the dominant issues in Sino-U.S. relations—trade, human rights, missile defense, Taiwan—have little to do with India. India-U.S. relations are likewise dominated by issues not closely related to China—economic cooperation, and countering terrorism. It was also the case that until mid-1998 U.S. policy toward China and India proceeded on largely separate tracks, with little thought given to how U.S. links with one affected U.S. ties with the other. Yet this very de-linkage caused a major misstep in U.S. policy in mid-1998 when Washington found itself in a distinct but unintended alignment with China against India.

The new triangle is also *asymmetrical* in two senses. First, Indian and Chinese concerns about the alignment of the other with the United States are far greater than U.S. concerns about a possible India-China alignment. This derives, of course, from the far greater power of the United States. Yet within the United States, one also detects apprehension regarding a possible China-India bloc.

The *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (QDR), issued by the U.S. Department of Defense on September 30, 2001, for example, listed among U.S. “enduring national interests,” the need to “preclud[e] hostile domination of critical areas,” including “the East Asian littoral,” a region defined as “stretching from south of Japan through Australia and into the Bay of Bengal.” In that region, “maintaining a stable balance” would be “particularly challenging,” according to the report, because “the possibility exists that a military competitor with a formidable resource base will emerge in the region.”¹ These carefully elliptical formulations referred to an increasingly powerful China that might, someday, dominate the “East Asian littoral.”

Earlier authoritative statements of U.S. Asian strategy contained similar emphases. A 1990 statement, formulated during the first Bush administration, stressed the U.S. interest in “maintaining the balance of power to prevent the rise of any regional hegemony.”² A 1995 statement, formulated during President Bill Clinton’s first term, also put on record the U.S. interest in preventing “the rise of any hegemonic power or coalition” as among “America’s permanent interests in the security of the Asia-Pacific region.”³

Although the possibility of a China-India bloc was not explicitly mentioned in any of these statements of U.S. strategy, it is clear that the formation of such a bloc would clearly be antithetical to “maintaining a stable balance” in the East Asian littoral.⁴ If fears of a partnership of the other two actors existed for the United States, those fears were much greater for China and India whose power was far less than America’s. India’s fears centered on U.S. support for a growing Chinese role in South Asia. China’s fears centered on the possibility of Indian participation in U.S.-inspired containment of China.

¹ United States Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001 <www.dod.gov/pubs/qdr2001.pdf>.

² Presidential Report to Congress prepared by the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, East Asia and Pacific Region, *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to Congress, Looking Toward the 21st Century*, April 1990, p. 5.

³ Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, East Asia and Pacific Region, *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*, February 1995, p. 5.

⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*.

The second sense in which the new triangle is asymmetrical is that U.S. and Chinese interests in their *mutual relationship* far outweigh the interests of each vis-à-vis India. For a century, the United States has been deeply engaged politically, militarily, and economically in East Asia. Yet U.S. political involvement in South Asia has been far shallower. The same holds true economically. In 1999 trade between India and the United States was only 13.3 percent of U.S. trade with China. This asymmetry also exists for China. Its economic links with the United States are absolutely vital to the success of its drive for development, but its economic links with South Asia are secondary. While China has major interests in South Asia, they pale in comparison to China's interests around the Pacific, except for those related to China's control over Tibet.

Origin of the New Triangular Configuration

Several factors undermined long-standing patterns of great power interaction in South Asia and contributed to the emergence of the new triangular relationship in the 1990s. These were:

- collapse of the Soviet Union
- Indian rethinking of its traditional policies of non-alignment and economic autarky
- U.S. disengagement from Pakistan
- explosive growth of Chinese power
- deterioration of Sino-U.S. relations

In many ways the most important factor was the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the subsequent ebb of Russian capabilities in South Asia. The Soviet Union had long been India's major backer among the extra-regional powers. Although Gorbachev's drive to improve relations with China in the late 1980s sapped much of the credibility of the 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty, which guaranteed Moscow's protection of India, the Soviet Union continued until its demise to be India's major great power backer.⁵ The Russian Federation (the internationally recognized successor state to the Soviet Union after 1991) had far less interest and capability in South Asia. Even after the break up of the Soviet Union, Russia's economic situation continued to unravel. Russia's gross domestic product declined by 43.4 percent between 1992 and 2000.⁶ Moreover, Russian naval power atrophied. Whereas

⁵ I discuss the redefinition of the 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty by Gorbachev in "The Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations," *The China Quarterly*, no. 125 (March 1991), pp. 55–85.

⁶ World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000, CD-ROM.

Soviet warships had played a significant role in the rivalries of the Indian Ocean, those of the Russian Federation were notably absent during the 1990s.

Moreover, unlike the Soviet Union, which abutted Afghanistan, Russia was geographically remote from South Asia. Russian attention also focused far more on domestic affairs. When Russian leaders turned to foreign affairs, their focus tended to be closer to home—on the “near abroad” of the newly sovereign Central Asia republics. In one foreign policy arena, Russian arms sales to India continued, while similar sales to China increased. These Russian arms sales arguably became a significant factor affecting the Sino-Indian military balance. But this alone did not make Russia a major actor on the South Asian stage, especially since Moscow did not attempt to exploit its arms supply relations with both India and China for any political ends. The exit of Russia from the cockpit of South Asian international politics may well only be temporary, but, during the decade after the end of Cold War, that void was quite distinct. Russia’s absence left India without strong backing among the major powers. With Moscow out of the game, it became necessary for India to bid higher for U.S. support.

The end of the Cold War also precipitated a process of rethinking within India about that country’s traditional policy of nonalignment. India’s nonalignment policy had been defined in terms of the east-west conflict of the Cold War. With that cleavage passé, what relevance did nonalignment have? The Indian debate over nonalignment was extremely complex, but influential voices gradually began to argue that old moralistic and idealistic policies of nonalignment had prevented India from maneuvering effectively in pursuit of its own national interests. A more coldly calculated, realistic pursuit of Indian national interests was required, these critics argued.⁷ These new realistic perspectives eroded traditional Indian taboos against military and political cooperation with the United States.

The end of the Cold War eroded Indian taboos against military and political cooperation with the United States.

The process of rethinking traditional verities about nonalignment was linked to a similar process of questioning long-standing, economic preferences for autarky and socialism. During the 1991 Gulf War, India experienced a collapse of remittances from Indian nationals

⁷ One of the most forceful expositions of the realist case was by Jaswant Singh who became one of the chief architects of the deliberately triangular Indian policies, which began in 1998 and are analyzed below. See Jaswant Singh, *Defending India*, London and New Delhi: Macmillan, 1999. Regarding the debate within India, see Stephen P. Cohen, *India, Emerging Power*, Washington, DC: Brookings, 2001, pp. 36–65.

working in the Persian Gulf area. Thus India discovered the wealth-generating potential of participation in the global economy, which led to a gradual but steady opening of the Indian economy. What began out of dire necessity, soon acquired a logic and momentum of its own. As Indian leaders sought to deepen the country's involvement in the global economy during the 1990s, improved relations with the United States were useful. India-U.S. trade increased by 264 percent in the decade between 1990 and 2000.⁸

The termination of the U.S.-Pakistan strategic partnership in 1990 over Pakistan's nuclear weapons program eliminated a major and long-standing obstacle to Indian-U.S. strategic cooperation. Throughout the 1980s, Washington and Islamabad had sparred over Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. In that process the United States declared that the assembly of various components into a usable bomb was an unacceptable threshold, which, if crossed, would lead to the suspension of U.S. military assistance to Pakistan. That threshold was crossed in early 1990, and later that year Washington followed through on its threat. The background for this action was the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan the previous year—a development that made cooperation with Pakistan less vital to Washington and fear of abandonment by the United States a greater concern in Islamabad. Most important for the purposes of this essay, however, is the fact that the collapse of the U.S.-Pakistan link increased Indian willingness to expand security ties with the United States. In the zero-sum logic of the India-Pakistan dyad, the United States was no longer the friend of India's enemy.

China's rapidly growing economic lead over India also created apprehension in India and a desire to find ways of dealing with that problem. In 1980, India's GNP was 133 percent the size of China's. By 1996 the two countries had traded places; India's economy had fallen to only 68 percent of China's—a dramatic change of relative position.⁹ In terms of net inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), India's intake of \$72 million dollars in 1982 was only 16.7 percent of China's intake in that year.¹⁰ By 1995, however, China's lead was even greater: India's FDI for that year was only 6 percent of China's. For the entire period between 1982

⁸ International Monetary Fund, *Direction of Trade Yearbooks*, Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 1992 and 2001.

⁹ World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, 2000, CD-ROM.

¹⁰ The World Bank did not list FDI for China until 1982; before that it was virtually zero. The huge leap in China's FDI in 1982 was partly due to new statistical reporting procedures implemented by China in that year. Still, the broader point stands: FDI inflow into China vastly exceeded the inflow into India. The lion's share of FDI coming into China in the early 1980s came from Hong Kong, which was in the process of shifting most of its labor intensive manufacturing industry to southern China.

and 1999, India's total FDI was, according to World Bank statistics, 5.4 percent of China's. In terms of foreign reserves (a good measure of a state's ability to act internationally), India's reserves of \$8.32 billion were 187 percent of China's in 1978. By 1995, India's comparative reserves had fallen to 28 percent of China's.

China's growing national capabilities were reflected in steadily improving and long-range military capabilities. Ever more modern Chinese warships increasingly frequented Indian Ocean ports: PLA warships visited Karachi in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Colombo in Sri Lanka in 1985–86; Karachi, Mumbai in India, and Chittagong in 1993; Lumut in Malaysia in 1999; Kelang in Malaysia, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, and Capetown in South Africa in 2000; and Karachi, Mumbai, and Sittwe in Burma in 2001. Chinese economic cooperation with countries flanking India's territory—Burma, Bangladesh, Pakistan—also expanded in tandem with the size and marketization of China's economy. Watching the growth of Chinese links with neighboring countries, Indian realists became increasingly apprehensive of China's rise and began to think about ways of countering China's growing strength and position.

A final trend that gave rise to the new triangle was the intensification of U.S.-Chinese tension during the 1990s. Conflicts over human rights, trade, proliferation, and Taiwan gradually merged with philosophical differences over the nature of sovereignty, the role of the United Nations, and the role of military force in international affairs. The common interests that once arose from joint opposition to the Soviet Union no longer balanced differences in other areas. Leaders in both Washington and Beijing became increasingly apprehensive about the growing power of the other side. Leaders in both countries also began to ponder how India would fit into the new equation of Sino-U.S. rivalry.

The Nehruvian and Chinese Preference for Constructing a New World Order

The desirable goal of Sino-Indian relations, both from the standpoint of Indian Nehruvianism and of the Chinese foreign-policy line throughout the 1980s and 1990s, was close cooperation between these two Asian giants in the struggle to construct a new political and economic world order. According to this perspective, the established world order was set up by and primarily benefited the developed countries of the West. The plan posited that to right the

historic wrongs inflicted on the non-western, non-white world as a result of western domination, India and China should cooperate to create a new international order in greater comport with the interests and values of the developing countries.¹¹

There was a huge chasm, of course, between the reality of Indian-Chinese rivalry and this posited outcome. Nonetheless, the Indian Congress Party governments of the late 1980s and early 1990s pursued Sino-Indian rapprochement in the hopes of achieving a Sino-Indian partnership. In his speech at Qinghua University in Beijing during his path-breaking visit to China in December 1988, for example, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi recalled “the warmth of our friendship and a shared sense of purpose which marked our joint endeavors” in the 1950s. India and China had then represented “the voice of resurgent Asia, worked toward ending colonialism everywhere, [and] taking the world from under the shadow of the past into the sunlight of the new era.” Gandhi called for a “new beginning” in which “the spirit of the mid-fifties is rekindled.”¹² Gandhi continued:

There has been significant parallelism in the views expressed by India and China on a wide range of issues relating to world security, the international political order, the new international economic order, global concerns as regards the environment and space. As developing countries, India and China share common concerns about the functioning of the international economic order” and should cooperate to achieve a restructuring of that order.¹³

When Prime Minister Narasimha Rao spoke at Beijing University during his September 1993 visit to China, he stressed the same themes. Most of the smaller parties in coalition governments that presided over the interregnum between Rao’s resignation in 1995 and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) takeover in March 1998 shared these basic Nehruvian perspectives. Although it was not explicitly stated in Indian or Chinese writings that advocated for such Sino-Indian partnership, if such a partnership had materialized it would almost certainly have pitted those two countries against the United States over the question of a fundamental transformation of the existing global political-economic order.

¹¹ Regarding Nehru’s views in this regard see Giri Deshingkar, “The Nehru Years Revisited,” in Tan Chong, ed., *Across the Himalayan Gap: An Indian Quest for Understanding China*, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts, 1998, pp. 403–13. Various comments by Nehru about India-China cooperation along these lines are presented on pages 45–51 of Tan’s book.

¹² Gandhi’s and Rao’s speeches are in Tan, *Across the Himalayan Gap*, pp. 5–11 and 14–17.

¹³ Ibid.

During the 1990s the emerging realist critique of Nehruvianism in India faulted the notion that Indian foreign policy should strive primarily for the achievement of a just world order. Foreign policy ought to focus on “a relentless pursuit of one’s own national interests.”¹⁴ Regarding China, realist critics said that the application of this idealistic, moralistic doctrine had led to disastrous mistakes. India should now have a clear concept of what its security interests required vis-à-vis China, and mobilize all possible pressure on Beijing to secure its acceptance of those Indian requirements. In practice (as will be shown below), this would mean Indian courtship of Washington as a way of pressing Beijing on a series of issues, starting with China’s assistance to Pakistan’s missile development efforts. The practitioners of Indian realism, who took office with the BJP’s victory in March 1998, were not entirely adverse to rhetoric about Sino-Indian cooperation on behalf of the third world, but they treated this as a condition that could only be realized once Beijing began to respect India’s core security interests. In the meantime, India would expand its security cooperation with the United States.

