

# Missed Opportunities: The United States and Indian Strategic Relationship Following the Cold War

A Monograph

by

LtCol Charles C. Readinger  
US Marine Corps



School of Advanced Military Studies  
US Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, KS

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Name of Candidate: LtCol Charles C. Readinger

Monograph Title: Missed Opportunities: The United States and Indian Strategic Relationship Following the Cold War

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Monograph Director  
Melissa A. Thomas, PhD

\_\_\_\_\_, ASLSP Director  
Barry M. Stentiford, PhD

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies  
James C. Markert, COL

Accepted this 24th day of May 2018 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

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## Abstract

Missed Opportunities: The United States and Indian Strategic Relationship Following the Cold War, by LtCol Charles C. Readinger, USMC, 42 pages.

The monograph analyzes the strategic relationship between the United States and India. The purpose of this monograph is to examine why the relationship between the United States and India did not strengthen more rapidly following the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are four main reasons the United States and India have not developed a stronger strategic partnership since the end of the Cold War. First, the United States supported the expansion of liberal democracy globally and acted to prevent catastrophe in less strategically significant regions throughout the last three decades. These actions diverted attention from strengthening functioning, developing democracies, such as India, and enabling their growth into reliable and powerful allies. Second, on the occasions when executive leadership focused on the US and Indian relationship, domestic politics consistently hindered the progress that was possible in US and Indian foreign policy. Third, regardless of the reason, US financial and military support to Pakistan stunted the growth of a strong partnership with India. Finally, China's growth as an economic and military power forces both India and the United States to hedge their actions relative to China in order to protect their economic interests. India and the United States fear that too strong of an overt partnership may provoke China and precipitate an aggressive Chinese response. The conclusion makes three recommendations on how the United States and India can act to form a closer strategic partnership. In short, the United States should continue to pursue and expand multilateral military exercises and partnerships, maintain bilateral consistency with India, and invest greater resources into the relationship with India.

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## Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear–Test–Ban Treaty
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
OBOR	One Belt, One Road
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USS	United States Ship
WWII	World War II

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## Introduction

India's and China's mutual dependence on the same sea lanes could also lead to an alliance between them that, in some circumstances, might be implicitly hostile to the United States. In other words, the Indian Ocean will be where global power dynamics will be revealed. Together with the contiguous Near East and Central Asia, it constitutes the new Great Game in geopolitics.

—Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*

Great power competition is reemerging due to Russia reasserting itself as an active global power and China continuing to pursue its national interests in East Asia and further afield. In response, the United States continues to search for policies and strategies that reassure traditional western allies while seeking to broaden or deepen partnerships with other countries that can help sustain US interests and influence around the globe. India is postured as a potential key strategic partner for the United States, not only regionally, but globally. On August 21, 2017 President Donald Trump stated that a “critical part of the South Asia strategy for America is to further develop its strategic partnership with India, the world’s largest democracy and a key security and economic partner of the United States.”<sup>1</sup> He continued by expressing appreciation for India’s contributions to stability in Afghanistan, but also asserted, “India makes billions of dollars in trade with the United States, and we want them to help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development.”<sup>2</sup>

The President’s comments echo those expressed by the three previous presidents with regard to US ambitions toward the relationship with India. India’s values and ideas are generally compatible with other western democracies. India’s geographic position and demographic potential are compelling reasons for a strategic partnership. The contested security situation in the

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<sup>1</sup> Natalie Jennings, “Trumps Muscular but Vague Afghanistan Speech, Annotated,” *Washington Post*, August 21, 2017, accessed August 22, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/08/21/president-trumps-primetime-address-on-afghanistan-annotated/?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main\\_trumptranscript-1053pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.ca7dceae7b83](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/08/21/president-trumps-primetime-address-on-afghanistan-annotated/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_trumptranscript-1053pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.ca7dceae7b83).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

global commons in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific demonstrates the strategic importance of the subcontinent. So why has the United States not built a stronger strategic partnership with India since the end of the Cold War?

The purpose of this monograph is to answer the question of why the relationship between the United States and India did not strengthen more rapidly following the collapse of the Soviet Union. There seem to be four primary reasons the United States and India have not developed a closer strategic partnership. First, the United States' idealistic pursuit of spreading liberal democracy conflicted with India's economic and security requirements as a still developing democratic country and created policy friction and a lack of attention to bilateral goals. Second, domestic politics and agendas in each country continually hindered strategic progress in the partnership by curtailing positive initiatives from executive leadership. The third and fourth reasons are the complicated relationships the United States and India maintain with Pakistan and China. Specifically, the United States and India face the difficulty of balancing these relationships while pursuing short-term goals often at the expense of a long-term partnership in the dynamic Indo-Pacific region.

The monograph will proceed in four sections. First, selected background events from the US and Indian relationship are described in order to provide context and trends in the complicated history of the geopolitics in South Asia from 1947 to 1991. Second, the monograph provides a discussion of how democracy and domestic politics complicate strategic decisions for the United States and India as a result of how leaders must prioritize international initiatives in light of opinions from their home audiences. Third, the monograph addresses the complexities of developing a consistent narrative with regard to foreign policy in the challenging neighborhood of South Asia. Finally, the conclusion makes three recommendations on how the United States and India can act to form a closer strategic partnership.

## Intricate History

The United States and India are estranged democracies not because we have failed to understand each other, but because of conflicting policies we and they have pursued with regard to the most elemental of national interests, military security.

—Senator Daniel P. Moynihan, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies*

From before partition on 15 August 1947 when India gained independence from the British Raj, the relationship between the United States and India has been one of cautious optimism and ubiquitous suspicion. There is a long history of choices by each nation made to solve an immediate security dilemma that prevented a bilateral partnership from developing. A majority of these security dilemmas were a product of the Cold War and a continuation of the Great Game played between Russia and Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> This section presents a brief background on these choices and policies involving the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Pakistan, and China before discussing why a closer strategic partnership has not developed between the United States and India following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### World War II, the First Kashmir War, and Nonalignment

US support of British policy during WWII and immediately following partition during the First Kashmir War strengthened Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's ideas about a policy of nonalignment. Nehru led India to remain nonaligned because he did not want a treaty or an alliance to inhibit India's pursuit of its national interests due to obligations to a larger power. As a result of Nehru's enduring legacy, India's history of nonalignment remains a factor in Indian foreign policy.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992). The "Great Game" is a common term used to describe the contest between the British and Russian empires for influence in Southwest and Central Asia and the Middle East, primarily during the nineteenth century.

American and Indian ideals were in line even before India was a nation, but US and Indian goals did not align during World War II. President Franklin D. Roosevelt lobbied for India's right of self-determination and a timeline for Indian independence with Prime Minister Winston Churchill numerous times during the war. Churchill was adamant that he did not want to be in charge of the collapse of the British Empire and was skeptical of the Indian ability to govern themselves. Therefore, he resisted Roosevelt vigorously. Roosevelt prioritized the special relationship with Great Britain and winning the war against the Japanese on the subcontinent over pressing for Indian independence. Jawaharlal Nehru believed independence took priority over defeating the Axis powers as India was providing most of the men and some of the material for the fight in Burma. Indian leaders were disappointed that the United States did not prove more anti-imperialist and owing to "this divergence of priorities, what could have been a promising start to the Indo-US relationship in fact was characterized by deep ambivalence on both sides."<sup>4</sup>

Another event occurred shortly after partition that tainted any hope of an early, productive relationship between the United States and India. In October of 1947, Pashtun tribesman from northwest Pakistan and Pakistani military personnel invaded the Hindu-ruled, majority-Muslim area of Kashmir, starting the First Kashmir War. At partition, Kashmir remained undecided whether to become a part of India or Pakistan, but shortly after the Pakistani invasion, the Hindu ruler of Kashmir decided to move to the Indian side in exchange for help in stopping the invaders. By the time India took action, Pakistan controlled a third of the territory of Kashmir. In an attempt to contain the conflict and preserve its reputation with the greater Arab world by not aligning with India, Britain influenced India not to expand military operations into other parts of Pakistan.