There was far greater stability in Chinese preferences. Throughout the process of Sino-Indian rapprochement that began in 1988, Beijing called upon New Delhi to undertake close, friendly cooperation with China in constructing a new international political-economic order. Once again the central, if implicit, idea was that the established international order primarily benefited the developed countries and that the two largest developing countries, India and China, should work together to create a new order. Beijing’s embrace of this approach dates back to Zhou Enlai’s 1950s diplomacy toward India.¹⁵ The stratagem was relaunched in Chinese diplomatic practice by Deng Xiaoping during his talks with Rajiv Gandhi in Beijing in 1988. During a 90-minute discussion with Gandhi, Deng stressed the prospects for Sino-Indian cooperation on such issues as lessening reliance on military blocs, reducing global economic disparities, and ending the “fallacious philosophy” of deterrence.¹⁶ The joint communiqué signed at the end of Gandhi’s visit indicated that the two sides agreed that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexist-

In 1988 Beijing called upon New Delhi to cooperate in the construction of an anti-Western political-economic order.

¹⁴ Singh, *Defending India*, pp. 34–35.

¹⁵ See Bei Mouyi, “Song 50 niandai de Zhong Yin guanxi kan Zhou Enlai zongli dui jianli zhanhou guoji zhengzhi xin zhixu de lishixing gongxin” (Viewing premier Zhou Enlai’s historic contributions to the establishment of a postwar new international political order from the standpoint of Sino-Indian relations in the 1950s), *Waijiao xueyuan xuebao* (Diplomatic college journal), vol. 1, no. 15 (1990), pp. 6–12.

¹⁶ *Asian Recorder* (New Delhi), no. 20431 (February 12–18, 1989).

ence “constitute the basic guidelines for establishment of a new international political order and the new international economic order.”¹⁷ Over the next several years the two sides fleshed out the meaning of that new international political-economic order. In the Sino-Indian joint communiqué signed at the end of Premier Li Peng’s important visit to India in December 1991 (reciprocating Gandhi’s 1988 visit), six full paragraphs were devoted to areas where joint efforts to build the new international order were appropriate.¹⁸

When Beijing introduced the strategy of Sino-Indian cooperation in the late 1980s, it aimed to create a positive atmosphere that would raise bilateral trade and resolve or at least reduce the danger of a clash over the boundary issue. Chinese leaders were *not* then concerned with possible Indian alignment with the United States. If anything, they were concerned with Indian alignment with the Soviet Union. As U.S.-Chinese relations deteriorated in the 1990s, however, the old policy acquired new objectives—even while the old objectives did not entirely disappear. Beijing became increasingly concerned with thwarting suspected secret U.S. strategies of containing China or splitting Tibet from China. Beijing became increasingly concerned with countering what it called U.S. unipolarity, power politics, and bullying. In this new post-Cold War context the old solicitation of India continued with a new purpose. The stratagem of drawing India into anti-western cooperation in construction of a new world order offered additional advantages. It became a way of preventing India from being drawn into the ring of U.S.-engineered containment that Beijing suspected Washington of trying to set up around China.

As Sino-Indian relations improved in the 1990s, examples of Chinese invitations to India to cooperate in establishing a new international order often decorated high-level Chinese-Indian interactions. For example, during President Jiang Zemin’s four-day state visit to India in November 1996 (the first time a Chinese head of state visited India), a major theme of his comments was the good prospects for Sino-Indian cooperation. Jiang produced for the visit a “16 character formula”: “Enhance [Sino-Indian] understanding, deepen friendship, build trust and promote cooperation in order to establish a constructive cooperative partnership.”¹⁹ In his

¹⁷ Sino-Indian Joint Press Communique, *Xinhua*, December 23, 1988, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report China* (hereafter FBIS-CHI), December 23, 1988, pp. 11–12. The Five Principles are: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual noninterference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and coexistence. Regarding the formulation of these principles see John Rowland, *A History of Sino-Indian Relations, Hostile Coexistence*, Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand Co., 1967. pp. 85–86.

¹⁸ Sino-Indian Joint Press Communique, *Xinhua*, December 16, 1991, in FBIS-CHI, December 16, 1991, pp. 20–22.

¹⁹ He Chang, “Jiang Zemin visits India to seep opportunities to establish Sino-Indian cooperative partnership,” *Zhongguo tongxun she*, November 29, 1996, FBIS-CHI-96-232.

talk with Indian President Shankar D. Sharma, Jiang maintained that “2,000 years” of peaceful exchanges, plus a history of mutual sympathy and support between the two peoples in common struggles against imperialism and colonialism, had created a solid foundation for relations. “China is willing to work with India to forge a future-oriented friendship and constructive partnership,” Jiang said.²⁰ Although Sino-Indian comity deteriorated after India’s 1998 nuclear tests, by mid-2000, Chinese solicitations to Indian-Chinese cooperation again became frequent. In July 2000, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan gave written answers in an interview by a reporter from the Indian paper *The Hindu*. Early in his responses, Tang made this pitch:

As the two biggest developing countries in the world, China and India share common interests and similar views on many major international and regional issues. Both countries uphold the ways of development in conformity with their own national conditions. They oppose hegemonism, power politics and “neo-interventionism.” They stand for promoting [the] world multipolarity process, while opposing [a] unipolar world, and are committed to the establishment of a just and equitable international political and economic order. Facing the complicated and changeable international situation today, it is not only possible but also necessary for China and India to strengthen coordination and cooperation in safeguarding the legal rights and interests of the developing countries and promoting world peace and stability.²¹

A clear, if unstated, implication of Indian acceptance of Beijing’s proposal for broad Sino-Indian cooperation is that India would remain distant from the United States and the western alliance. By cooperating with China in the struggle against the vested interests of the rich, western nations, India would work with China against the United States and its developed-country allies to construct a new international order. If such a China-India united front had been realized, it would have encountered a number of major difficulties. Be that as it may, pursuit of this ideal had the advantage for Beijing of inclining New Delhi toward China and away from alignment with Washington.

This is not to say that Beijing did not genuinely perceive advantages in a multipolar political order and a shift of economic advantages from rich to less-rich countries. There are no grounds for concluding that Chinese propositions for a new global order were less than heartfelt, but the fact that Chinese leaders deemed these goals desirous in and of themselves does not entirely explain the matter. Comments by Chinese leaders—such as those by Jiang Zemin

²⁰ “Jiang notes India’s contributions to human civilization,” *Xinhua*, November 28, 1996, in FBIS-CHI-96-231.

²¹ “Chinese foreign minister reviews Sino-Indian relations,” interview by C. Raja Mohan, *The Hindu*, July 22, 2000, in FBIS-CHI-2000-0722.

and Tang Jiaxuan quoted earlier—clearly indicate the belief that by cooperating on such issues, Sino-Indian relations could be moved in a positive direction. That is, not only were the goals related to a new international order desirable on their own, but cooperation between India and China in pursuit of those goals was also judged as likely to have a beneficial effect on relations between the two countries.

India and the Sino-American “Strategic Partnership”

The first clear instances of the new post-Cold War triangularity occurred in 1995 and 1996, when, during negotiations on the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Extension and Review Conference and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the United States and China aligned against India over nuclear weapons issues. This pattern of U.S.-Chinese alignment against India was repeated in the aftermath of India’s nuclear tests in 1998. This episode of Sino-American alignment against India constituted a learning experience for both New Delhi and Washington. Regarding Washington, it seems that the United States aligned with China against India largely because it did *not* think in terms of a triangular relationship. Instead, Washington was dealing independently with India and China in pursuit of nonproliferation goals. India’s strongly negative response to the experience of confronting a Sino-U.S. alignment, however, compelled Washington to rethink the matter—that is, to begin thinking in triangular terms. The result was a policy far more sensitive to Indian concerns of U.S. alignment with China. For New Delhi, the stark reality of coming up against a Sino-U.S. alignment brought home the risks of diplomatic isolation and the crucial importance of diplomatic maneuver to uncouple China and the United States.

U.S.-Chinese relations were especially complex in 1995–96. On the one hand, following Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui’s June 1995 visit to the United States, Beijing and Washington moved into what became a militarized confrontation in the Taiwan Strait in early 1996—the first Sino-U.S. military confrontation in three decades—and the prospect of war over Taiwan suddenly became far more tangible. On the other hand, however, Beijing and Washington simultaneously intensified their cooperation in the area of nuclear nonproliferation. Cooperation in this area was seized upon by leaders of both countries who hoped to switch U.S.-Chinese relations away from increasing confrontation toward what the two governments began calling a “strategic partnership.”²²

²² The Clinton administration stressed that the “strategic partnership” was an objective to be built through the efforts of both sides, not a description of the extant U.S.-Chinese relations.

One aspect of that growing Sino-U.S. cooperation was directed against India, but U.S.-Chinese cooperation was only one element of the international pressure that confronted New Delhi in 1995–96 over the NPT and CTBT. Nevertheless, since the most significant perceived nuclear threat to India came from China or its partner Pakistan and since the United States wielded preeminent influence in the international community, the conjuncture of China and the United States intensified the pressure on India. In particular, during the NPT Review and Extension Conference of 1995, India came under U.S. and Chinese pressure to accept institutionalized status as a non-nuclear weapon state under the NPT. India, which had long objected to the putative discriminatory nature of the NPT and had refused to sign the treaty, did not attend the conference.

Prior to the opening of the NPT conference, Beijing, in response to U.S. prompting, issued a National Statement on Security Assurances that addressed the security concerns of non-nuclear states not participating in the NPT.²³ India was the most important country in this category. The wording of China’s statement was constructed to extend guarantees to participants *in the NPT regime*. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council then jointly offered a degree of reassurance to non-nuclear weapons states, contingent, once again, on their entry into the NPT regime. Security Council Resolution 984, which was passed in April 1995, provided that in the event of use or threatened use of nuclear weapons “against non-nuclear weapon States *who are party to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, [the Security Council] and above all its nuclear weapons states permanent members, will act immediately in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations [emphasis added].”²⁴ Limiting these security assurances to participants of the NPT regime was intended to pressure non-nuclear weapons states outside the NPT to accede to the treaty.

Resolution 984 raised the specter that China and the United States might condone the other’s use of nuclear weapons against India.

India’s representative to the United Nations objected strongly to Resolution 984. “In my delegation’s view,” he said, “it is the clear responsibility of the nuclear weapons states that are also permanent members of the [Security] Council to go to the assistance of any state that is threatened with or is the victim of nuclear attack, and not merely those that might be signatories

²³ The statement was published in *Beijing Review*, April 24–30, 1996, p. 20.

²⁴ *UN Security Council Resolution 984* <www.un.org>.

to the NPT.”²⁵ Resolution 984 might, the Indian representative said, “give a wrong message” to nuclear weapons states recognized by the NPT. “One would hope that by offering a draft resolution of this kind,” India’s representative said, “the nuclear weapons states are not telling the non-members of the NPT that they, the nuclear weapons states, are free to use nuclear weapons against them, because this would have implications which are too frightening to contemplate.” In other words, the resolution raised the specter that China and the United States might condone the other’s use of nuclear weapons against India.

Although New Delhi did not attend the NPT review conference, India did participate actively in the CTBT negotiations. According to the head of the Indian team at those negotiations, Ambassador Arundhati Ghose, the strong international pressure on India that was manifest at the NPT conference had a deep impact on India.²⁶ Confronted by mounting international pressure to formally and permanently forgo the nuclear weapons option, the Indian government, then still headed by Narasimha Rao, decided to test a nuclear weapon to create a nuclear *fait accompli*. Foreign governments became aware of this plan and heavy international pressure led to cancellation of the test.²⁷

Following the NPT conference, U.S. attention focused more intently on the CTBT negotiations. In February 1996 the Clinton administration concluded a month-long review of its China policy by deciding to expand high-level contacts with China in an effort to create a new “strategic dialogue.”²⁸ China responded to U.S. prompting in June, when it dramatically shifted policy at the CTBT talks by dropping the demand that it be allowed to conduct nuclear explosions for “peaceful purposes.” Beijing also indicated it would suspend all further nuclear tests by September 1996, when the CTBT was scheduled to take effect.²⁹ Further U.S.-Chinese talks during the summer of 1996 made U.S. officials optimistic that future cooperation in such areas as non-proliferation would help set a more positive, less conflict-ridden tone for U.S.-Chinese relations.³⁰

Having shifted course toward cooperation with the United States on the CTBT, Beijing became an enthusiastic proponent of stringent “entry into force” provisions designed to pres-

²⁵ United Nations Security Council, 50th Session, 3514th meeting, April 11, 1995, S/PV.3514.

²⁶ Arundhati Ghose, “Negotiating the CTBT: India’s Security Concerns and Nuclear Disarmament,” *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 51, no. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 239–61.

²⁷ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Strategic Survey, 1996–97*, London: IISS, 1997, pp. 202–03.

²⁸ Jeffrey Smith, “U.S. to Seek Closer Ties With China,” *Washington Post*, February 21, 1996, A27.

²⁹ Barbara Crossette, “In Concession, China is Ready to Ban A-tests,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1996, A1, A4.

³⁰ Keith Richburg, “U.S. China Optimistic After Talks in Beijing,” *Washington Post*, July 11, 1996, A21.

sure India into joining the emerging CTBT. As a draft of the CTBT began to take shape, India declared it would not sign the document as it then stood. The United States was initially not very concerned about India's response, as it felt that participation by the five declared nuclear weapon states was a sufficient accomplishment of the CTBT. After India's announcement, however, China, along with Russia, emerged as a vigorous proponent of strong provisions to pressure India into accession to the treaty, according to Ambassador Ghose.³¹

Confronted with strong international pressure, including U.S.-Chinese alignment, India attempted to prevent action on the CTBT by refusing to assent. Since the UN Conference on Disarmament (where the CTBT talks took place) functioned by consensus, India hoped that its non-consent would prevent approval of the completed CTBT text. China and the United States circumvented Indian obstruction by conveying the finalized CTBT to the General Assembly as a nationally- and jointly-sponsored proposal. Indian objections to this procedure were ignored, and virtually the entire international community endorsed the treaty. On September 11, 1996, the General Assembly approved the CTBT by a vote of 158 to 3. Only India, Bhutan, and Libya voted against it.

India's representative put his country's objections on record, saying that India was "deeply concerned" by the circumvention of the normal procedures of the Conference on Disarmament. A "very small group of countries" had pushed through the objectionable provisions in an attempt to "enforce obligations on India without its consent."³² The CTBT would "only further sustain the present nuclear hegemony" of the current Permanent Five. In words that foreshadowed those of Atal Behari Vajpayee's letter to Clinton following India's nuclear tests two years later, India's UN representative pleaded for international understanding of India's security situation vis-à-vis nuclear China and Pakistan:

Our security environment has obliged us to maintain the nuclear option. We have exercised unparalleled restraint with respect to our nuclear option. Countries around us continue their weapons programs either openly or in a clandestine manner. In such an environment, we cannot permit our option to be constrained or eroded in any manner as long as nuclear weapons states remain unwilling to accept the obligation to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.³³

In plain speech, New Delhi's representative was saying that India hoped the United States and other countries would be understanding of India's need to keep the nuclear option

³¹ Ghose, "Negotiating the CTBT," *Journal of International Affairs*.

³² United Nations General Assembly, 50th Session, 123rd Plenary Meeting, Sept. 9, 1996, A/50/PV.123.

³³ *Ibid.*

open in the face of linked Chinese and Pakistani nuclear threats. New Delhi's preference was for the United States to support India against China, although Indian diplomacy toward that end was ineffectual in 1996.

As the "strategic partnership" between Beijing and Washington moved forward after the CTBT negotiations, nonproliferation cooperation directed against India remained an important component. The long-delayed visit by President Jiang to the United States in October 1997 and President Clinton's reciprocal visit to China in June 1998 were products of the joint effort to establish "strategic partnership." At the October 1997 summit, Beijing and Washington formally agreed to "build toward a constructive strategic partnership" on the basis of "a long-term perspective." According to the joint presidential statement issued at the summit, the two countries had "great potential for cooperation in maintaining global and regional peace and stability" and for "preventing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." South Asia was one of several specified areas where the two powers could cooperate to "maintain peace and stability."³⁴

In Indian eyes, the October 1997 Sino-American joint statement suggested that, under the wing of the United States, China would play a larger security role in South Asia. It was another small element in the emerging structure of China-U.S. anti-India alignment. Moreover, during occasional "strategic dialogues" between Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1997-98, the Chinese side often turned the subject to India and South Asia.³⁵ The need for an Indian diplomatic maneuver to uncouple this emerging alignment was mounting.

New Delhi's Solicitation of U.S. Understanding for Nuclearization and Beijing's Riposte

The second clear case of U.S.-Chinese-Indian triangularity came in 1998, when India bid for strategic "understanding" from the United States regarding Chinese threats to India. China responded with strenuous efforts to abort that understanding.

³⁴ White House, "Joint U.S.-China Statement," October 29, 1997 <www.state.gov/www/regions/eap/971029_usc_jtstmt.html>.

³⁵ Susan Shirk, "Chinese Perceptions of India: Brief Comments," in Carolyn W. Pumphrey, ed., *The Rise of China in Asia: Security Implications*, Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002, p. 107.

Following the March 1998 victory of the BJP, a new Indian foreign policy team came to office, headed by Jaswant Singh, then deputy head of the planning commission and chief Indian interlocutor with the United States following the May 1998 nuclear tests, and Brajesh Mishra, principle secretary to Prime Minister Vajpayee and chargé d'affaires at the Indian mission in Beijing from 1969 to 1972. It soon became apparent that India's new team planned to accumulate pressure points on China in order to move Beijing toward greater sensitivity to India's security concerns in South Asia. Indian nuclearization and a new security-oriented thrust to India's "Look East" policy were important elements of India's new set of pressures. The "Look East" policy was an effort to expand India's cooperative links with the countries of East and Southeast Asia. Launched in 1995 under Narasimha Rao, it initially had a largely economic complexion. The leadership of Vajpayee, Singh, and Mishra gave a security cast to the policy, and Indian defense and security links with the countries of those regions began to proliferate after 1998.³⁶ The instrument of Indian leverage most relevant to purposes of this article was, however, a distinct Indian tilt toward strategic partnership with the United States.

Beijing's initial response to India's first round of nuclear tests was relatively subdued. This response shifted radically after the *New York Times* published a May 13 letter from Vajpayee to President Clinton and other world leaders explaining the rationale for the tests.³⁷ Vajpayee's letter dealt first and foremost with the threat from China. In fact, 68 words targeted China, compared to 48 addressing the Pakistani threat to India. The letter did not explicitly name China, but the implications were clear. Vajpayee pleaded for U.S. support: "We hope that you will show understanding of our concern for India's security." In short, Vajpayee's letter to Clinton sought U.S. understanding of Indian nuclearization by stressing the Chinese threat to India and China's role in assisting Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs.

The anti-China justification of India's nuclearization in May 1998 roused Beijing's ire and concern. Shortly after India's tests, China's prominent India specialist, Ye Zhengjia, conducted an extensive survey of the "experiences and lessons" of Sino-Indian relations, but the findings did not mention either nonproliferation or possible dangers to China posed by India's possession of nuclear weapons. Instead, the report stressed the "preposterous" nature of the various "anti-China" statements by Indian leaders justifying the tests. Indian leaders "clearly understood," Ye said, that it was "inconceivable" that China's nuclear weapons might be used "against a friendly good neighbor like the Indian people" and that "Sino-Pakistan cooperation did not threaten India." But "in order to reduce western sanctions against India, it played 'the China

³⁶ I discuss the "Look East" policy in "The Security Dilemma in Sino-Indian Relations," *India Review*, vol. 1, no. 4 (October 2002), pp. 1-38.

³⁷ "Indian's Letter to Clinton on the Nuclear Testing," *New York Times*, May 13, 1998, A12.

threat card' in the West, thereby damaging Sino-Indian relations." In conclusion the article stressed that "China and India should be partners, not rivals.... If China and India try to contain each other, this will cause happiness among those who plot to establish global hegemony."³⁸ Another of China's top India hands, Wang Hongwei, summarized the first discussion between Chinese and Indian scholars following the May tests:

Although the Chinese side expressed understanding of India's need to carry out nuclear tests for its security needs, it could not understand why India thinks China's nuclear weapons are a threat to India, and felt that India should not have used China as the reason for its plans for realizing nuclear weapons.³⁹

In the 26 months after India's nuclear tests, Beijing employed various tactics to compel New Delhi to retract the anti-China framework of its nuclearization. Beijing's strongly negative reaction to the BJP government's orientation can be understood at several levels, all linked to

Vajpayee's letter to President Clinton was an authoritative and powerful assertion of a "China threat."

U.S.-China relations. One level had to do with the fact that Vajpayee's letter posed a direct challenge to Beijing's long-standing efforts to refute "the China threat theory." Beijing was fearful of a new U.S.-led effort to contain China and saw dissemination of information about various "threats" posed

by China as preparation for such an anti-China containment effort. Vajpayee's letter was as authoritative and powerful an assertion of a "China threat" as could be imagined. If it was left unrebutted, it might have long-term pernicious consequences.

At another level, Vajpayee's letter meant that India had begun to lay before the United States its concerns about China's relations with other countries of South Asia. From Beijing's perspective, China's relations with other countries of South Asia were not the proper concern of India, let alone the subject of Indian representations to the United States. As Ambassador Zhou Gang asserted in a speech in New Delhi on October 20, 1998: "To develop friendly relations between China and any country is not directed against another third country.... *There is no more than a boundary dispute* [between China and India, a dispute which] generally speaking...is a legacy of history when India was ruled by the colonialists [emphasis added]."⁴⁰

³⁸ Ye Zhengjia, "Wushi nianlai de Zhong Yin guanxi: jingyan he jiaoxun" (50 years of Sino-Indian relations, experience and lessons), *Guoji wenti yanjiu* (International studies), no. 4 (1994), pp. 17-23.

³⁹ Wang Hongwei, "Tancheng duihua, shi yin zeng xin" (Frank dialogue, dispelling doubts, increasing trust), *Nanya yanjiu* (South Asia research), no 1 (1999), pp. 14-17.

⁴⁰ "Speech delivered by H.E. Zhou Gang, Ambassador of China," Indian Association of International Affairs, October 20, 1998 (manuscript in possession of author).

Beijing viewed India's efforts to limit Chinese ties in South Asia as hegemonism. From Beijing's perspective, therefore, Vajpayee's plea to Clinton was tantamount to solicitation of U.S. understanding for Indian hegemony in South Asia.

At the deepest level, Vajpayee's letter implied an Indian-U.S. alignment based on a common understanding of a China threat. China, Vajpayee's letter asserted, was a covert proliferator of nuclear weapon and missile technology. Moreover, Pakistan, strongly backed by China, was sponsoring terrorism abroad. India, therefore, needed to substantially increase its defense capabilities by acquiring a nuclear deterrent to deal with these threats. India's new government hoped that Washington would show understanding of its position. If such U.S. understanding were forthcoming, India would be willing to work with the United States in other areas such as achieving a verifiable worldwide termination of production of fissile material. Comments by Defense Minister George Fernandes in early May 1998 also hinted at other areas relating to China on which India and the United States might share similar concerns and cooperate. They included, for instance: limiting Chinese activities in Burma, restoring genuine Tibetan autonomy, and monitoring Chinese naval activities in the Indian Ocean.

Most ominous from Beijing's perspective was the possibility that India and the United States might cooperate on Pakistan and Chinese assistance to Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs. During talks in Washington on May 1, 1998 (two weeks before India's tests), Indian Foreign Secretary K. Raghunath had stressed that Pakistan's missile capability was "not an indigenous one." Pakistan's development of such missiles as the Ghauri was "not an isolated incident" but part of a "long-standing, clandestine program for developing missile capability aimed at primarily one country—India."⁴¹ In response to Pakistan's China-derived missile threat, Raghunath said, India had to consider what its response and strategies ought to be. Raghunath's early May 1998 discussions in Washington constituted a "second stage" of the Indo-American "strategic dialogue," or so the foreign secretary told a group of Indian journalists afterward.

Beijing responded to the BJP's new foreign policy direction with a systematic effort to compel New Delhi to shift course.⁴² Beijing suspended the meeting of the joint working group on the border, and it unleashed a campaign of harsh rhetoric via the Chinese media.

⁴¹ Ramesh Chandran, "US told of Chinese aid to Pakistan," *Times of India*, May 4, 1998.

⁴² For a discussion of Beijing's post-test pressure campaign against India, see Garver, "The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity Following India's Nuclear Tests," *The China Quarterly*, no. 168 (December 2001), pp. 865–89.

For the first time in many years Chinese media openly condemned India as “hegemonist.” China’s UN ambassador hinted in a speech to the Security Council that China might return to a pro-Pakistan position on the Kashmir issue.⁴³ Beijing increased its support for Pakistan’s missile development efforts and demonstratively moved to support Pakistan’s armor and warplane development efforts. Beijing’s campaign of counter-pressure against New Delhi continued until Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan’s visit to India in July 2000, when both sides declared the existence of mutual non-threat. The crux of Beijing’s demand during this period was that New Delhi retract the words about China constituting a threat to India. In accordance with its usual negotiating style, Beijing attempted to first establish an important principle, which could then be used to pry further concessions from an adversary on threat of charges of insincerity.⁴⁴ If Indian leaders retracted their words about China posing a threat to India, it followed that there was no need for India to seek U.S. understanding or otherwise cooperate with the United States against China.

The crux of the issue facing India was outlined in November 1998 by the president of the Janata Party, Subramanian Swamy. The deterioration of Indian-China relations in mid-1998 forced India to decide whether its China policy should be friendly or adversarial. Vajpayee’s letter was “an attempt to curry favor [with Clinton] and an inane oblique suggestion that India was ready to be considered as a counterweight to China,” Swamy argued. “Sound strategic reasons” pointed against such a policy. Defense against a joint China-Pakistan attack was “nearly impossible for India’s armed forces,” while China could “cause India enormous problems” in Kashmir, Sikkim, Assam, and elsewhere.⁴⁵ After the May 1998 tests, China’s riposte made this point very well.

The 1998 U.S. Tilt Toward China

For the purposes of this article, the most important element of China’s campaign of counter-pressure against India in the 26 months after the May 1998 tests was Beijing’s effort to out bid New Delhi in securing U.S. support. In effect, Beijing trumped New Delhi’s attempt to play the U.S. card.

⁴³ United Nations Security Council, June 6, 1998, S/PV.3990.

⁴⁴ Regarding this tactic see, Richard H. Solomon, *Chinese Political Negotiating Behavior, 1967–1984, An Interpretive Assessment*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, December 1985.

⁴⁵ Subramanian Swamy, “Vajpayee’s China Fiasco,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, November 12, 1998 <www.ipcs.org/issues/articles/151-cr-swamy.htm>.

The initial U.S. response to the South Asian nuclear crisis of 1998 was guided by nonproliferation concerns and a desire for better relations with China. Pursuit of those objectives brought Washington into alignment with China against India for the first several months after the Indian tests. During that period, Beijing and Washington cooperated closely. Shortly after India's but before Pakistan's nuclear tests, Clinton used the recently installed hot line to Beijing to call Jiang Zemin. This was the first use of the direct presidential communication link established by the October 1997 joint U.S.-China statement reached during Jiang's summit visit to the United States. During the call, Clinton urged Jiang to press Pakistan to abstain from answering India's nuclear tests in kind. Jiang agreed to write a letter along these lines, and U.S. sources were later assured that Jiang had, in fact, sent a letter asking Pakistan to hold off on nuclear testing.⁴⁶

Beijing was enthusiastic about working with the United States to deal with India's nuclear tests. Foreign Minister Qian and Secretary Albright coordinated policies via a series of phone calls. Together they determined a set of "benchmarks" that India and Pakistan would have to achieve to denuclearize South Asia. One U.S. official was struck by the extent to which Beijing had become a "status quo power" by supporting the nonproliferation regime.⁴⁷ Beijing encouraged the United States to use its vast influence to mobilize world pressure against India and did what it could to rescue Pakistan from global ostracization once Islamabad followed India's lead with its own nuclear tests on May 28 and 30, 1998. China worked to toughen the U.S. reaction against India and ease U.S. sanctions against Pakistan.

Beijing attempted to make the U.S. position toward India a litmus test of U.S. sincerity toward China. For instance, if, despite the promises made during Jiang Zemin's October 1997 visit to Washington, the United States had been pursuing a policy of containment toward China, a key element of that policy would have been strengthening China's neighbors, especially its more hostile neighbors, as a way of hemming in China. The United States should now avoid any moves in that direction in dealing with India, Beijing suggested. "If the United States ... is seen as subtly supporting India, then we [China] must rethink our whole rationale," one Chinese official told the *New York Times*.⁴⁸ Another senior Chinese foreign ministry official suggested that such Chinese rethinking could lead to China's withdrawal from the CTBT. Although China remained "serious" about the CTBT, the official said, a treaty would allow nations to withdraw if their "supreme national interests" were endangered. China "did not want

⁴⁶ John Pomfret, "China Asked Pakistan Not to Conduct Tests," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1998, A36.