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<sup>4</sup> S. Paul Kapur, "India and the United States from World War II to the Present: A Relationship Transformed," in *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Sumit Ganguly (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 253.

In November of 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. Britain was sensitive to Arab perception and concerned about British interests in the Middle East due to the unpopular reactions of Palestinian Arabs. For this reason, British diplomacy with regard to Kashmir was perceived by India as support for Pakistani and Muslim interests in Kashmir. The United States chose to defer to the regional experience of a longtime ally and again demonstrated insensitivity to the Indian position because of its relationship with Britain. US diplomats went so far as to threaten that Indian aggression in Kashmir could jeopardize a future relationship with the United States. India viewed Kashmir as a South Asian matter and did not appreciate US and British interference. These actions set the stage for the geographic, ethnic, and religious disputes that haunt the Kashmir region to the present day. Additionally, following the US threat, Indian leadership countered and “suggested that they might establish closer ties with the Soviet Union in the future” despite their preference for India to remain non-aligned.<sup>5</sup>

Nehru’s initial experiences with powerful nations attempting to intervene in what he perceived to be local concerns cemented his already hardened stance on a policy of nonalignment. He envisioned India as a “democratic, anticolonial, anti-imperialistic, secular, pluralistic, antiwar, and pro-world-peace” independent nation serving as a model to the developing world.<sup>6</sup> Due to the length of his tenure in power and the continuation of his family members as major players in Indian politics, the nonalignment policy continues to hinder consistent diplomacy between the United States and India. Despite the many shared US and Indian values, Nehru’s policy deterred the United States from seeking a close relationship with India even if US policy in South Asia was not erratic in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

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<sup>5</sup> Kapur, “India and the United States from World War II to the Present,” 255.

<sup>6</sup> Nirode Mohanty, *Indo-US Relations: Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Nuclear Energy* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 39.



Figure 1. Disputed Areas of Jammu and Kashmir. Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection – UT Library Online, accessed December 10, 2017, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/kashmir\\_disputed\\_2003.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/kashmir_disputed_2003.jpg).

## The Sino-Indian War and the Second Kashmir War

During the 1960's the United States supported India during its brief war with the Chinese in 1962 and then restrained Indian ambitions a few years later. Ultimately, US actions during the Sino-Indian War and the Second Kashmir War encouraged the strategic relationship between Pakistan and China and strengthened India's tilt toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The closest Nehru came to abandoning his position of nonalignment occurred when China decisively defeated Indian forces with an offensive begun on October 20, 1962, intended to

settle the border dispute along the mountainous frontier. Throughout the 1950's, US policy favored Pakistan due to the security of important US listening stations strategically located in and around Peshawar, designed to collect information on the Soviets. However, President John F. Kennedy decided to adjust policy and engage neutral developing countries like India in order to wrest nonaligned nations away from Soviet influence and to counter the Communist Chinese. The Chinese attack provided the opportunity in India and the Kennedy administration proceeded with a promise of military aid in response to a desperate plea from Nehru for not only equipment, but also direct participation. The request from Nehru was probably deeply humiliating for a proud man "who had always insisted that India follow the path of independence and self-reliance."<sup>7</sup>

The urgency for American action and Indian desperation decreased precipitously in late November when the Chinese declared a unilateral ceasefire. However, three choices made during these few months of conflict had significant ramifications for the subcontinent in the next decade. First, the US offer of military aid to India encouraged Pakistan to seek a closer relationship with China to hedge against a perceived growing US preference for India. Second, an embarrassed India refocused on strengthening its military due to the loss of terrain on the northern border resulting from a military defeat. Third, the Soviet decision to remain neutral in the conflict avoided giving offense to China and enabled continued Soviet engagement with India.<sup>8</sup>

On August 5, 1965, the Pakistani military launched the Second Kashmir War with Operation Gibraltar, an infiltration into Kashmir to link up with disenfranchised Muslims and encourage insurgency in the Vale of Kashmir. The aim of the war was to establish dominion over parts of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan proceeded with Operation Gibraltar based on three primary assumptions. First, India was slowly integrating Kashmir into the Indian system and the international community was losing interest in resolving the dispute over the region. Second,

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<sup>7</sup> Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 272 – 292.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-304.

Pakistan believed India would not resist a quick asymmetric incursion that created a rebellion on the Indian periphery. Finally, Pakistan believed that if the operation expanded into a major conflict with India, then China would come to Pakistan's aid.<sup>9</sup> The second two assumptions proved false.

The Indian military was rapidly alerted to the infiltration by confused Kashmiri citizens, decisively acted to resist the insurgents, and counter-attacked Pakistan south of Kashmir. The Indian Army achieved relatively successful results against conventional Pakistani military forces at Khem Karan in Punjab. The Indian military was eager to exploit local terrain advantages and continue hostilities, but reluctantly accepted a ceasefire under pressure from the United Nations. The ceasefire was supported by the United States. From the Indian perspective, the United States had again sided with Pakistan and worse disengaged from helping resolve the Kashmir dispute in the aftermath because of the need to focus on Vietnam. The Soviets seized the opportunity to broker the ceasefire agreements in Tashkent in 1966, which further tilted Indian preferences toward the Soviet Union despite its stated posture of nonalignment.<sup>10</sup>

## The Soviet Treaty, Bangladesh, and the Nuclear Test

US and Indian policy decisions made in light of Cold War tensions and the ongoing Vietnam conflict caused US and Indian relations to further degrade in the 1970s. India's treaty with the USSR, US support of Pakistan during the conflict over Bangladesh, and India's nuclear tests combined to make for a bad decade.

Nineteen seventy-one proved to be the low point in the US and Indian relationship and influenced the dynamic on the subcontinent until well after the Cold War ended. Due to Pakistan's friendship with China and a need to end the Vietnam War, President Richard Nixon cultivated relations with Pakistan in order to open diplomatic relations with China. Nixon's less-

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<sup>9</sup> Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 40-43.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-47.

than-friendly relationship with Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and India's need for assurance against threats from Pakistan and China prompted the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation between India and the Soviets. Following the Treaty of Friendship in 1971, India was "lined up with America's principal foe while, at the same time, Washington was itself aligned with India's major enemy," Pakistan.<sup>11</sup> The treaty was not an alliance, but it did send a message to the United States and China that India also had a powerful sponsor on the subcontinent.

While India was signing the treaty with the Soviets, the majority-Muslim Bengali population in East Pakistan was posing large problems for the central government located in West Pakistan. For a myriad of reasons outside the scope of this background, the Pakistani military violently repressed the Bengali resistance in East Pakistan, which was receiving support and refuge from inside India. The principal reason for Pakistan's desire to maintain the dysfunctional unity of its split nation was predominantly preservation of an independent Muslim nation. Much like the disputed areas of Kashmir, losing dominion over the Muslim population in East Pakistan would weaken Pakistan's reason for existence at partition. As India increased support to the resistance forces and planned to take action inside East Pakistan, the Pakistani military attacked Indian airfields in the western part of the country and declared war on India. India quickly used its geographical advantage of bisecting Pakistan and invaded East Pakistan while conducting actions on its western border to prevent Pakistani reinforcements. India's decisive actions ended the war within two weeks, leading to the creation of the independent nation of Bangladesh and the capture of 93,000 Pakistani soldiers stranded in the East.<sup>12</sup>

The 1971 War was an embarrassing loss for Pakistan, but US actions during the conflict were most detrimental to the US relationship with India. The United States supported the

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<sup>11</sup> Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-1991* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1993), xiii.