⁴⁷ Shirk, "Chinese Perceptions of India," pp. 105, 108.

⁴⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*

to be” India’s enemy, but, if it found itself in that situation, Beijing might have withdrawn from the CTBT.⁴⁹ Securing China’s participation in the CTBT had been a major objective of the Clinton administration in 1995–96. Now this Chinese official suggested that, unless India’s course were reversed—something a conciliatory U.S. approach toward India could not achieve—Beijing might leave the CTBT.

One result of the new convergence of Chinese and American views on South Asian non-proliferation was the promulgation of a “Sino-U.S. Presidential Joint Statement on South Asia” on June 27, 1998, during President Clinton’s visit to China. India saw this joint statement as an egregious manifestation of U.S. alignment with China against India. According to the joint statement, China and the United States pledged “to continue to work closely together . . . to prevent an accelerating nuclear and missile arms race in South Asia.” The two countries were “committed to assist where possible, peaceful resolution of difficult and long-standing differences” between India and Pakistan, “including the issue of Kashmir.” The joint statement called on India and Pakistan to “adhere immediately and unconditionally” to the CTBT, refrain from weaponization or deployment of nuclear weapons, and “enter into firm commitment” not to weaponize or deploy nuclear weapons “or missiles capable of delivering them.” According to the statement, the common goal of China and the United States was the accession of India and Pakistan to the NPT “as it stands, without any modification.” The statement further asserted that if New Delhi and Islamabad failed to join, they “cannot expect to be accorded the same

benefits and international standing as are accorded to NPT parties. Notwithstanding their recent nuclear tests, India and Pakistan do not have the status of nuclear weapons states in accordance with the NPT.” China and the United States recognized their respective “responsibilities” in South Asia and

Beijing’s message was clear: if New Delhi chose to play the U.S. card, China could outbid India.

pledged “to contribute actively to the maintenance of peace, stability and security in the region.”⁵⁰ Through the joint statement the United States in effect endorsed Beijing’s long-standing position that India should renounce nuclear weapons independent of China’s nuclear arsenal, that South Asia should become a “nuclear weapon free zone,” and that China should retain its nuclear weapons under the imprimatur of the NPT.

Through its alignment with the United States in June 1998, Beijing effectively trumped Vajpayee’s effort the previous month to play the U.S. card against China. Beijing demonstrated that it was risky for India to try to maneuver the United States against China, because,

⁴⁹ *Agence-France Presse*, June 1, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-152.

⁵⁰ “Sino-U.S. Presidential Joint Statement on South Asia,” *Beijing Review*, July 20–27, 1998, p. 17.

when all was said and done, China was weighted more heavily in American calculations than India. Beijing's message was clear: if New Delhi chose to play the U.S. card, China could outbid India.

India reacted strongly to the U.S.-China joint statement on South Asia. On the same day, New Delhi issued an official response stating that India "categorically rejects the notion of [China and the United States] arrogating to themselves, joint or individual responsibility for 'the maintenance of peace, stability and security in the region.' This approach reflects the hegemonistic mentality of a bygone era...and is completely unacceptable."⁵¹ Regarding the suggestion by the joint statement that China and the United States might "assist" resolution of India-Pakistan differences, including Kashmir, the Indian response said flatly that "there is no place for any kind of third-party involvement whatsoever."

The Sino-U.S. joint statement on South Asia challenged Indian policy interests in several ways. First, it represented a categorical U.S. rejection of Vajpayee's request for U.S. understanding of India's situation. Washington responded to India's solicitation for understanding regarding the China threat by aligning with China against India. Secondly, the joint statement represented a continuation of what New Delhi viewed as Washington's permissive policy toward Chinese assistance to Pakistan's nuclear program. The joint statement contained no allusion to China's long history of covert assistance to Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs. India's response to the joint statement noted that "it is most ironical that two countries that have directly [i.e., China via its assistance to Pakistan] and indirectly [i.e., the U.S. via its lenient attitude toward China's chronic assistance to Pakistan] contributed to the unabated proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery systems in our neighborhood are now presuming to prescribe norms for nonproliferation."⁵² From India's perspective, after long colluding in the development of Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability, China and the United States had now declared their intention to jointly compel India and Pakistan to denuclearize, which would leave China and the United States as the only nuclear powers in the South Asian region.

The 1997 joint statement also explicitly ruled out the possibility of modifying the NPT to recognize India as a nuclear weapons state on a par with China. Its comments about Kashmir flew in the face of India's long-standing rejection of international involvement and insistence on a purely bilateral (India-Pakistan) resolution of that issue. Most offensive of all, the joint state-

⁵¹ Shiv S. Mukherjee, Minister of Press, Information, and Culture, "Government of India's response to the U.S.-China 'Joint Statement on South Asia'," Press Release from the Embassy of India, Washington, DC, June 24, 1998 <www.indianembassy.org/pic/pr_1998/June98/prjune2798.htm>.

⁵² Ibid.

ment carried the clear implication that China and the United States were first-rank powers with the “responsibilities” to order other regions of the globe, while India was paired with Pakistan as a purely regional power expected to go along with the leadership of the front-tier powers. The United States seemed to be giving its approval to China playing an important role in maintaining peace, security, and stability in South Asia. India had spent many decades struggling against China playing exactly such a role. An Indian initiative that began as an attempt to constrain China in South Asia through Indian nuclearization with U.S. understanding led to U.S. endorsement of China playing a larger role in South Asia.

When *New York Times* correspondent Thomas Friedman visited India in June 1998, he found strong concerns that an emerging U.S.-China “alliance” was adversely affecting India. Friedman interviewed a wide range of Indians and reported a widespread opinion that the emerging Sino-U.S. relationship would “marginalize” India while “giving South Asia to China” as a sphere of influence. Former Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit complained to Friedman: “Your government tolerates China no matter what it does. Whether it is nuclear weapons tests, or abuse of human rights, your government says, ‘No, we cannot spoil relations with China.’” Former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral went even further. Recalling a comment by former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry to the effect that China should pay more attention to South Asia, Gujral pondered: “I ask myself: What is the purpose of making this statement? Is it a division of areas of influence? If so, have you decided that this side of Suez is an area of influence of China? What should an Indian policy maker do?”⁵³

The Adjustment of U.S. Policy: Shift Toward a Balanced Position

Indian anger in response to Washington’s perceived alignment with China caused a rethinking of U.S. policy. Probably for the first time, U.S. officials began to think through how U.S. relations with the two Asian powers related to one another. Underlying this rethinking was an understanding that management of the rise of China was a major task confronting the United States and that fostering multiple independent centers of power around China would facilitate the successful accomplishment of that task. Why, then, should the United States alienate India, perhaps pushing it into isolation or perhaps even into alignment with China? Did it not make more sense for the United States to support and encourage Indian efforts to enhance its strength and confidence thereby maintaining a balance of power in Asia?

⁵³ Thomas Friedman, “Both Sides Now,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1998, A11.

As U.S. pressure on India intensified in the weeks after the May tests, so too did debate within the U.S. government regarding the wisdom of that pressure. While some in the Clinton administration favored continued stress on nonproliferation, others wanted to expand cooperation with India. According to the *Washington Post*, the latter group was “eager to put aside the administration’s anger and sense of betrayal [with India] and resume efforts to build a constructive relationship with the South Asian giant.” The pro-India group wanted to see India “prosper and thrive and attain its aspirations for itself” in the twenty-first century. The United States, they believed, should “keep in mind [its] long-term interest in the way India evolves” and “its greatness... and potential and the tremendous benefits that would come from a closer relationship with India.”⁵⁴ Although public commentary did not identify balancing China as one of those U.S. interests, such an objective can reasonably be inferred. There was also an awareness that humiliating the most pro-U.S. Indian foreign policy team in a very long time (i.e., that led by Vajpayee, Singh, and Mishra) would strengthen Nehruvian arguments about U.S. perfidy and the wisdom of seeking alignment with China.

Within a few months, Washington began to move away from an alignment with China toward a more balanced position between Beijing and New Delhi. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott was the U.S. official with primary responsibility for dealing with the South Asian situation in the aftermath of the May tests. In an interview with the prominent Indian paper *The Hindu* in early July, Talbott rejected Indian charges that the United States was “playing its China card against India.” Talbott argued against the “false assumption” that the United States was “in some sense joining with China against India,” and asserted that the United States wanted good relations with both India and China. Talbott argued that, in its talks with China, the United States had worked to “advance goals that India supports.”⁵⁵ The United States had used its influence with Beijing to impress upon China the need to pursue “responsible transfer and nonproliferation policies.” U.S. messages to Beijing, including those to the “highest levels of the Chinese leadership,” Talbott said, urged the need for China “to conduct itself in a responsible fashion when it comes to the transfer of potentially dangerous technology to other states in the region.”⁵⁶ In plain language, this meant that the United States had urged Beijing to end Chinese assistance, covert and otherwise, to Pakistan’s nuclear weapons and missile programs. Talbott also said, in elliptical diplomatic language, that Beijing

⁵⁴ Thomas W. Lippman, “Administration Ponders Next Step Toward India,” *Washington Post*, June 21, 1998 <www.lexis-nexis.com>.

⁵⁵ Malini Parthasarathy, “U.S. not playing China card against India: Talbott,” *The Hindu*, July 4, 1998 <www.indiaserver.com/thehindu>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

should recognize that China's own military activities contributed to India's sense of insecurity. Talbott defended the appropriateness of the United States and "the international community" (i.e., China and other countries) in using "whatever good offices it has" to improve the atmosphere for a resolution of the Kashmir issue. Talbott also tried to ease Indian concerns in this regard by acknowledging that, "in the final analysis," the Kashmir issue would need to be resolved by India and Pakistan.

Talbott made his first post-test visit to India and Pakistan on July 20–22, 1998. Over the next four months he and Jaswant Singh conducted a half dozen rounds of talks on nuclear proliferation concerns and India-Pakistan relations. In these talks the United States quietly but

New Delhi sought U.S. understanding toward Indian nuclearization because of China's assistance to Pakistan's strategic programs.

effectively backed away from alignment with China against India and adopted a more balanced position between those two powers. In his talks with Talbott, Singh argued that the United States should adopt an understanding attitude toward Indian nuclearization, in part, because of China's long record of assistance to Pakistan's strategic pro-

grams. In effect New Delhi was saying to Washington: if you cannot help us deal with the Sino-Pakistan entente, at least be understanding of our own efforts to do so. An article by Jaswant Singh in the fall 1998 issue of *Foreign Affairs* publicly expressed India's appeal to the United States for understanding in the face of combined Chinese-Pakistani threat.⁵⁷

Indian thinking in the aftermath of U.S. alignment with China was also reflected in a series of articles on India's future security published in the fall 1998 issue of the influential journal *Indian Defense Review*. A key theme of most of the articles was resentment toward the United States and all the evil things it was doing to India and the world at large. The articles accused the United States of trying to stifle India's emergence as a major power, condoning Chinese assistance to Pakistan as a way of stifling India, interfering in India's internal affairs, and even toying with the idea of partitioning India. Globally, the "USA as the sole superpower [is] bent upon a policy of rampant bullying to manage the world according to American perceptions," according to one article. Yet the same article was also strongly critical of Nehru's failure in the 1950s to secure U.S. support for India's emergence. China was also encroaching on India's sphere of influence in South Asia, and "the continuous accretion" of "economic and

⁵⁷ Jaswant Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 77, no. 5 (September–October 1998), pp. 41–52.

military clout” by China would be very difficult for India to match. The author’s policy prescription was to increase cooperation with Russia, Europe, China, “and obviously with USA.”⁵⁸

An article by the editor in the same issue set a similar tone. According to the article, racist U.S. hegemony was running amok and doing all sorts of bad things to India and the world. Given this, the clear direction of evolution in the first decade of the twenty-first century would be toward a “strategic partnership” among India, China, and Russia to end U.S. domination. The article advocated, however, that such a move would have been premature at the time because China was manipulating the United States to increase its own power and position.⁵⁹ The editor’s short-term policy prescription was to dangle the Indian market before U.S. corporations, then allow them to press Washington to adopt more friendly policies toward India.⁶⁰ In other words, India would need to tilt toward the United States to compel Beijing to become more reasonable in South Asia. After that, India could consider an alignment with China to counter U.S. bullying. Another article argued directly in favor of Indian alignment with the United States against China and the radical Islamists in Pakistan, India’s primary opponents. The author also argued that the United States and the West were India’s “natural allies” against these opponents.⁶¹

India’s strongly negative reaction to Sino-U.S. cooperation, and the possibility that U.S. inflexibility might push India into alignment with China, forced Washington to modify its policies. Rather than lose all leverage over an embittered India and possibly push it into alignment with China, Washington distanced itself from China during the Talbott-Singh talks. Washington also began distancing itself from the earlier demand for full implementation of UN Resolution 1172 of May 1998 (calling for Indian and Pakistani denuclearization)—even as Beijing continued to insist on rigorous implementation of that resolution. Washington also backed away from demonstrative acts of cooperation with China in South Asia. Washington did not completely abandon cooperation with China on South Asian issues. It did, however, considerably dilute the original content of that cooperation so as not to alienate India, and because of a realization that U.S. interests in an Asian balance of power were not served by strengthening China’s role in South

⁵⁸ Lt. Gen. Vijay Madan, “The Present and the Future of India’s Security Environment,” *Indian Defense Review*, October–December 1998, pp. 13–18.

⁵⁹ Beijing was attempting “to consolidate control over the Straits of Malacca, the eastern Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal” through “being appointed as the regional cop” by the United States. “2020: Defending India,” *Indian Defense Review*, October–December 1998, pp. 7–11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ A.K. Ray, “India’s National Interests in 2020,” *Indian Defense Review*, October–December 1998, pp. 85–88.

Asia to India's disadvantage. In short, the United States began balancing between India and China, while both of those countries attempted to influence U.S. policy toward the other and became deeply apprehensive of possible alignment of the other with the United States.

The Clinton and Vajpayee Visits and China's Triangular Apprehensions

As the United States began moving toward compromise with India over nuclear issues in late 1998, Beijing felt betrayed and abandoned by the United States. When China had taken the lead in organizing the Permanent Five to condemn India following the May tests, Washington had encouraged Beijing. Within months, however, some people in Washington were "playing the India card," leaving China in the lurch with New Delhi.⁶² By early 1999 some Chinese analysts had concluded that the U.S. drawback from cooperation with China against India represented a major shift in U.S. South Asia policy. The United States was now set on a course of cooperating with India. One major objective (though not the only objective) sought by the United States through this new approach, Chinese analysts concluded, was to use India as a counterweight to China.

Writing in early 1999, one analyst at the China Institute of International Studies (the Chinese foreign ministry's think tank) traced the beginnings of the new U.S. policy to 1997: U.S. strategy in South Asia was derived from a global strategy that sought to strengthen the ability of the United States to direct affairs in all areas of the world and prevent any big power from challenging U.S. leadership. Washington had realized it could not achieve this goal in South Asia by relying on its old Cold War ally, Pakistan. Rather, Washington was trying to "fill the vacuum" left by the disappearance of the Soviet Union and win over Moscow's old friend, India. A desire to balance China lay behind this new U.S. strategy. "The China factor is the most important content of the contemporary U.S.-Indian dialogue," the article said. Washington wanted to "establish strategic relations" with India in order to "contain China in the post-Cold War system by using India as a core element for balancing China." These calculations and policies were temporarily thrown off track by India's tests of May 1998, according to the author of the Chinese article, but were back on course.⁶³

⁶² Author's discussion with analyst at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, Beijing, October 10, 2001.

⁶³ Liu Xuecheng, "Shiji zhe jiao de daguo nanya zhengce" (South Asian policies of the big powers on the eve of the new century), *Nanya yanjiu* (South Asian research), no. 2 (1999), pp. 23–29.

Chinese analysts saw President Clinton's March 2000 visit to South Asia as a major move implementing the new U.S. South Asia policy of using India to balance China. Clinton's visit prompted a flurry of Chinese analyses, which generally agreed that "balancing China" was again the thrust of U.S. South Asia strategy. An article in *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (Contemporary international relations—a journal published by a think tank linked to China's ministry of state security) concluded that Washington had rethought its South Asian policy following the May 1998 tests. A "new stage" of that policy had begun, characterized by stressing U.S. links with India and treating India in the same category as China and Russia. By doing this, Chinese analysts posited, Washington hoped to create a "new American century" and strengthen U.S. global leadership by drawing India into the U.S.-led world order. Cooperation with India would enhance U.S. "control" in South Asia. Washington hoped to "make use of India's psychology of 'suspicions' regarding China to form a sort of strategic 'balance' of China in Asia." In the course of the ten rounds of talks between Talbott and Singh, the United States had gained a better "understanding" of Indian "concerns" regarding China, with the result that "the U.S. has recognized that India requires some level of nuclear capability," according to the article. New Delhi, for its part, hoped to "use and encourage U.S. 'concern' and 'vigilance' regarding China to secure a position of advantageous political superiority, to balance the improvement of Sino-U.S. relations," while "strengthening Indian superiority over Pakistan and reducing obstacles to [Indian] control of the Indian Ocean."⁶⁴

Chinese analysts saw U.S. reconciliation with the idea of an Indian "minimal nuclear deterrent"—that is the backing away from UN Security Council Resolution 1172—as part of the new tilt toward India. A "year-end special column" in *Renmin ribao* (People's daily) in December 1999 maintained that India had refused to compromise with the United States over the nuclear issue during the Talbott-Singh talks.⁶⁵ Another "news analysis" in *Renmin ribao* during Clinton's India visit in March 2000 maintained that following India's May 1998 nuclear tests the United States had "declared sanctions" but had not, in fact, implemented them.⁶⁶ A lengthy article in *Renmin ribao* shortly after Clinton's visit to India found that although Clinton had urged India to sign the CTBT, India's rejection of that proposal had been expected by the Americans. The United States "did not squabble [with India] as in the

⁶⁴ Zhang Minqian, "Mei dui yin zhengce tiaozheng chuxiang, yitu ji mei yin guanxi zuoshi" (The tendency toward adjustment in U.S. policy toward India signifies the direction of U.S.-Indian relations), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (Contemporary international relations), no. 4 (2000), pp. 31–35.

⁶⁵ "Huanhe Zhong Yin duili" (Moderating the China-India confrontation), *Renmin ribao*, December 16, 1999, p. 6.

⁶⁶ "Meiguo tiaozheng Nan Ya zhengce (U.S. adjusts South Asian policy), *Renmin ribao*, March 20, 2000, p. 6.

past over nonproliferation issues,” but moved ahead to improve multifaceted Indian-U.S. relations. According to the *Renmin ribao* article, the remaining sanctions against India imposed after the May 1998 tests were abolished during Clinton’s visit, even though India still refused to sign the CTBT. [In fact post-May 1998 U.S. sanctions were not fully lifted until April 2001—a matter discussed below.] The article went on to say that Washington was “daily discarding its old mentality in handling South Asian affairs” by placing less emphasis on nuclear nonproliferation and more on cooperating with India. Henceforth the United States would “appropriately stress India’s role on the world stage.”⁶⁷

As U.S. policy adjusted in a pro-Indian direction, Beijing lobbied Washington to ensure that the United States did not isolate Pakistan, China’s ally, in the process. Beijing was deeply apprehensive that Pakistan would slide into a situation of international isolation. In early 1999 Pakistan’s initiation of a military incursion across the Line of Control in the Kargil region of Kashmir had deeply antagonized Washington. U.S. leaders were shocked and dismayed by Pakistan’s initiation of military conflict with India less than a year after the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, and they insisted in firm, if private, tones on Pakistan’s withdrawal. Then came the military coup in Pakistan and the overthrow of Nawaz Sharif’s civil-

ian, parliamentary government in October 1999. Economic crisis in Pakistan followed as capital fled or avoided the country. All the while Pakistan continued active support for the anti-Indian “mujahidin” in Kashmir and the ultra-fundamentalist Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Some people in the United States were calling for labeling Pa-

In the event of a war between India and Pakistan, China might be left to bear alone the burden of supporting Pakistan politically and materially.

kistan a “terrorist state,” an act that would have severe consequences for Pakistan’s international standing. Others were speaking of Pakistan as a “failed state,” where religious and ethnic fundamentalism were overwhelming weak state institutions.

A Pakistani slide into international isolation whether as a terrorist, failed, or rogue state would have meant that China alone was responsible for sustaining Pakistan. That would have been costly and dangerous. In the event of a war between India and Pakistan, China might be left to bear alone the burden of supporting Pakistan politically and materially. Without U.S. understanding for Pakistan, and for Chinese support of Pakistan in the face of Indian hostility, it would be more likely that India would strike against Pakistan with such forceful means as to

⁶⁷ Tang Lu, “Meiguo gaibian nanya zhengce” (U.S. changes its South Asian policy), *Renmin ribao*, March 30, 2000, p. 7.

overturn the balance of power between India and Pakistan that had existed in South Asia since 1947 and upon which Chinese analysts believe China's security rests. To avert Pakistan's isolation, Beijing lobbied hard for Clinton to include a visit to Pakistan in his South Asian trip. The Clinton administration satisfied Beijing in this regard by including a very brief stopover in Pakistan in the March 2000 presidential itinerary.

An article in the foreign ministry sponsored journal *Shijie zhishi* (World knowledge) outlined some of the dangers for Pakistan, and by extension for China, inherent in the new South Asian policy of the United States. By developing relations with India in order to "balance a daily-more-powerful China," the United States might create an "imbalance" in South Asia that could "cause regional conflict and especially be a direct cause for increasingly sharp contradictions between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir problem." By fostering all-around better relations with India and even "adopting a clear policy of supporting India" on Kashmir during the Kargil crisis, U.S. policy had "caused Pakistan's diplomacy and national security to face serious difficulties." The India-Pakistan balance of strength was becoming "imbalanced and instability-producing factors in the South Asian security structure have increased." The solution proposed was that the "U.S. should supply military and economic aid to Pakistan and give Pakistan appropriate security guarantees, and do all possible to maintain a balance of power between India and Pakistan in order to reduce the possibility of large scale conflict between the two countries, especially the possibility of nuclear war."⁶⁸ An article about the same time in the journal of the Chinese foreign ministry's think tank argued that "the West... wishes to use India to balance and contain China.... The United States has played the India card to contain China and maintain the balance of power in Asia."⁶⁹

When Prime Minister Vajpayee reciprocated Clinton's visit in October 2000, Chinese analysts again saw anti-China content in the talks. The underlying purpose of Vajpayee's visit was clear, according to an article in *Beijing Review*: "The United States and India obviously met each other's need and reached a consensus." According to the article, a recent U.S. Department of Defense report had "without giving any name...hinted strongly that in the next century China will be perceived as America's No. 1 enemy. The U.S. strategy is to use Japan and India to constrain China. So it is not difficult to understand why the United States entertained the Indian leader so lavishly."⁷⁰ The article ended with this warning: "Relations between

⁶⁸ Wu Xin, "Meiguo nanya zhengce 'shiyong' hua" (Pragmatization of U.S. South Asian policy), *Shijie zhishi* (World affairs), no. 3 (2000), pp. 22–23.

⁶⁹ Zheng Ruixiang, "Some Strategic Issues in South Asia," *International Studies*, 2001, Beijing: China Institute of International Studies, pp. 33–34.

⁷⁰ Ren Yujun, "Vajpayee's U.S. Tour," *Beijing Review*, October 16, 2000, p. 10.

the major powers will play a decisive role in world peace and development. The leaders of the big countries must show prudence at the helm.” Simply stated, the United States and India should not go too far in working together against China.

One Chinese response to India’s deepening alignment with the United States was to try to borrow Russian influence and use Indian sentiments of friendship toward Russia in an effort to check India’s movement toward the United States. During a visit to India in 1999, Russian Premier Yevgeny Primakov had proposed a strategic partnership between Russia, India, and China as a way of making the world more balanced. Neither Beijing nor New Delhi was then interested in the Russian proposal. In October 2000, however, Russia’s new president, Vladimir Putin, visited India, and he and Prime Minister Vajpayee signed a statement declaring a Russo-Indian “strategic partnership.” A *Renmin ribao* “news analysis” of the new Russo-Indian partnership saw the statement as a manifestation of the “balancing trick” being pursued by all powers, with the objective of maximizing their interests by improving relations with other powers. The Chinese analyst lauded “cool and objective” Indian analysts who “continually warned that if India wants to take full advantage of its balancing role to maximize its interests, it must genuinely maintain balance among world powers and cannot count on relying on a certain power to counter another power.”⁷¹ In other words, India should improve relations with China, as well as Russia, and not align with the United States to contain China.

During Jiang Zemin’s October 2001 visit to Moscow, Beijing hinted that a Russo-Indian-Chinese alignment might be necessary to deal with the unbalanced world situation. A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman replied to a reporter’s query about whether Jiang would discuss with Putin prospects for collaboration between Russia, India, and China, by saying “On many international issues China, Russia and India have similar or near identical stands and concerns.” China hoped, he said, “to further strengthen its cooperation with Russia and India.”⁷² About the same time, a “first-ever” meeting of scholars from China, Russia, and India convened in Moscow to discuss prospects for expanded trilateral cooperation. Prominent Chinese scholars and retired diplomats argued in favor of such expanded cooperation. Professor Ma Jiali of the Ministry of State Security’s think tank argued that such cooperation would “make international relations much more stable and balanced,” while former Chinese ambas-

⁷¹ Li Wenyun, “New connotations of India-Russia Relations,” *Renmin ribao*, October 6, 2000, in FBIS-CHI-2000-1007.

⁷² “China open to strategic tie-up with India, Russia,” *India Times News*, October 18, 2001 <<http://news.indiatimes.com>>.

sador to India, Cheng Ruisheng, termed such trilateral cooperation as “essential for the establishment of a multipolar world.”⁷³ Beijing’s proposal for Russo-Indian-Chinese anti-unipolar cooperation was fairly popular among India’s newspaper editorialists.⁷⁴ In spite of this, the Indian government refused to take the bait. India remained disinterested in anti-unipolar cooperation with China, even if Russia was added to the roster.

The Bush Administration and the Forging of an Indian-U.S. Military Relationship

After assuming office in January 2001, the Bush administration quickly made clear that it would continue, and indeed intensify, the course toward expanded cooperation with India charted by the Clinton administration. This intention was combined with an increasingly vigilant approach toward China by the new administration. The Bush administration’s earnestness about expanding cooperation with India was reflected in its appointment of a new U.S. ambassador to India within one month of the inauguration. The Clinton administration had allowed that post to go vacant for several years. The individual nominated, Robert Blackwill, was a specialist on Chinese strategic issues. Chinese analysts noted both the swiftness of Blackwill’s nomination and his background in dealing with China. Expansion of military and security cooperation with India was a key focus of the new administration’s India policy.

Aside from not appointing an ambassador, Clinton had begun an Indian-U.S. “strategic dialogue” in January 1995, when Defense Secretary Perry visited India to sign an agreement on expanded military-to-military ties. At the time, U.S. officials went to considerable lengths to ensure that China did not feel threatened by the India-U.S. agreement, discussing it with China before it was finalized during Perry’s visit.⁷⁵ The low level India-U.S. military contact and cooperation initiated under the 1995 agreement, however, was suspended by the United States in the aftermath of India’s May 1998 nuclear tests. As relations with India warmed following the tests, Clinton and Vajpayee affirmed in March 2000 that the “Agreed Principles” would continue to govern the expanded and institutionalized Indo-U.S. relationship, but the agreement conspicuously excluded exchanges between the Indian and U.S. defense

⁷³ “Chinese scholars upbeat on China-India-Russia ties,” *India Times News*, October 18, 2001.

⁷⁴ See pieces in the *Deccan Herald*, July 22, 2000, in FBIS-CFHI-2000-0722; and *The Hindu*, July 24, 2000, in FBIS-CHI-2000-0724.