<sup>12</sup> Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, 63-69.

Pakistani position during the brief war and attempted to send a reassuring message to China with the intent of advancing a relationship that could further contain the Soviet Union. As the conflict unfolded, the United States suspended both military equipment sales and economic assistance to India while at the same time condemning India at the United Nations Security Council.

Additionally, President Nixon directed the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* to move off the coast of India in the Bay of Bengal as a show of force with a stated mission of utilization as an evacuation platform for US citizens. The United States did not want the fighting to expand to West Pakistan, but the symbolic show of force was directed more to demonstrate to China that an ally of the United States receives support during a crisis. However, India received the message as overt support to Pakistan and further proof of a US desire to frustrate India's regional aspirations.<sup>13</sup> Prime Minister Gandhi was happy to remove Pakistan from India's eastern flank by the creation of Bangladesh, but deeply disturbed by US and Chinese policy toward her troublesome neighbor. She would take action in short order.

In 1974, India upset the United States and Canada by conducting subterranean nuclear tests utilizing reactors supplied by the western countries under an agreement that India not utilize the reactors to build weapons. Under Nehru, India supported nuclear test bans and nonproliferation in line with his policy of nonalignment; however, he did establish a nuclear program because he understood the potential. Following his death and after the Chinese began testing their nuclear weapons in 1964, Indira Gandhi directed further progress in India's nuclear program. In the wake of the events of 1971, India perceived a need to develop a strategic deterrent in light of potential Pakistani or Chinese aggression. As a result of India's inability to receive assurances of protection from any nuclear-armed country in the event of an attack on India, Prime Minister Gandhi felt compelled to demonstrate India's nuclear potential. Contributing to the US policy dilemma, India refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation

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<sup>13</sup> Kux, *India and the United States*, 302-307.

Treaty (NPT), creating a transparency problem that exists to today.<sup>14</sup> India improved its strategic position throughout the 1970s by strengthening its relationship with the Soviets, eliminating the Pakistani threat to its east, and demonstrating the ability to achieve a nuclear reaction, but this position was challenged again in the 1980s.

## The Cold War Concludes

As the Cold War wound to a conclusion in the 1980's, three significant developments affected the US relationship with India in the decades after the fall of the Soviet Union. US support of the Mujahedeen funneled through Pakistan to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Islamization of Pakistan, and Pakistan's nuclear potential would further complicate US foreign policy in South Asia.

In 1979, the USSR invaded Afghanistan and began a decade-long march toward the Soviet Union's collapse. India defended the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the UN General Assembly again demonstrating an obvious preference toward the Soviet relationship. Prior to the Soviet invasion, General Zia-ul-Haq overthrew Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on July 5, 1977 in the second military coup in Pakistan's political history. The Saur Revolution in Afghanistan, followed by the Iranian Revolution in 1979, combined with the Soviet threat to South Asia caused Pakistan and US interests to converge to counter a loss of US influence in Afghanistan and Iran. The relationship would serve immediate US interests, while enabling Pakistan's long-term state sponsorship of violent Islamic organizations in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and India. US military technology and Saudi Arabian economic aid transferred to Pakistan in support of the Mujahedeen fight against the Soviets forced India to strengthen its military relationship with the Soviet Union, further straining the Indo-US relationship.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mohanty, *Indo-US Relations*, 109-111.

<sup>15</sup> Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, 79-83.

The second development in South Asia was Pakistan's move away from democratic secularism to an autocratic dictatorship grounded in Islam. The Islamization of Pakistan amplified the religious divide with the majority Hindu Indian state. Acting as a dictator, Zia viewed secular politics as "arbitrarily divisive and dysfunctional" for a country founded on Islam. He adjusted the political system to rule through Islamic law in order to validate not holding elections, banning political parties, and extending martial law.<sup>16</sup> Domestically, the Islamization of Pakistan's institutions, sponsored by Saudi and US dollars, included the army, the courts, the bureaucracy, and most notably the education system.

Internationally, Pakistan sought "strategic depth" relative to its fear of an Indian attack.<sup>17</sup> Strategic depth would give Pakistan room for maneuver to absorb an initial Indian attack or be out of range of Indian missiles. Pakistan believed the land just over the border in Afghanistan would allow the military to gain time and space to survive and then counter Indian aggression. Pakistan's goal was to gain a pliable Pashtun, Islamist ally in Afghanistan to serve as a Pakistan proxy force against threats from Central Asia, Iran, and its eastern neighbor. The US role in enabling Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to grow and utilize its expanding network of violent Islamic radicals did not go unnoticed by India and created a domestic and international terrorist problem that is not yet resolved.

The final development that changed the geopolitical situation in South Asia during the 1980's was an assumed Pakistani nuclear capability. Due to the support received from the United States and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan felt secure in its strategic position and had the capacity to cause trouble along the border with India. Pakistan and India fought minor skirmishes instigated by

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<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan: At the Crosscurrent of History* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 165.

<sup>17</sup> The idea of strategic depth means the dispersal of Pakistan's military assets to areas in eastern Afghanistan and the frontier, which places them beyond some of the offensive capabilities of the Indian military. The depth is intended to allow Pakistan to absorb an initial attack so that it has time and space to counter such an attack.

Pakistan over Siachen in 1984 and as a result of the Indian Operation Brasstacks in late 1986 and early 1987. A.Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear program, hinted that Pakistan would use the bomb if its existence was threatened by India during Operation Brasstacks. Khan's warnings led India to believe that "Pakistan had crossed an important threshold in its quest for nuclear weapons" and an Islamic nuclear weapon fueled growing Hindu nationalism.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, these conflicts brought Kashmir back into worldview in a manner that would continue throughout the 1990's as discussed in the next section. When the Cold War came to a close, these complex regional and geopolitical developments created a challenging environment in which the United States and India would begin a new relationship in the post-Soviet world.

### Liberal Democracies and Domestic Politics

In government, it is often said, the urgent drives out the merely important. India – the world's second most populous country, its largest democracy, and the most powerful country in a region that is home to nearly a quarter of humanity – seemed permanently stuck in the latter category.

—Strobe Talbot, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb*

Two themes related to democracy consistently hinder efforts to build a closer strategic partnership between India and the United States. The first theme relates to US actions in a relatively unipolar new world order. After the Cold War, the United States embarked on a less-than-targeted effort at making the world a better place through what Walter McDougall termed "Global Meliorism."<sup>19</sup> Since India was already a developing democracy, the subcontinent consistently garnered relatively little attention from the United States. The second theme is the challenge of negotiating executive initiatives between the leadership of nations that are subject to

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<sup>18</sup> Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, 88.

<sup>19</sup> Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 173. McDougall claims Global Meliorism is the expression of an American mission to spread the American dream to other nations to improve socio-economic, political, and cultural circumstances.

extreme scrutiny from domestic audiences and have legislative bodies with ratification power or the ability to abolish a coalition. The United States Congress and India's Parliament consistently hinder efforts by the leadership of each country to pursue a closer strategic relationship based on partisan preferences from the political party not occupying the executive at the time.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and with few real threats on the horizon, the United States lacked a singular enemy on which to base a foreign policy. The policies of the administrations from President Clinton to President Obama promoted liberal democracy and free market capitalism in pursuit of democratic peace as a method to bring nations into a secure international community.<sup>20</sup> Although promoting US values was not a new policy, there was no clear prioritization of countries for democracy promotion efforts. In pursuit of this ideal, the United States often attempted to mitigate failure as opposed to reinforcing success. Instead of strongly supporting functioning democracies and enabling successful democratic examples to flourish, the United States chose to divert limited resources to try to convert or save poorly functioning, non-democratic nations. The desire or need to react to immediate crisis in order to satisfy domestic audiences demanding action in areas not adhering to Western ideals often trumped realistic policies of reinforcing successes abroad, specifically in India.

As the world's two largest democracies, leaders in India and the United States must consistently consider domestic political agendas when pursuing foreign policy goals. Specifically, in India's case, domestic issues frequently consume the "political bandwidth," leaving less energy to devote to strategic planning and foreign policy formulation.<sup>21</sup> In both countries, on most important issues, the executive decision-making apparatus encounters conflict between national interests and prudent foreign policy. Robert D. Putnam referred to a "two-level game," where the

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<sup>20</sup> Jarrod Hayes, *Constructing National Security: U.S. Relations with India and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), x.

<sup>21</sup> Poorvi Chitalkar and David M. Malone, "Democracy, Politics, and India's Foreign Policy," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 17, no. 1 (March 2011): 75, accessed December 15, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/11926422.2011.563956>.

executive must maintain a coalition by maximizing results in international negotiations to ensure favorable results for domestic groups while “minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments.”<sup>22</sup> The dilemma of balancing foreign policy agendas with domestic audiences delayed progress in building a strategic relationship between India and the United States.

The section proceeds by describing how US and Indian foreign policy and domestic politics negatively affected building a strategic partnership on three specific topics. First, Indian and US reactions to various crises and the new world order immediately following the Cold War is discussed. Next, the negotiations over nuclear weapons and nuclear power is examined. Finally, the section considers how the American choice to invade Iraq has affected the US and Indian strategic partnership.

## Post-Cold War Dilemmas

Following the US demonstration of its military superiority during Desert Storm and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States found itself in a relatively unprecedented situation as the global superpower. Simultaneously, India was forced to address significant internal problems and the loss of its security relationship with the Soviet Union. The United States faced the decision of where and how to engage South Asia in the absence of a threatening Soviet presence. India needed to reassess its policy of nonalignment while reacting to an economic crisis.

The Clinton administration faced myriad issues, both international and domestic, upon taking office. Nevertheless, President Clinton viewed India as a potential important partner and intended to build a closer relationship. He envisioned India, with its resilient democracy, growing technical market, moderate economic liberalization, and burgeoning consumer market, as a promising strategic investment. In line with his thinking, he sent Hillary Clinton to tour India in

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<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 432-434, accessed September 28, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706785>.

order to indicate presidential interest in the subcontinent and she returned convinced that India should play a prominent role in the administration's foreign policy. Additionally, in response to the growing nuclear tension on the subcontinent, the Clinton administration requested the Council on Foreign Relations to investigate how the United States could increase its influence in South Asia. The Council's report suggested that the United States pursue a closer relationship with India based on India's capacity to grow into a significant power.<sup>23</sup>

His initial intentions notwithstanding, Clinton did not devote much attention to India in the first six years of his presidency. Internationally, the Clinton administration attempted to mitigate the suffering caused by starvation and civil war in Somalia, reestablish democracy in Haiti, intervene to negotiate a peace agreement in the Balkans, stabilize a political crisis in Russia, and coordinate a Middle East peace process. Additionally, during Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to India in 1997, the first visit by a secretary of state in fourteen years, she cut her trip short and departed India hastily to attend a meeting concerning removal of weapon inspectors from Iraq. Some of the leadership in India viewed this action as "yet another reminder that India was low on Washington's list of strategic priorities."<sup>24</sup> The Clinton administration's activities had minimal long-term benefit for US strategic partners and all diverted attention from building a strategic partnership with India.

While the Clinton administration addressed various crises at home and abroad, India faced an economic crisis in the early 1990s. Following independence, India adopted import substitution policies that essentially closed its markets to foreign trade and investment in an attempt to develop a domestic manufacturing base. In the 1950s it pursued a more socialist agenda where the government owned major economic sectors and passed strict labor laws that deterred the hiring of workers by making firing them virtually impossible. The excessive

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<sup>23</sup> Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2004), 24, 40-41.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 42.

bureaucratic regulation reduced industries' ability to expand, which inhibited building a manufacturing base. In 1991, oil prices rose significantly as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Operation Desert Storm, causing strain on the Indian economy. Additionally, the Gulf War forced many migrant workers to return to India from the Middle East. Substantial remittance payments, a large source of cash flow in the Indian economy, ceased as a result of the migrant workers' return. Immediate action was required as India was about to default on its international debts.<sup>25</sup>

Finance Minister Manmohan Singh endeavored to change over 40 years of import substitution. He devalued the rupee, encouraged Indian companies to export, encouraged foreign investment and imports, and secured new international loans in an attempt to stimulate the economy. The economic opening driven by Singh coincided with advancements in broadband infrastructure, which facilitated a relative boom in the Indian economy spearheaded by the less-regulated information technology sector. He was less effective in trimming bureaucratic regulations. Opening the economy without successfully deregulating the manufacturing, agriculture, and infrastructure sectors created "a hybrid economy that produced somewhat lopsided results."<sup>26</sup> More extensive deregulation did not occur due to domestic politics. The central government in India can make policy, but the states choose how to implement policy. Many populist left-leaning states still choose not to deregulate blue collar jobs, which continues to discourage business expansion in these states. India's partially closed economy as a result of extensive bureaucracy is at odds with the US ideal of free market capitalism, which creates regulatory friction between the United States and India.

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<sup>25</sup> Anja Manuel, *This Brave New World: India, China, and the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 77-78.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63, 78.

## The Nuclear Issue

Nuclear weapons and civilian nuclear energy are areas where the US and Indian leadership have agreed in principle, but in various ways the legislative process has not supported progress. In May of 1998, India tested five nuclear devices that led to Pakistani tests of six nuclear devices days later. The nuclear tests brought immediate attention and international scrutiny to the subcontinent. President Clinton had previously encouraged India to sign both the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Now Clinton pursued the discussions with purpose in order to deescalate the tension in South Asia and because containing the testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons was an important initiative of his administration. Clinton was a leading advocate of a permanent extension of the NPT, to which the UN agreed to in 1995, and he was the first of 146 world leaders to sign the CTBT in 1996. Although India had not agreed to the NPT or the CTBT, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee did state there would be no more testing a little over a week after the successful tests in May.<sup>27</sup> Clinton and Vajpayee gradually came to a tacit agreement between their inner circles, but the leaders' agreement was not enough for the nations to act. Ultimately, both President Clinton and Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee were constrained by their inability to build consensus in the US Congress and Indian Parliament.

Many Indian decision makers from both of the major political parties were very proud of the successful nuclear tests and were offended at American initiatives to diminish their new prestige. Indian Senior Advisor on Defense and Foreign Affairs Jaswant Singh captured the Indian sentiment by questioning why India is criticized “for not falling in line behind a new international agenda of discriminatory nonproliferation” when the “nuclear powers continue to have, but preach to the have-nots to have even less.”<sup>28</sup> At the same time that Vajpayee was under

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<sup>27</sup> Talbott, *Engaging India*, 35-36, 39, 51.