⁷⁵ John Burns, “U.S.-India Pact on Military Cooperation,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1995, A12.

establishments. Dialogues on security, nonproliferation, and Asian security were launched by the Clinton-Vajpayee agreements but were to be handled by the two foreign ministries.⁷⁶

The first post-May 1998 contact between U.S. and Indian defense officials came with Jaswant Singh's visit to the Pentagon for discussions with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in April 2001. (Singh then served concurrently as foreign and defense secretary.) This was the first meeting between defense ministers of the two countries since William Perry's 1995 visit to India.⁷⁷ Singh and Rumsfeld set in motion a whole series of discussions. The Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff soon visited India for the first time. Mid-level exchanges between the two defense establishments proliferated. By the end of the year the bilateral Defense Policy Group, suspended after the 1998 tests, had resumed meetings. A new entity, the Security Cooperation Group, was established to manage the defense supply relationship.⁷⁸ U.S. sanc-

The expansion of Indian-U.S. security cooperation extends far beyond concerns about China.

tions imposed after the 1998 tests were finally lifted, an agreement guaranteeing the security of U.S. defense information and technology was signed, and by the end of 2001 India was preparing a list of sophisticated U.S. weapons systems it wished to purchase. Washington promised swift and sympa-

thetic consideration of the Indian requests.⁷⁹ By spring 2002 joint U.S. and Indian naval patrols of the Strait of Malacca had taken place, and U.S. merchant vessels were being escorted through that strait by Indian naval ships.

The expansion of Indian-U.S. security cooperation was not, of course, due entirely to objectives related to China. A desire to expand cooperation against international terrorism following the September 11, 2001, attacks played a role. So too did deep appreciation in both New Delhi and Washington of the fact that two long-estranged major democracies were, finally, beginning to build a positive cooperative relation in the critical area of national and international security. The benefits perceived as accruing from this new security cooperation extended far beyond concerns about China. Yet, calculations regarding influencing China's

⁷⁶ The Agreed Principles are available at <www.indianembassy.org/indusrel/clinton_india/joint_india_us_statement_mar_21_2000.htm>.

⁷⁷ Casper Weinberger was the first U.S. Secretary of Defense to visit India in October 1986. Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941–1991*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1993, p. 408.

⁷⁸ See Joint Statement of the India-U.S. Defense Policy Group, December 4, 2001 <www.indianembassy.org/indusrel/2001/jdwg_dec_04_01.htm>.

⁷⁹ "India Outlines Defense Needs as U.S. Sanctions End," *Defense News*, November 12–18, 2001, p. 34; and "U.S. ready to resume arms sales to India," *Financial Times*, February 19, 2001, p. 3.

behavior were a part of the decision-making in both New Delhi and Washington. The specific nature of Indian and U.S. objectives will be discussed below.

Beijing watched warily as the India-U.S. military relation grew. Commentaries in *Renmin ribao* noted and elliptically condemned the new direction in India-U.S. ties. An April 2002 article noted that, when Jaswant Singh visited Washington, he was accorded a “grand reception” at the Pentagon and also accorded a special meeting with President Bush. The article was also critical of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Henry Shelton’s upcoming visit to India to expand military relations. The purpose of this exchange, “when China and the United States were deadlocked in a diplomatic impasse caused by the midair [EP-3] collision incident,” was apparent, the article concluded. It “was a gesture the United States deliberately posted for Beijing after Washington ran into a rebuff when dealing with China.” Washington was sending “a clear message to China.” “The United States is expanding its sphere of influence in Asia [into] China’s backyard.” Yet it was hard to predict, the article said, whether India would “become a strategic ally of the United States or a strategic ally of China.” India’s “sudden appearance and its attractiveness may sooner or later change the balance of power among the three countries in this region.” According to the article, the strategic objectives of the United States in allying with India were “establishing a bastion for containing China; checking and containing the Islamic fundamentalists in Central Asia; and promoting democratic politics in South Asia.”⁸⁰

Another article commenting on the same set of events in India-U.S. relations, concluded that New Delhi’s “warm welcome” for the Bush administration’s decision to move forward with missile defense was an Indian “gesture” toward Washington. The United States, for its part, wanted to maneuver India against China. Due to India’s

special strategic position on the U.S. global chessboard, it has always been regarded by the United States as a chip for containing China and Russia. The experience of many years show that preventing any power from coming to the fore to pose a threat to the United States has always been the essence of U.S. foreign policy....⁸¹

But the article also expressed hopes that the U.S. scheme was futile. India “will come into conflict with the United States over its many interests,” the article opined.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ren Yujun, “Purpose of the United States in Playing the ‘India Card’ is Known to All,” *Renmin ribao*, May 14, 2001, FBIS-CHI-2001-0514.

⁸¹ Qian Feng, “Behind the Warming Up of India-U.S. Relations,” *Renmin ribao*, May 14, 2001, FBIS-CHI-2001-0514.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Chinese analyses about the ultimate implications of the burgeoning India-U.S. military partnership did not point in a single direction. On the one hand, that cooperation was seen as increasing the threat to China's security. On the other hand, there was confidence that the India-U.S. partnership would come to naught. One article in *Renmin ribao* argued, for instance, that India was moving toward the deployment and possible use of tactical nuclear weapons.⁸³ Objectively speaking, the article said, "China's current strategic superiority over India would not last long, with the further improvement and development of India's Agni II [medium range ballistic missile], and China would gradually lose its favorable natural defense condition." The "Qinghai-Tibet plateau," the article asserted, would "lose [its] original dignity before India's missiles." India's "current acceleration of its pose of using nuclear power to equip its armed forces" was "inseparable from the profound background of [the recent] U.S. change of its South Asian strategy. Since Bush took office, the United States [has] got increasingly nearer to India." The Americans "actually give tacit consent to India's practice of expanding the nuclear arsenal and developing a 'reliable and minimal nuclear deterrent force'," the article concluded. Another article in *Beijing Review* framed the emerging India-U.S. partnership in terms of India's drive for empire in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, and U.S. endorsement of that drive as a way of containing China. India's leaders had "dreams" of "capturing the leadership of the Indian Ocean region, and even Asia," the writer said. The United States and India were, the author quoted Vajpayee as saying, "natural partners." Washington "regards India as a pillar to stand against China."⁸⁴ In plain speech, India and the United States were working in concert to contain China in the South Asian-Indian Ocean region.

Yet the same article in *Beijing Review* was also confident that India's military and great power ambitions would come to naught. Although the earthquake in Gujarat in January 2001 "could not shake India out of its big power dream, the "reality of [India's] messy internal situation eventually will force it to wake up."⁸⁵ According to another *Renmin ribao* article, South Asia is a region full of complex ethnic and religious contradictions. If the United States became too deeply involved there, "it is bound to run the risk of [being] dragged into the subcontinental mire, including the Kashmir conflict, the thorniest problem there. And the experience of history shows that this is an unending situation that no one is able to break and resolve."⁸⁶

⁸³ "India Needs to Eliminate 'Anxiety' about China," *People's Daily*, September 6, 2001 <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200109/06/eng20010906_79501.html>.

⁸⁴ Shao Zhiyong, "India's Big Power Dreams," *Beijing Review*, April 12, 2001, pp. 9–10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Qian Feng, "Behind the Warming," in FBIS-CHI-2001-0514.

The Impact of September 11 on the Triangle

U.S. reengagement with Pakistan following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States substantially improved China's triangular position. Renewed U.S. economic and political support for Pakistan after September 11 meant that no longer would China be Pakistan's only major supporter. The United States would now share with China responsibility for Pakistan, and thereby share with Beijing New Delhi's anger at extra-regional powers supporting India's nemesis. Beijing could now argue to New Delhi that Chinese support for Pakistan was not some sort of anomaly—as it increasingly was seen as Islamabad slid toward international pariah-hood prior to September 11—but in accord with “international trends.” The renewal of U.S.-Pakistan strategic partnership in the months after September 11 also meant that the United States would be unlikely to condone an Indian attack on Pakistan (in response to infiltration from Pakistan into Indian Kashmir). In other words, China would now share with the United States the burden of deterring, limiting, or ending an Indian attack on Pakistan. Another way of saying this is that U.S. reengagement with Pakistan widened the common interest of China and the United States in maintaining peace between India and Pakistan. This was a major triangular gain for China.

Had Pakistan declined to cooperate with the United States in the campaign against terrorism, and had Washington accepted New Delhi's post-September 11 offer of all necessary assistance in the campaign to destroy the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, China's position could have been severely diminished. Vajpayee's government responded to the September 11 attacks by offering to allow the United States to base all necessary military operations in and out of India. This was an unprecedented offer. Had Pakistan rejected Bush's call for cooperation, the United States was apparently prepared at that juncture to force transit through Pakistan's airspace to reach Afghanistan to conduct operations against Al Qaeda and its Taliban sponsors. Had that occurred, and had the United States and India moved squarely and actively into military alliance, Pakistan might have been pressured into surrender or collapse and the South Asian balance of power upon which Chinese security policy in that region rests would have been overthrown. A Pakistani appeal to China for help in such a situation would have confronted Beijing with the Hobson's choice of abandoning Islamabad or risking war with India and the United States.

Beijing worked to avert such a dire outcome. Beijing fully supported Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf's decision to cooperate with the United States anti-terrorist effort.⁸⁷ In the

⁸⁷ Author's discussion with analyst at National Defense University, Beijing, October 12, 2001.

days and weeks after September 11 Chinese and Pakistani leaders consulted intensely. Musharraf met repeatedly with the Chinese ambassador in Islamabad. Musharraf considered a brief visit to Beijing to discuss the situation in the week after September 11, but this was ruled out, perhaps because of concerns having to do with domestic challenges to Musharraf were he to leave the country at that sensitive juncture.⁸⁸ Instead Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Islamabad for discussions. In these discussions, Beijing indicated that China would welcome Pakistan-U.S. cooperation and continue to support Pakistan in that context.⁸⁹ When Musharraf and Jiang Zemin spoke by telephone at the end of September, Jiang “spoke highly” of, and “expressed full understanding and respect” for, Pakistan’s decision to cooperate with the anti-terrorist efforts of the international community. China also extended \$10 million in emergency aid to Pakistan.⁹⁰

Shortly after September 11 Beijing informed Washington that China, too, would cooperate with the international anti-terrorist campaign. The main reasons for this swift Chinese decision probably had to do with a desire to stabilize relations with the United States by creating a new basis for strategic cooperation. Yet considerations pertaining to South Asia may also have played a role. In any case, it is clear that, with India bidding so high for U.S. support after September 11, and with Pakistan in danger of confronting a U.S.-Indian combination, China’s position in South Asia would have been very precarious if either Beijing or Islamabad had opted to remain outside the anti-terrorist coalition.

Learning the Rules of the New Game

The 1990s constituted a learning process for both India and the United States regarding the operation of the new triangle. Beijing employed triangular diplomacy throughout the decade and seems to have understood fairly well from the start China’s interests within the emerging triangle. New Delhi and Washington, on the other hand, learned the rules of the new game through a process of trial and error.

Throughout the decade, China invited India to cooperate in anti-hegemony, anti-unipolarity activity. As Chinese fears of U.S. containment mounted during the 1990s, this invitation to anti-unipolarity cooperation began playing the role of keeping India away from alignment

⁸⁸ Julie Chao, “China Modifies Position on Military Action,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, September 19, 2001, A6; and *Xinhua*, September 17, 2001, in FBIS-CHI-2001-0917.

⁸⁹ Charles Hutzler, “China’s Quiet, Crucial Role in the War,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2001, A10.

⁹⁰ *Xinhua*, September 30, 2001, in FBIS-CHI-2001-0930.

with the United States. Simultaneously, Beijing explored the possibility of cooperating with the United States against India in the nuclear area. The high priority the Clinton administration placed on nonproliferation, plus the administration's growing desire to build a more constructive relationship with Beijing, induced Washington to work with China on nonproliferation issues that ran counter to Indian policy objectives. Washington apparently had little understanding at that time of the triangular implications of its actions—that is, of how U.S. alignment with China against India would appear in New Delhi. The first concrete instance of U.S.-Chinese alignment against India came during the CTBT and NPT negotiations of 1995–96. It deepened during the October 1997 Sino-American summit, and still further in the immediate aftermath of India's May 1998 nuclear tests.

Initially India abstained from triangular maneuver between the United States and China, even as the latter two moved closer together and began working in tandem against Indian policies. Confronted by Chinese-U.S. cooperation contrary to Indian policy, New Delhi did not respond by triangular maneuver. India's Nehruvian leaders nominally embraced a doctrine of China-India alignment against the United States, but the impracticality of such a policy prevented its actual implementation. New Delhi finally began engaging in triangular diplomacy in May 1998 with Vajpayee's bid for U.S. understanding of the China threat to India. This first Indian attempt at diplomatic maneuver within the triangle was clumsy. The BJP government's abandonment of the elliptical language usual to diplomacy during its first three months in office precipitated strong Chinese counter action. This Chinese pressure soon compelled New Delhi to retract its frank statements about Chinese threats to India and return to the normal bland rhetoric of Sino-Indian comity. This shift did not, however, prevent India from moving steadily forward with construction of a new strategic partnership with Washington. At the same time, New Delhi intensified its demands (in the security dialogue initiated in March 2001) that China begin to decrease its security links with Pakistan. By 2000 New Delhi, too, had learned how the new triangle operated and was using it to achieve leverage vis-à-vis Beijing.

Two factors seem to have been critical in producing New Delhi's embrace of triangular maneuver. First was the experience of confronting the stark reality of Sino-U.S. cooperation in a situation in which India had no backer among the major powers. Second was the March 1998 assumption of power by realist-minded leaders who were highly critical of earlier idealistic foreign policy and committed to a more pragmatic foreign policy of diplomatic maneuver in pursuit of Indian interests.

The American backtracking from close cooperation with China beginning in late 1998 reflected U.S. learning about the operation of the new triangle. Until that point Washington

was not sensitive to Indian triangular concerns. Washington had imagined it could cooperate with China against Indian nuclear policies without rousing a sharp Indian reaction. Beijing's efforts during the 1990s to educate U.S. representatives about Chinese fears of U.S. "containment" had succeeded in making the United States sensitive to Chinese triangular concerns. Washington then began to try to rebutt Beijing's charges that the U.S. sought to contain China by searching for areas in which Washington and Beijing could cooperate. This led, in turn, to the Sino-U.S. alignment against India over nonproliferation. As Sino-U.S. cooperation against India in the nuclear arena deepened between 1995–98, India's reaction grew steadily stronger. United States officials seem to have been initially shocked by New Delhi's strong adverse reaction to Sino-U.S. cooperation against India. By fall 1998, however, in response to Indian pressure, Washington backed away from a tilt toward China and adopted a carefully balanced posture in the India-China relationship. In 2001 the Bush administration adopted a more pronounced tilt toward India in an effort to constrain China. Washington too had learned the rules of the new triangular game. This was before September 11, 2001. After the events of that day, U.S. motivations to cooperate with India intensified still further.