<sup>28</sup> Jaswant Singh, “Against Nuclear Apartheid,” *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 5 (1998): 43.

popular and political pressure not to give in to American requests, both houses of Congress had Republican majorities that also vowed not to ratify the CTBT. Despite President Clinton signing the CTBT, the Indians were aware that Republican hawks such as Senators Jesse Helms, Richard Shelby, and Tim Hutchinson were not going to ratify the treaty any time soon, if ever.<sup>29</sup>

Vajpayee's desire to get re-elected and retain a majority in Parliament combined with the failure of the US Congress to ratify the CTBT allowed Vajpayee to compromise with Clinton in private, while publically remaining defiant under pressure to sign the CTBT. Domestic politics stunted strategic progress.

President George W. Bush was more successful in bringing India into the nuclear community, but again domestic politics minimized the impact of his efforts. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 consumed President Bush's first term in office, leaving any South Asian policy initiatives on hold. However, on July 18, 2005, Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed a joint declaration that recognized India as a responsible, nuclear state. Accompanying the declaration was a pledge to support India's civilian nuclear program, which surprised both Congress and strategists in the United States.<sup>30</sup> Initially, the declaration appeared to be a big breakthrough in the US strategic relationship with India. In an effort to help India with its energy requirements, the United States was giving much more than it was receiving in the civilian nuclear deal. However, the negotiations were contentious and the implementation is yet unrealized.

The deal was intended to provide carbon-free energy for India to help reduce pollution. During negotiation of the deal, the younger generation of Indians who saw an opportunity faced consistent resistance from the older generation. Many of the older officials remain tied to the policy of nonalignment and distrust the United States due to inspection requirements and dual-

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<sup>29</sup> Talbott, *Engaging India*, 119, 125, 245.

<sup>30</sup> Dan Blumenthal, "Will India Be a Better Strategic Partner than China?" in *Gauging U.S.-Indian Strategic Cooperation*, ed. Henry Sokolski (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 327.

use-technology restrictions. To the older officials, inspections and restrictions still echo of colonial oversight in Indian affairs. US negotiators thought the discussions would be relatively simple based on the large concessions made to India. Instead, the negotiations were regularly stymied by senior members of India's nuclear establishment, who were unconcerned with environmental fears, but were motivated to continue growing India's economy.<sup>31</sup> The negotiations lasted over three years, but implementation has taken over a decade and no reactors are completed to date.

When the Indo-US nuclear bill finally passed Congress in September of 2008, Westinghouse and General Electric were prepared to build nuclear reactors to supply civilian energy to the subcontinent. India's central government supported the funding and technology, but the individual states must negotiate the land use and approve final implementation. Popular fears in the wake of the Japanese nuclear disaster led Parliament to take up the issue of liability. State leaders and members of Parliament capped the government's liability at \$400 million, but there was no liability cap placed on the suppliers of technology and parts. The liability issue as well as other problems such as land acquisition discouraged investment by foreign companies, and until 2016, progress to conclude contracts was stifled. What was intended as a strategic opening with India turned into a bureaucratic problem because of domestic politics yet again.<sup>32</sup>

## Iraq

The United States' invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 created new dilemmas for Indian strategists. Regardless of the original intent of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the United States ultimately chose to embark on nation building with a goal of planting democracy in Iraq. The US choice to pursue democracy in Iraq created two short-term dilemmas for India. First, India surprised the United States by not supporting the US-led invasion of Iraq when the United States

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<sup>31</sup> Manuel, *This Brave New World*, 170.

<sup>32</sup> William Antholis, *Inside Out India and China: Local Politics Go Global* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 155-157.

did not gain a consensus at the United Nations Security Council.<sup>33</sup> India's decision was focused on maintaining relationships in the Middle East, but the United States noted the lack of support. Additionally, India imported a substantial amount of oil from Iraq and the invasion caused economic stress in India as it lost a source of oil and oil prices in general increased substantially as a result of the invasion. These first two problems caused stress in the relationship that were overcome, but there are three additional lingering strategic quandaries.

India's policy of nonalignment, its need for secure energy sources, and limitations in the scope of US power in the region came into focus during the US efforts to support democracy in Iraq. The first two are related because India needed to maintain critical partnerships in the Middle East in order to ensure its supply of oil. Specifically, India needed the fuel exports from Iran in order to sustain its growth. Despite US condemnation, India retains a relationship with Iran and views its strategic autonomy as critical to increasing the quality of many of its bilateral partnerships. India pursues its national interests with bilateral partners regardless of the type of government. The third consideration at the time was that US strategic fixation in Iraq undermined its sway and standing in the Indo-Pacific region and allowed China to increase its clout due to US focus elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> India's lack of support for US operations in Iraq are an example of how India chooses to pursue national interests over common values at times, something the United States must appreciate.

India will promote democracy when strategic and economic interests align and not from an idealistic commitment to exporting ideology. India will support building democracy and pursue close relationships in places like Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal because India's population is much more concerned with improving conditions in India and securing its

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<sup>33</sup> Kurt M. Campbell, Nirav Patel, and Richard Weitz, *The Ripple Effect: India's Responses to the Iraq War* (Washington, DC: Center for New American Security, 2008), 8, accessed December 18, 2017, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/the-ripple-effect-indias-responses-to-the-iraq-war>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 33.

immediate neighborhood.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, India maintains a relationship with Iran and must accommodate Burma due to Chinese encroachment on its eastern flank. As a result of increased Chinese investment and influence in Burma, India either engages in diplomacy with the “odious” Burmese regime or loses influence in its own neighborhood.<sup>36</sup> India’s choices are not as black and white as US policy wants them to be due to the challenging nature of South Asian geopolitics. The United States must wrestle with the Indian reality and decide where compromise can be made if a stronger strategic partnership is to be established.

### Challenging Neighborhood

A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region. The region, which stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States, represents the most populous and economically dynamic part of the world. The U.S. interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific extends back to the earliest days of our republic.

—*National Security Strategy*, December 2017

Even if the United States and India could align more generally on long-term foreign policy, the dynamic nature of South Asian and Indian Ocean geopolitical considerations would still challenge the relationship. Terrorist organizations actively threaten stability from the Middle East to Indonesia and place US and Indian interests at odds, specifically with regard to India’s relationship with Iran and the US relationship with Pakistan. The existence of nuclear weapons in Pakistan, India, and China and the nuclear aspirations of Iran and North Korea further complicate bilateral and multilateral relationships. The security dilemma created by nuclear weapons and large standing armies force economic interests to compete with security interests for prioritization, creating difficulty in formulating coherent policy. Additionally, competition for

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<sup>35</sup> Arijit Mazumdar and Erin Stutz, “Democracy Promotion in India’s Foreign Policy: Emerging Trends and Developments,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 42, no. 2 (April-June 2015): 78-79, accessed November 22, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00927678.2015.1034611>.

<sup>36</sup> Jeff M. Smith, “Sino-Indian Relations: A Troubled History, an Uncertain Future,” *Harvard International Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 112.

access to natural resources in the form of sea and ground lines of communication place China and India in a dilemma as to where to build infrastructure and how to posture their militaries in order to protect trade. Ultimately, the countries posing the biggest challenges to a closer strategic partnership between Indian and the United States are Pakistan and China.

## Pakistan

Following the Cold War there were numerous articles, reports, and books written about the relationship between India and the United States, but most gave equal weight to the US relationship with Pakistan. A report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace stated that US policy should promote “multifaceted Indo-Pakistan negotiations in which nuclear non-proliferation and other issues are addressed concurrently.”<sup>37</sup> The title of a report from the Council on Foreign Relations was “A New Policy toward India and Pakistan” and discussion in the report alludes to mediating bilateral negotiations between India and Pakistan.<sup>38</sup> The idea of a holistic South Asian policy is not flawed, but the United States must recognize the desire of India to remove the hyphen from its association with Pakistan and India’s aspirations for a greater role in the Indo-Pacific region. Unfortunately, nuclear weapons on the subcontinent and Pakistan’s state-sponsored terrorism have prevented a closer bilateral relationship and consistent US-Indian foreign policy. US short-term interests toward Pakistan frequently disrupt the longer-term interests and constructivist ideals toward India, creating policy tension.<sup>39</sup>

The nuclear dilemma in South Asia has existed since 1974, but tension between India and Pakistan escalated following the Cold War. Doctor Paul Kapur calls the period from 1990-1998 the “de facto nuclear period” because neither country had actually tested a nuclear weapon, but

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<sup>37</sup> Selig S. Harrison and Geoffrey Kemp, *India and America: After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993), 33.

<sup>38</sup> Gideon Rose, *A New U.S. Policy Toward India and Pakistan: Report of an Independent Task Force* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> Selina A. Khan, “The Realist/Constructivist Paradigm: U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Pakistan and India,” *Strategic Studies* 1, no. 3 and 4 (Dec 2010): 1, accessed August 15, 2017, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1231703253?pq-origsite=summon>.

both were believed to have the capability. He calls the period from 1998 to present the “overt nuclear period” because each country tested nuclear weapons in 1998. He asserts that increasing nuclear capability on the subcontinent caused, rather than deterred, increased conventional conflict between India and Pakistan. His rationale is that Pakistan sought to balance its relatively weak conventional military position and gain back some of the Kashmir territory it viewed as its own by conducting limited or localized attacks. Pakistan reasoned that India would not escalate any conflict beyond the limited or local area due to the threat of nuclear retaliation.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Pakistan sought to reinvigorate world interest in settling the Kashmir dispute as Pakistan was not in a position to negotiate a favorable outcome bilaterally with India. The limited conflicts in the 1990s further served to maintain the hyphenation between India and Pakistan as the threat of a South Asian nuclear exchange loomed prominently.

Following the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan, Pakistan sought to use the mujahedeen warriors that were no longer fighting the Soviets to escalate the conflict in Kashmir. In 1990, the ISI capitalized on unrest among the Kashmiri Muslims to foment an insurgency by providing men, materiel, and training to the anti-Indian rebellion. Pakistani actions to create a low-intensity conflict for India in Kashmir were intended to inflict a diplomatic and financial toll and succeeded in two significant ways diplomatically. First, at the outset of the crisis, US National Security Advisor Robert Gates visited both countries to provide assurances and deescalate a potential larger conventional conflict. The diplomatic involvement from the United States served as another example to India that the United States could not delink its approach to the two countries and that the international community would not let the Kashmir issue be a South Asian issue. Second, India’s actions to quell the insurgency throughout the 1990’s brought allegations of murder, torture, and other human rights violations from the international

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<sup>40</sup> S. Paul Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2.

community. These reports tarnished India's image as a secular, democratic, and liberal state and further strained the US and Indian relationship throughout the decade.<sup>41</sup>

After both countries became openly nuclear-armed countries in 1998, the Pakistani military chose to execute operations in Kargil in 1999 to threaten Indian lines of communication to the Siachen territory in Kashmir. India responded relatively quickly and gained the military advantage within a few months. Notably in this instance, although some senior officials encouraged the end to hostilities, President Clinton decided not to mediate the conflict when approached by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.<sup>42</sup> Despite conventional hostilities ending in late July of 1999, the situation in Kashmir remained strained. Pakistani terrorist organizations increased attacks in Kashmir and India proper throughout the next few years, culminating in three high profile attacks in late 2001. India's response was a large mobilization of over 500,000 troops with the intent of fighting a limited conventional war to coerce Pakistan into taking action to stop the attacks. First US Secretary of State Colin Powell and then his deputy, Richard Armitage, visited to encourage leadership in Pakistan to deter terrorist attacks and India to reduce its mobilizations. Eventually, the diplomacy worked and India did not attack partially to avoid angering the United States by distracting Pakistan during US operations in Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> Despite the prudence of the decision, India partially viewed the US actions as protecting its annoying neighbor to the west. US actions to prevent a nuclear exchange in South Asia led to a continued hyphenation of the Indo-Pakistan relationship.

Concurrent with the events described above, the United States and the international community increasingly viewed Pakistan as a problem due to another military coup, the third in the nation's history. In October of 1999, General Pervez Musharraf overthrew the regime of Nawaz Sharif and led Pakistan into its third decade of military rule in less than 50 years. Because

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<sup>41</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 98-109.

<sup>42</sup> Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, 118-120.

<sup>43</sup> Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent*, 134-136.

he was the architect of the Kargil operation, Musharraf's ascent to the chief executive position only served to strain the relationship between Pakistan and India severely. Additionally, the United States did not want to support a military dictatorship in Pakistan, which created an opportunity for India and the United States to strengthen their strategic relationship. During President Clinton's trip to South Asia in 2000, he spent a few days in India and only a few hours in Pakistan, signaling a clear preference for the democratic South Asian nation.<sup>44</sup> However, the attacks of September 11, 2001 curtailed a few years of progress by yet again forcing the United States to choose an inconvenient alliance on the subcontinent.

By 2001, the United States and India were very aware that the Pakistani military, through the ISI, essentially sponsored and encouraged the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Pakistan sought strategic depth relative to India. An Islamist state beholden to the ISI on their western border provided some asymmetric balance to the superior conventional and nuclear arsenal of the Indian military.<sup>45</sup> When Al Qaeda attacked the US homeland on Sept 11, 2001 and the United States confirmed that the planning and guidance for the attacks originated in Afghanistan, the United States chose to respond by removing the Taliban. Immediately following the attacks of Sept 11, 2001, many Indian officials were hopeful that US interests and reactions to the attacks would bring the US and Indian relationship even closer as they worked to counter terrorism. India aspired to an alliance to put pressure on Pakistan as one of the only supporters of the Taliban and the primary cause of terrorist acts against India. India was extremely disappointed when the United States called Pakistan one of its main allies in the "war on terror" and is frustrated that the United States continues to collaborate with Pakistan despite proof that groups connected with the ISI continue to promote attacks against India.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ganguly, *Conflict Unending*, 134.

<sup>45</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> Campbell, *The Ripple Effect*, 5.

India could understand the pragmatic logistical choice of aligning with Pakistan because Operation Enduring Freedom required significant materiel to travel overland from Karachi into Afghanistan. However, it was more difficult for India to understand the billions of dollars pouring into Pakistan with seemingly very little oversight as to how the money was spent. From 2002 to 2014, the United States gave over twenty billion dollars to Pakistan in order to compensate it for fighting terrorism and supporting a stable Afghanistan as well as to encourage democratic reform, stability, and nuclear non-proliferation. These are all goals with which India would agree, but two realities are much more troubling to India. First, much of the money ended up increasing and sustaining Pakistan's conventional military forces and enriching the powerful army generals. Second, and more disturbing, the United States only infrequently demanded that Pakistan stop supporting terrorist groups other than Al Qaeda. Pakistan did not capture a high-value Afghan Talib inside Pakistan until 2007 when attacks against coalition forces increased. More significantly, Pakistan ignores Lashkar-e-Taiba and the terrorist groups' persistent attacks against India, including the high-profile Mumbai attacks in 2008.<sup>47</sup> The United States has not applied consistent pressure on Pakistan to take action against all the terrorist networks operating inside its borders, which has ultimately been dissatisfying to India in what is called a global war on terror.