Chinese, Indian, and U.S. Triangular Interests

A pattern of competitive bandwagoning between India and China for U.S. support emerged as the triangle consolidated in the late 1990s.⁹¹ During the early stage of the CTBT negotiations, an Indian-U.S. agreement to the effect that India would not sign but also would not oppose the CTBT treaty led to strong Chinese counter-efforts to align with Washington. Beijing worked to move the United States toward exerting stronger pressure on India to enter the CTBT. Then renewed Sino-U.S. nonproliferation cooperation against India in 1997 was again followed by an Indian appeal (via Vajpayee's May 1998 letter) for U.S. understanding of India's predicament vis-à-vis China and Pakistan. India's bid, in turn, invigorated Chinese efforts to align with the United States against India in the UN Security Council. This move, yet again, was followed by vigorous Indian courtship of the United States during late 1998, which succeeded in drawing the United States away from China and toward a deeper strategic relationship with India. Finally, Beijing moved to restore strategic cooperation with the United States after September 11, when it became apparent that India was prepared for full military alliance with the United States. Both Beijing and New Delhi seem to have been bidding against each other for U.S. support.

⁹¹ My thanks to Dr. Deng Yong of the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, for pointing this out to me.

China's position in the new triangle seems to be the weakest of the three actors. Beijing's conflicts with both India (over Pakistan and the border) and the United States (over Taiwan and the U.S. role in the world) are far deeper than conflicts between India and the United States. Indian-U.S. relations have nothing comparable to Pakistan in the Sino-Indian dyadic relationship or to Taiwan in Sino-U.S. relationship. Moreover, both India and the United States are deeply apprehensive of China's rapidly growing power, and Chinese diplomacy has not been particularly astute in assuaging those apprehensions. China and India are both resentful of U.S. "bullying," and it is conceivable that U.S. policy could force those two countries into alignment against the United States. Such an outcome, however, would require insensitivity not apparent in U.S. policy during the period surveyed here. In fact, as noted above, Washington was fairly quick to learn the rules of the new triangular game.

China seems to have two major interests within the new triangle. The first is to prevent close Indian alignment with the United States. Beijing's strategic nightmare during the post-Cold War period has been U.S. "containment." Very close India-U.S. ties, military cooperation, or Indian participation in U.S.-sponsored political arrangements opposed by Beijing would severely diminish China's security situation. Were Russia to continue its post-September 11 move toward the West, China might eventually find itself confronting a chain of U.S.-friendly states around its entire periphery.

The threat posed to China by a India-U.S. combination would be felt most acutely in Tibet. In that region Beijing confronts a largely hostile if sullen population, immense logistical difficulties, and wide international criticism of its policies. As long as India refuses to cooperate with the various "anti-China forces" regarding Tibet, Beijing's Tibet problem is quite manageable. Indian cooperation with the United States in support of Tibetan "anti-China forces," however, would place Beijing in a far more dangerous situation.

Beijing's second major triangular interest is to avoid paying too high a price to achieve the first objective (of uncoupling New Delhi and Washington). Beijing's objective in the South Asian-Indian Ocean region is to develop multifaceted, cooperative, friendly ties with *all* the countries of that region. This includes military and security links. Expansion of such cooperative relations accords with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Beijing believes. It also comports with the growth of China's national power and the final obliteration of the national humiliation inflicted on China in the century after 1839.⁹² This means that China must recognize

⁹² Regarding the concept of China's national humiliation see, John Garver, *Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993, pp. 4-8.

no barriers to the expansion of its multidimensional, cooperative ties with its “neighbors” in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. Just as a fundamental objective of U.S. diplomacy in the nineteenth century was to prevent a European power from establishing itself in the western sweep of North America thereby potentially blocking the “manifest destiny” of the United States in that region, China today seeks to prevent creation of institutional barriers to the gradual growth of Chinese influence in several neighboring regions, including South Asia. I am not suggesting here that China seeks to annex South Asia in a fashion similar to the U.S. annexation of western North America. The point, rather, is that rising powers often seek to prevent the creation of barriers to the growth of their power and influence in areas they deem crucial to achievement of their historical destiny.

The problem for Beijing is that New Delhi’s notion of the South Asian-Indian Ocean region as India’s security zone combines with the deep, lingering suspicions of China to lead Indian leaders (especially those who assumed power in 1998) to insist that Beijing be sensitive to Indian concerns about various Chinese activities in South Asia. Were Beijing to accede to Indian sensitivities, or were it to give New Delhi a veto over various Chinese security and military links with South Asian-Indian Ocean countries, a significant barrier to the growth of Chinese influence in that region would be institutionalized. By recognizing an Indian sphere of influence in the South Asian-Indian Ocean region, Beijing could certainly persuade New Delhi to disassociate from the United States. But the price would probably be too high for Beijing to accept—too high in terms of the achievement of China’s ultimate destiny as a recognized great power in Asia and the world. Thus while China may occasionally pull back before strong Indian objections or countermoves to various Chinese advances in South Asia, it has avoided, and very probably will continue to avoid, any action signifying recognition of an Indian sphere of influence in South Asia. This will make it difficult for Beijing to achieve a fundamental change in its relations with India.

The beginning of active Indian triangular diplomacy in 1998 placed increased pressure on Beijing to terminate assistance to Pakistan’s nuclear, missile, and other advanced military development programs. Chinese acceptance of Indian demands in this regard, i.e., Chinese military-strategic disengagement from Pakistan, would certainly satisfy New Delhi and guarantee a period of Sino-Indian cooperation. Through negotiations with New Delhi, Beijing could very probably secure a clear Indian disassociation from U.S. moves that Beijing deemed “anti-China” as the quid pro quo for Chinese abandonment of Pakistan. Yet Chinese abandonment of Pakistan could easily lead to Indian dominance over, and subordination of, Pakistan.

Chinese security along its Tibetan border would then henceforth rest on Indian goodwill, and not, as is currently the case, on a balance of power in the South Asian region that constrains India. Rather than rest Chinese security on India's benign intentions, Beijing will probably insist on its right to assist Pakistan's military development efforts. In other words, Beijing will probably opt to found Tibet's security vis-à-vis India on a South Asian balance of power unfavorable to India, rather than on Indian goodwill. Stated differently, China's objective is to persuade India to disassociate itself from the United States while allowing the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership to continue. The Chinese formulate this strategy in terms of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

China's objective is to persuade India to disassociate itself from the United States while allowing the Sino-Pakistani strategic partnership to continue.

Beijing's interests within the new triangle interact with the geopolitical rivalry with India described in the previous paragraphs. Beijing's interests lead it to seek to inspire U.S. actions in South Asia that limit or constrain Indian power, or that work against recognition of an Indian sphere of influence in that region. Beijing will seek to keep the United States engaged with Pakistan and prevent U.S. policy in the Indo-Pakistan equation from tilting too far toward India. Beijing will seek U.S. understanding of China's refusal to bow to Indian objections of China's military-security ties with countries of the South Asian-Indian Ocean region. Subtly, and certainly privately, Chinese representatives will disparage Indian ambitions before U.S. leaders—the point being that India is not really in the same class as China and the United States, and that it is unreasonable for either to bow to New Delhi's outrageous demands. Beijing will demand that the United States prove it is not “containing” China by promoting India as paramount power in South Asia, or by otherwise appeasing New Delhi's regional hegemonic ambitions. The United States has, over the years, repeatedly made pledges that it is not “containing” China. Now the United States should prove its sincerity, Chinese diplomats will say, by not injuring Chinese interests in the South Asian region. In this way, Sino-U.S. friendship will advance, grow, and prosper. Such a friendship, Chinese representatives will say, will have many benefits, some of which will accrue to U.S. corporations seeking contracts in China. Narrower objectives of Chinese triangular lobbying in Washington may be to prevent or limit the transfer of U.S. military or dual use technology to India.

India for its part seems to have three primary interests within the new triangle. The first is to prevent or abort Chinese-U.S. cooperation contrary to Indian policy objectives. As demonstrated earlier, instances of Sino-U.S. cooperation to press India to accept non-nuclear

status roused India to vigorous countermeasures by the late 1990s. More broadly, and more nebulously, India wants to prevent U.S. support for a broader Chinese role in South Asia.

A second Indian interest seems to be to play on Washington's apprehensions over China's growing power to secure U.S. support, or at least U.S. understanding, for strengthening India's pre-eminent position in the South Asian-Indian Ocean region via transfers of advanced military technologies, training in modern modes of warfare, and so on. New Delhi may also attempt to secure U.S. support for moves to counter China's growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean perhaps by strengthening Indian naval capabilities in the Andaman Sea-Bay of Bengal region, or helping persuade Burma's government not to undertake deeper naval cooperation with China. Stronger U.S. support for India would also be manifest in economic areas (access to the U.S. market, U.S. investment, etc.) or in support for India in the UN Security Council and other international fora.

Aside from playing on U.S. apprehensions of China's rising power, New Delhi may also play on a U.S. desire to co-opt India into the U.S.-led system of global power in order to secure stronger U.S. support for Indian economic and military development. There is an indirect but significant link between the U.S. desire to co-opt India into the U.S. system of global hegemony and China. During the post-Cold War period, China emerged as the most powerful and vociferous critic of U.S. "unipolarity"—at least until the September 11, 2001, arrival of radical Islam. Indian refusal to make common "anti-unipolarity" cause with China thus strengthens the new post-Cold War system of U.S. unipolarity.

The relationship between India's quest for greater U.S. support and the simultaneous objective of eventually securing U.S. military withdrawal from the South Asian-Indian Ocean region also merits consideration. It may be that India's position within the region is anticipated to grow with U.S. support and understanding. Then once U.S. power begins to decline, as most Indian analysts believe is inevitable, Washington's influences will recede from the region leaving India as the exclusive, paramount power.

Finally, India's third interest within the new triangle is to play on Chinese fears of Indian participation in U.S. inspired "anti-China" schemes to make Beijing more understanding of Indian objections to Chinese activities in the South Asian-Indian Ocean region. As noted earlier, Indian leaders are concerned over a wide range of Chinese activities in the South Asian region: assisting Pakistan's missile and nuclear programs, deploying powerful and offensive military forces to Tibet, road building in and visits by Chinese warships to Burma, Chinese naval interest in association with the new Pakistani port at Gwadar in western Baluchistan, etc. From Beijing's perspective, these are normal, ordinary forms of state-to-state cooperation

that do not in any way constitute a threat to India, and that fall under the purview of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. According to Beijing, India has no right or grounds for objecting to China's friendly, cooperative ties with its neighbors. New Delhi, however, maintains that for the sake of Sino-Indian friendship, and mutual non-threat, Beijing should be more respectful of India's concerns.

Over the years India has had little and relatively weak leverage to press Beijing to cease and desist from such objectionable activities. Until it engineered the new partnership with the United States, New Delhi had few if any instruments that it could use to pressure Beijing to be more sensitive to such Indian concerns. Now the real prospect of closer Indian-U.S. partnership has given New Delhi significant leverage with Beijing. The threat of an Indian link with the United States may prove to be a far more effective instrument of pressure.

Regarding U.S. interests in the new triangle, it is significant that U.S. triangular diplomacy began and then deepened under two presidential administrations with very different perspectives foreign relations. The Clinton administration was an advocate of "comprehensive engagement" with China (after early 1994, in any case) and rejected the view that China was a strategic competitor of the United States. The Bush administration took a far more skeptical and guarded approach to China. At the same time, both administrations sought to forge a new relationship with India. This suggests that very fundamental interests underlie that new relationship. *Some* of those interests are related to the creation of a structure of power in Asia that will constrain an increasingly powerful and assertive China. India-U.S. relations cannot, of course, be reduced entirely to China; nor is that the proposition argued in this essay. Yet it does seem that considerations touching on China's rapidly growing power and ambitions constitute one important element of the new U.S. relationship with India. As China's power continues to grow in the coming decades, the problem for Washington will be how to induce Beijing not to embark on a course of hegemony, territorial expansion, or confrontation with the United States in Asia. The U.S. concern is that China might, at some point in the coming decades, follow the course of Germany in the 1890s, 1900s, and 1930s or of Japan in the 1910s and 1930s. Supporting the emergence of a strong India is a way of creating an Asian structure of power that will constrain a rising China, making resort to aggression less likely.

The new U.S. policies toward India are in the same category as efforts nudging Japan toward a larger political-military role in Asia or the strengthening of the U.S.-Australian alliance. U.S. efforts toward all three powers (India, Japan, and Australia) help create a structure of power that will be less inviting to Chinese aggression in the decades ahead—or at least, this seems to be the unspoken thinking that dominates U.S. policy.

The Future Evolution of the Triangle

It is doubtful that, under present circumstances, Beijing would actually be willing to move very far along the path toward close Sino-Indian alignment against the United States. Since the revolution in China's international orientation engineered by Deng Xiaoping circa 1978—and reaffirmed by Jiang Zemin since Deng's death in 1997—the foundation of China's diplomatic strategy has been maintaining stable, cooperative relations with the United States. This approach has been based on the understanding that cooperative relations with the United States were vital to the success of China's economic development drive. China's leaders (or at least those who followed Deng Xiaoping) understood that China needed access to the vast U.S. market, U.S. capital, technology, and higher education. Beijing might toy with aligning with India against the United States, but, once such cooperation gave signs of angering Washington and endangering China's ability to pump the U.S. economy, Beijing would almost certainly lose interest. The same can be said for India, although the Indian political elite has by no means gone as far as China's in embracing full participation in the global economy.