The United States' continued operations in Afghanistan necessitate an ongoing relationship with the Pakistani military, which is the most enduring deterrent to improved relations between India and Pakistan. Despite the fact that the Pakistani military still sees various terrorist organizations as useful allies and these organizations operate and train predominantly along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the United States has yet to envision a strategy to defeat these terrorist threats without Pakistan's cooperation. The United States and India both fear what could result from a failed Pakistan if a terrorist organization were to acquire

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<sup>47</sup> C. Christine Fair, "Time for Sober Realism: Renegotiating U.S. Relations with Pakistan," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2009): 152, accessed December 18, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01636600902775680>

a nuclear device and the nation were to devolve into anarchy. The Pakistani military is the only viable Pakistani institution that can prevent this scenario. The fear of a failed Pakistan and the need to sustain operations in Afghanistan keeps military aid flowing into Pakistan and creates consistent friction between the governments and the military leadership of the United States and India. Therefore, despite the desire to delink Pakistan policy from Indian policy, Washington's collaboration with Pakistan continues to hinder its efforts to establish a stronger strategic partnership with India.<sup>48</sup>

## China

As recently as the summer of 2017, India and China clashed along their border in the vicinity of Bhutan. The clash is indicative of a trend of conflicts arising that are concurrent with high-level international meetings, in this case Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first visit with President Donald Trump. Additionally, Chinese media sent a message that Indian power cannot compete with Chinese power and the United States would not help India if the crisis intensified.<sup>49</sup> The conflict and messaging are over one of two disputed regions along the Chinese and Indian border and a greater competition that is brewing in the region. The two disputed areas are Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin and pose a proximate threat to India due to Chinese investment and development near Bhutan and in the Pakistani controlled disputed regions of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>50</sup> However, these remote disputes, although historically significant, are minor compared to the larger strategic issues developing in the Indo-Pacific region.

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<sup>48</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Naresh Chandra, *The United States and India: A Shared Strategic Future* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Inc. 2011), 41-42.

<sup>49</sup> Ellen Barry and Yufan Huang, "With Modi in Washington, China and India 'Jostle' on Their Border," *New York Times*, June 27, 2017, accessed August 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/27/world/asia/india-china-border.html>

<sup>50</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 116, accessed August 22, 2017, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/lib/carl-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1076126>.



Figure 2. Disputed Areas Along the Chinese and Indian Border. Dean Chang and Lisa Curtis, “The China Challenge: A Strategic Vision for US-India Relations,” *Backgrounder* 2583, The Heritage Foundation, July 18, 2011, 4.

The Indo-Pacific region is a complicated and dynamic environment with regard to numerous nations’ pursuit of security, economic influence, and access to resources. In order to negotiate the geopolitics of the region, leaders and diplomats must understand each other’s perspectives. Currently, some in Washington view China as an economic juggernaut globally and a callous bully to smaller countries in its immediate vicinity. China sees itself as surrounded by a “Great Wall in reverse” in the first island chain running from Japan in the north down to Australia in the south. Most of the countries in the Indo-Pacific region are hostile to or wary of Chinese expansion of economic influence and military capability.<sup>51</sup> India sees aggressive Chinese

<sup>51</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2010), 284.

development in neighboring states as strategic encirclement leaving it potentially cutoff from an east-west economic corridor from China to and through Central Asia.<sup>52</sup>

The United States announced its Pivot to the Pacific in 2011. It quickly tried to rebrand its policy as a “rebalance to the Pacific” after the word “pivot” came under scrutiny from many in the western world because it implied the reduced importance of institutions like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The rebalance was principally based on two general national interests. First, the desire to expand trade and economic opportunities in the growing markets of the Indo-Pacific countries required devoting more diplomatic and information resources to the region. Second, although not explicitly stated, was a desire to counter growing Chinese military capability and China’s willingness to use the capability along with other forms of soft power to achieve national objectives throughout the region. China’s response to the US rebalance appears to be an increased effort to expand its influence in the region in an attempt to counter what it perceives as containment of its economic and diplomatic expansion.<sup>53</sup> As India aspires to grow as a world power, the friction between the United States and China places it in a strategic dilemma due to its economic ties and proximity to China and its need to have partners to counter any future Chinese aggression in the region. The goals of the United States and India in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region make a strategic partnership between them difficult due to the need to balance and gauge Chinese intentions. Currently, India is hesitant to commit to any alliance or more significant partnership because it fears becoming isolated and encircled by China.

China’s 900 billion dollar “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) initiative was launched in 2013 with two goals in mind.<sup>54</sup> First, China seeks to link its western provinces via an overland route

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<sup>52</sup> Feroz Hassan Khan, “The New Great Game in Central Asia/South Asia: Continuity and Change,” in *The New Great Game: Chinese Views on Central Asia*, ed. Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2006), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Graham Edwards, “On Balance – Is the US Rebalance Good for Australia?” *Indo-Pacific Strategic Papers* (Canberra, AU: Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies, August 2015), 3-4, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://www.defence.gov.au/ADC/Publications/IndoPac/R23177601-2.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Max Rodenbeck, “Hissing Cousins,” *The Economist*, July 22, 2017, 10.

through Central Asia to parts of Europe to create a Eurasian economic community that could rival the transatlantic trading relationships. An additional benefit of the “One Belt” investments could be to stabilize some of the more restive areas on China’s western border through investment and opportunity. More concerning for India is the “One Road” aspect of China’s initiative, which is sometimes referred to as the “string of pearls” and is focused on the sea lines of communication through the Strait of Malacca and into the Indian Ocean. China’s motivation in developing the “One Road” is to ensure it has options that circumvent the Strait of Malacca when moving oil into and commercial goods out of China. Additionally, China desires friendly ports for shipping vessels now and potentially military craft in the future. The “string of pearls” is what bothers India most because they are located in neighboring countries.<sup>55</sup>



Figure 3. One Belt One Road Map. “China Faces Resistance to a Cherished Theme of Its Foreign Policy,” *The Economist*, May 4, 2017, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/china/21721678-silk-routes-are-not-always-appealing-they-sound-china-faces-resistance-cherished-theme>

China is in varying stages of development of deep-water ports in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, as well as pipelines and ground lines of communication through

<sup>55</sup> Manuel, *This Brave New World*, 251.

Myanmar and Pakistan. Additionally, China has constructed an efficient rail and road network along its southern border to connect its western markets to the overland routes it envisions coming through Myanmar and Pakistan. The investment to build these massive infrastructure projects is welcomed by the poor nations and increases China's influence and access to four of six Indian neighbors. In theory this investment is all geared toward solving what former Chinese President Hu Jintao termed the "Malacca Dilemma."<sup>56</sup> Ostensibly the intent is to provide a shorter and more efficient transit route overland to reach China's western provinces, but the alternative routes also provide strategic flexibility if the strait were closed or obstructed as could happen in the event of a conflict. The United States is still dominant in enforcing freedom of navigation in the strait as security competition is increasing in the Sino-American relationship. Therefore, India could infer that the Chinese infrastructure projects are dual-purpose facilities in preparation for potential conflict in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>57</sup> India cannot help but feel surrounded and is now stuck between its largest trading partner, China, and its current most prudent strategic partner in a potential conflict with China, the United States. Currently, India is hedging its options in the Indo-Pacific by balancing economic cooperation and resource competition with China while increasing its military coordination with the United States.<sup>58</sup>

India's regional equivalent to Washington's rebalance in the Pacific is a revitalization of its Look East Policy first envisioned in the 1990's. Originally, the Look East Policy was part of India reorienting its foreign policy after the Cold War. The idea in India that its position in the Indian Ocean placed the Middle East and East Asia in its area of interest, and eventually influence, grew with good economic progress in the 2000's. The requirement now is to increase its access and influence to the economic vitality of Southeast Asia and continue to build political

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<sup>56</sup> Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 121.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Thorsten Wojczewski, "China's Rise as a Strategic Challenge and Opportunity: India's China Discourse and Strategy," *India Review* 15, no. 1 (January-March, 2016): 49.

relationships that were nonexistent or strained during the Cold War.<sup>59</sup> In an effort to open up economic and military relationships in the Western Pacific, India rebranded its policy “Act East” in 2014 to promote action as opposed to observation.