From Beijing's perspective, the real utility of invitations to, and episodes of, alignment with India against the United States is spoiling India-U.S. cooperation. Sino-Indian cooperation against the United States automatically deflates the idea of a U.S.-Indian "natural alliance" based on common democratic values and institutions. It will also anger some ordinary Americans who, perceiving their nation as making considerable sacrifices for the security of all democratic states, expect at least sympathy from other democracies for that effort. There is no such U.S. expectation in the case of non-democratic China. A China-Indian bloc condemning, say, U.S. actions in the Middle East would cost India much more than China in terms of U.S. goodwill. Sino-Indian cooperation against the United States also appeals to the third-worldist, anti-U.S. orientation of India's traditional Nehruvians. It is in China's interests to mobilize those Nehruvian forces to keep India away from close alignment with the United States, and rhetoric and episodes of Indian-Chinese third-world brotherhood may help accomplish this goal. Instances of Sino-Indian cooperation against American unipolarity or western domination demonstrate to India's Nehruvians that Sino-Indian cooperation is a real possibility and that India should not, therefore, get too close to Washington lest Beijing be angered.

For Beijing the prospect of cooperation with the United States against India is a far more attractive prospect than cooperation with India against the United States. Such Sino-Ameri-

can cooperation would imply recognition of convergent U.S. and Chinese interests. It would mean that the United States, like China, refused to accept India's claimed right to veto military-security links between South Asian-Indian Ocean countries and extra-regional powers. It would also probably mean that the United States would not condone an Indian effort to subordinate Pakistan or accept India as the equal of China and the United States in the UN Security Council, under the Nonproliferation Treaty, and so on. Cooperation with the United States in the South Asian region would be a very big step toward the Chinese goal being accepted as the peer of the United States as a global power. India's ability to confound China would also be correspondingly reduced.

It is also probable that India will not be interested in close alignment with the United States against China. India's policy objective, at least at the time of writing in mid-2002, is to use closer ties with the United States to increase pressure on Beijing, eventually compelling Beijing to accept a relationship compatible with India's basic security concerns. Overly close Indian alignment with the United States might so scare Beijing as to make concessions to India even less likely. Moreover, if and when Beijing is prepared to meet India's terms, India could be expected to move away from the United States.

The character of U.S. policy will clearly influence the evolution of Sino-Indian relations. U.S. policies of arrogance, economic protectionism, or military aggression that threaten both India and China could conceivably force those two countries into alignment. On the other hand, there is every reason to believe that U.S. policies sensitive to the nuances of the new triangle should be able to prevent the emergence of an anti-U.S., China-India bloc. It could well be in the interest of both New Delhi and Beijing to stimulate Washington's fears of a possible India-China alignment against the United States, since it would induce the United States to pay more for Chinese and Indian abstention from such a combination.

A debate seems to be emerging within the United States over how far Washington should go in aligning with India. The contrast between the Clinton administration's abstention from military ties in the context of the post-nuclear test rapprochement and the Bush administration's enthusiastic embrace of military cooperation was noted earlier. This difference seems to have been linked to the two presidents' differing approaches to China. The differences over U.S. triangular policy were not part of the U.S. debate over China policy during the late 1990s, but the trend now seems to be changing. The India factor is increasingly entering the ongoing U.S. policy debate over China.

The prominent U.S. China specialist Harry Harding argued in 2001 against an U.S.-Indian alignment to counter China. The United States should seek to expand cooperation with India, place greater stress on the importance and role of India in the world, and treat India more on a par with China, Harding argues. But for the United States to pursue a firm strategic alignment with India as a counterweight against China would be both unnecessary and unwise. It would be unnecessary, Harding argues, because the United States should not assume a confrontational relationship with China. It would be unwise because it would lock both the United States and India into an antagonistic relationship with China that would not be in either country's interest. A U.S.-India strategic combination against China could also, Harding warns, imply a U.S. commitment to India's security that might be too costly for the United States. It could also imply an Indian dependence on the United States that would be unacceptable for India.⁹³

A commentary in the *Wall Street Journal* by a councilor at the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC, reached similar conclusions. "The Bush administration's adamant denial that its overtures toward India have anything to do with China is believed by nobody in Asia, least of all the Indians," the editorial warns. "No amount of diplomatic pleasantries... can dismiss the [Asian] presumption that the U.S. and India are joining hands to 'balance' Chinese power." U.S. embrace of India could encourage Indian bullying of other South Asian countries, which would "ultimately... provide an excuse for Chinese skulduggery toward India's weaker neighbors." U.S. alignment with India risked stimulating a "tit-for-tat competition [between China and India] for spheres of influence in South and Southeast Asia," the author warned.⁹⁴

Advocates of a U.S. policy of containing China argue that the United States should forge an alliance with India.⁹⁵ Bill Gertz, China reporter for the *Washington Times*, argues, for example, that "the United States should seek to develop a strategic alliance as part of a larger policy of pressing China into adopting noncommunist democratic reforms." That alliance should "be aboveboard in frankly identifying China as the major threat to peace, stability, and freedom in Asia."⁹⁶ In addition to Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, Gertz argues, the new

⁹³ Harry Harding, "Conclusion: Implications for the U.S." *The India-China Relationship: What the United States Needs to Know* (Conference Report), November 30, 2001, The Asian Society and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

⁹⁴ Kenneth Weisborode, "Don't Rush to the Alter with India," *Wall Street Journal*, August 22, 2001.

⁹⁵ Zalmay M. Khalilzad, et. al., *The United States and a Rising China, Strategic and Military Implications*, Santa Monica: RAND, Project Air Force, 1999, pp. 69–70.

⁹⁶ Bill Gertz, *The China Threat, How the People's Republic Targets America*, Washington, DC: Regnery Publishers, 2000, p. 202.

alliance should include India. William C. Triplett II and Michael Pillsbury also see a common Chinese threat to India and the United States, although they stop short in their published writings of calling for an open Indo-U.S. alliance against China.⁹⁷

The conference report of a multiyear Asia Society-Woodrow Wilson Center project on the India-China relationship laid out a centrist series of recommendations for U.S. policy. The United States should approach both India and China as rising powers whose relationship will be a key factor in the Asian region, the report urged. The U.S. should seek to develop relations “with each country on its own merits, not in zero-sum terms,” and, therefore, the “United States should not assume a hostile relationship with China, with whom many common interests do exist.” Washington “should encourage India and China to develop closer relations with each other, and to maintain and expand ties,” secure in the knowledge that the “chances of Sino-Indian ties leading to an opposing force against the United States in the region is remote, because our relationship with each will still be better than each country’s relations with the other.” The report also recognized the difficulty in actually delinking relations with one from U.S. relations with the other (i.e., dealing “with each country on its own merits”). “[M]any Chinese viewed this [Asia Society-Wilson Center] India-China project with suspicion, thinking this might be an attempt by the American government to pit one power against the other in order to weaken them both.”⁹⁸

It seems likely that, regardless of what actual U.S. intentions might be, Chinese analysts will conclude that the new India-U.S. military relationship is, to a substantial degree, directed against China. This means that forging a new India-U.S. military relationship will have triangular consequences *regardless* of U.S. intentions. This fact will, in turn, put U.S. opponents of an American tilt toward India in a quandary. Since Chinese beliefs and perceptions will determine Chinese behavior, U.S. opponents of a tilt toward India will need to oppose (logically at least) any U.S. ties with India that Beijing might deem threatening. This approach would cede considerable triangular leverage to Beijing and would enable China to use its

*Forging a new India-U.S. relationship
will have triangular consequences
regardless of U.S. intentions.*

⁹⁷ Edward Timperlake and William C. Triplett II, *Red Dragon Rising, Communist China’s Military Threat to America*, Washington, DC: Regnery Publishers, 1999; and Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2000, pp. 138–53.

⁹⁸ Justin Sommers, Rapporteur, *The India-China Relationship: What the United States Needs to Know*, Conference Report, November 30, 2001, The Asia Society and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, pp. 30–31.

anger to block advances in India-U.S. cooperation. If, on the other hand, Washington developed cooperative ties with India on the basis of what Washington professes are U.S. interests other than those having to do with China, and without granting Beijing a veto over those ties, those advances in Indo-U.S. ties will almost certainly confirm China's sinister interpretations of U.S. policy.

It is also fairly clear that the Bush administration has no interest in unnecessarily antagonizing Beijing. While adopting more vigilant policies toward China in a number of areas, the new administration made clear its desire to continue to engage and cooperate with Beijing. This was the central message of Secretary of State Colin Powell's July 2001 visit to Beijing. After September 11 the administration's desire for a working relation with China was even stronger. This intention suggests that while strengthening India to create a more China-constraining balance of power in Asia, the administration will take moves to minimize the possibility that these policies will antagonize Beijing. Thus, the administration's newly appointed ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, said in his first major address on U.S.-India relations after assuming his post: "U.S.-India relations will stand on their own during the Bush administration. They will not be directed against any third party."⁹⁹

Henry Kissinger observed that, when a country abjures the intention of exploiting a conflict between two other nations, "it is in fact signaling that it has the capacity to do so and that both parties would do well to work at preserving that neutrality."¹⁰⁰ When the 1972 communiqué between China and the United States laid out the anti-hegemony clause that became the foundation of Sino-American cooperation against the Soviet Union, for example, it also abjured any intention of cooperating against Moscow. The clause immediately following the famous anti-hegemony provision in the 1972 communiqué stipulated that neither China nor the United States would enter into "agreements or understandings with the other directed at other states."¹⁰¹ In other words, the anti-hegemony clause of the preceding section was not directed against the Soviet Union. Such disclaimers had diplomatic utility but could not be taken at face value. We can expect Washington to reject the proposition that it is trying to align with one member of the new triangle against the third party, even while it is, in fact, doing precisely that. Beijing and New Delhi will also resort to similar protective coloration.

⁹⁹ Robert Blackwill, "The Future of U.S.-India Relations," Remarks to the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce and Indo-American Society, Mumbai, India, September 6, 2001 <www.state.gov/p/sa/rls/rm/4850pf.htm>.

¹⁰⁰ Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York: Touchstone, 1994, p. 724.

¹⁰¹ The 1972 communiqué is in Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China Since 1972*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1992, p. 376.

The emerging U.S. debate over engagement with India echoes the debate over engagement with China in the late 1970s. At that juncture, one perspective within the U.S. foreign policy establishment, represented by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, argued against closer U.S. engagement with China on the grounds that it would antagonize the Soviet Union and thus make Soviet-American cooperation more difficult. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski represented the other point of view and argued in favor of forging a Sino-American strategic partnership as a way of constraining and pressuring the Soviet Union. Eventually the aggressive behavior of the Soviet Union in Indochina, Africa, and Afghanistan persuaded President Jimmy Carter of the wisdom of Brzezinski's point of view.

As the outcome of the debate between Vance and Brzezinski suggests, the decisive factor in emerging U.S. policy debate may well be the behavior of China. If China pursues assertive policies that antagonize India and the United States, it will probably drive those two powers ever closer together. If, on the other hand, Beijing draws back from antagonistic policies toward one or both of those powers, China may be better able to exploit the contradictions between Washington and New Delhi. In this case, the pattern of triangular interaction may remain more flexible, with each actor shifting first closer to one actor and then closer to the other to achieve particular objectives.

The record of Chinese diplomacy in this regard is not encouraging. Beijing's practice over the past 13 years (since 1989, which we can take as marking the end of the Cold War) has succeeded in antagonizing both Washington and New Delhi. China's relations with the United States have been marred by severe crises every several years: in 1989 the Beijing massacre led to the collapse of the old Sino-American amity; in 1994 came the confrontation over most favored nation status and human rights; in 1996 militarized confrontation over Taiwan occurred; and then in 1999 officially condoned Chinese mobs besieged and (in Chengdu) burned U.S. diplomatic facilities because of the "deliberate" U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Two years later, in 2001, came the bitter standoff over the EP-3 collision and U.S. surveillance flights in international airspace off the Chinese coast. These episodes were *not* entirely China's responsibility, nor was China entirely in the wrong. Nonetheless, it is fair to conclude that Beijing's tough, forceful handling of each of these episodes did play a significant role in the downward spiral of Sino-U.S. relations and stimulated growing U.S. apprehension about China's future course.

China's diplomacy toward India was equally firm, and equally successful at antagonizing New Delhi. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Beijing continued to assist Pakistan's nuclear weapons programs. After China's entry into the Nonproliferation Treaty in 1993 such

assistance ceased, but Chinese assistance to Pakistan's civilian nuclear power programs continued. It is well understood that nuclear technologies and know-how are intrinsically fungible. By the early 1990s, China was assiduously assisting Pakistan's missile programs thereby helping Islamabad to acquire assured means of delivering its new nuclear bombs. All this was done under the cover of Chinese denials and subterfuge accompanied by adamant insistence that China's nuclear and military cooperation with Pakistan was not a legitimate concern of India. Throughout the 1990s Beijing expanded military cooperation with Burma on India's eastern flank. By the late 1990s the Indian Ocean had become a favored focus of ship visits and official exchanges by the Chinese navy. Again there were two sides to this story. Aggressive or sinister motives should not be attributed to this pattern of Chinese activity.¹⁰² Yet, once again, it is fair to conclude that this pattern of Chinese activity was instrumental in pushing India toward strategic partnership with the United States.

We may be witnessing a drawing together of various states apprehensive over China's growing power. The case of Germany's rise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries comes to mind. Fearful of Germany's rapidly growing power and antagonized by assertive, abrasive Berlin diplomacy, Russia, France, and Britain drew together to counter Germany. This outcome was by no means inevitable but was largely the product of inept German diplomacy.¹⁰³ China's diplomacy since 1989 does not seem to have been any more adept at keeping the various powers from fearing and coalescing against it. In fact, Beijing's actions—its repeated confrontations with the United States and its dogged insistence on arming Pakistan—have steadily pushed Washington and New Delhi closer together. Unless China can produce a statesman closer to the caliber of Otto von Bismark, the *sine qua non* of whose diplomacy was to keep Russia, France, and Britain from uniting against Germany, the future may be gloomy, or to return to the narrower theme of this essay, alignments within the new post-Cold War triangle may become rigid. Rather than allowing the new Sino-Indian-U.S. triangle to evolve toward an ever-shifting, flexible, three-cornered minuet, continuation of Beijing's abrasive policies of the 1990s may well move the new triangle in the direction of a fairly stable combination of India and the United States against China.

¹⁰² John W. Garver, "The Security Dilemma in Sino-Indian Relations," *India Review*.

¹⁰³ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, pp. 145–200.

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