India sought access and closer relationships with the countries of Southeast Asia since the end of the Cold War in order to expand export markets and gain influence in the region. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) consistently denies India membership because it sees India as geopolitically isolated by Pakistan and China and does not want to be forced to take a position on South Asian conflict. Although India is a member of ASEAN’s regional forums, until India can reduce tension with Pakistan and China and further open up its economy, ASEAN is unlikely to embrace India as a member. Lack of membership in ASEAN has not kept India from substantially strengthening bilateral relationships with Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, primarily through naval military relationships.<sup>60</sup> These naval relationships are very much on the Chinese radar due to the geography of Malaysia and Singapore relative to the Strait of Malacca and Vietnamese hostility to Chinese development and encroachment in the South China Sea. The United States welcomes Indian involvement with countries that have interests in the South China Sea and seeks to enhance security cooperation with the Indian Navy.

The Indian Navy leads the way in attempting to expand India’s overt presence further afield than the Indian Ocean. Beginning in 2007 and continuing to present, the Indian Navy conducts annual multilateral exercises with various countries including the United States, Japan, Australia, Russia, China, and Singapore. Although initially focused on fostering cooperation with littoral nations around the Strait of Malacca, the exercises expanded to include large-scale naval exercises. China sees increased Indian naval presence as a potential threat to China’s rising power, especially east of the Strait of Malacca. China is specifically concerned about the

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<sup>59</sup> Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 93.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-103.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Indian territories strategically placed along the western exit of the strait. The United States seeks to share the security burden of the Indo-Pacific region and views the modernization and increased presence of the Indian Navy very positively. However, India remains tied to its policy of nonalignment and still has no intent of involving itself in any sort of “Asian NATO.”<sup>61</sup>

India is also adjusting its military strategy on the subcontinent as a result of Chinese actions. India announced that it was revising its longstanding military response strategy focused solely on Pakistan to one of fighting a war on two fronts in 2009. The second front now focuses on India’s border with China due to Chinese infrastructure build-up along the border and increased incursions since 2006. In the past, Indian policy was not to build infrastructure along the border with China so as not to create an avenue of approach for invading Chinese forces. However, the Chinese can now move troops along the border at double the speed of the Indian military and have a numerical advantage in airfields of five to one. Increased Chinese capability along the border is forcing India to increase investment in what Indians now view as strategic infrastructure.<sup>62</sup> These border security developments are just one aspect of India’s broader response to China’s grander ambition of OBOR.

Despite Indian and US shared concerns over Chinese expansion both military and economic, Chinese manufacturing inextricably ties the two countries to China. China is India and the United States’ largest trading partner. The Chinese believe that India alone cannot currently balance Chinese influence in South Asia, but they are aware of India’s potential. The US bemoans Chinese actions in the South China Sea and in the cyber realm, but cannot divorce its economy from Chinese exports. India would like to settle its territorial disputes with China and reduce tension with its northern neighbor, but China has no incentive to compromise.<sup>63</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>61</sup> Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 98-99.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, “Sino-Indian Relations: A Troubled History, an Uncertain Future,” 110.

<sup>63</sup> Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 246.

India retains its non-aligned policy despite increased military cooperation with the United States as it watches the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region develop and slowly tries to become a major power itself. Stephan Burgess accurately observed that any “moves toward a US-India alliance are less contingent on the actions of the two countries than those of rising China.”<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

There are four main reasons the United States and India have not developed a stronger strategic partnership since the end of the Cold War. First, the United States supported the expansion of liberal democracy globally and acted to prevent catastrophe in less significant countries throughout the last three decades. These actions diverted attention from strengthening functioning, developing democracies, such as India, and enabling their growth into reliable and powerful allies. Second, on the occasions when executive leadership focused on the US and Indian relationship, domestic politics consistently hindered the progress that was possible in US and Indian foreign policy. Third, regardless of the reason, US support to Pakistan both financially and militarily stunted the growth of a strong partnership with India. Finally, China’s growth as an economic and military power forces both India and the United States to hedge their actions relative to China in order to protect their economic interests. India and the United States fear that too strong of an overt partnership may provoke China and precipitate an aggressive Chinese response.

Domestic politics will continue to influence foreign policy as long as democracy flourishes in the United States and India. That said, the United States and India have many common goals upon which they agree. Each country seeks to influence and help lead a multipolar, stable balance of power in Central, South, and East Asia, which promotes open economic systems and secure sea lines of communication. The United States and India are both

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<sup>64</sup> Stephan Burgess, “The US Pivot to Asia and the Renewal of the US-India Strategic Partnership,” *Comparative Strategy* 34, no. 4 (September-October 2015): 375.

critical to realizing this vision. There are three actions the United States should take to strengthen its relationship with India. The United States should continue to pursue and expand multilateral military exercises and partnerships, maintain bilateral consistency with India, and invest greater resources in strengthening the relationship with India.

The United States should support and promote India as an important partner and encourage cooperation in what the Center for a New American Security calls “Networking Asian Security” in order to deter aggressive Chinese actions.<sup>65</sup> The United States currently has mutual defense treaties with Japan, Australia, South Korea, and the Philippines. Japan and India agreed to a Special Strategic and Global Partnership as outlined in the “India and Japan Vision 2025.” Concurrently, Australia and India executed bilateral naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal for the first time in five decades in 2015. A specific opportunity here is to encourage India to allow use of the naval facilities on its territorial islands of Andaman and Nicobar by the United States, Australia, and Japan.<sup>66</sup> Multilateral naval exercises involving the United States, India, Japan, and Australia increased dramatically in the last decade. The United States should continue to pursue and expand these initiatives to include more robust planning exercises that comprise diplomatic, economic, and information aspects in the planning. Expanding the military exercises to include more diplomatic aspects will make coordination and cooperation easier whether for future humanitarian operations or conflict. In time, and if necessary, these steps could lead to an arrangement similar to NATO. However, for India to be a part of that organization, it would have to desire membership and feel that it was gaining all-weather allies.

The United States should maintain a consistent pro-Indian policy when disputes arise in the Indo-Pacific. Acknowledging its current reliance on Pakistan for overflight and the ground

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<sup>65</sup> Patrick Cronin, Richard Fontaine, Harry Krejsa, and Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Networking Asian Security: An Integrated Approach to Order in the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 30, 37.

line of communication (GLOC) for supporting operations in Afghanistan, the United States must seek to permanently delink its policies toward Pakistan and India. The United States should not begrudge India's desire to remain free of any alliance obligations in pursuit of its national interests in the short-term, especially considering the history of US foreign policy in South Asia. US foreign policy retained strategic autonomy for a century and a half by not entering into any binding treaties or alliances and India is just entering its seventh decade. Although India is not protected by two oceans, the subcontinent allowed India a certain degree of autonomy, but that is now changing. Whether speaking of America's focus on the Pacific or India's orientation to the east, "the reality is that intense rivalries and competition will be played out in the Indo-Pacific region – where the United States and India have far more common long-term interests than possibly any other two countries."<sup>67</sup> The US should be patient and consistent with India in developing the partnership, but must also be creative and assume risk in the approach.

There are opportunities to enhance the US and Indian partnership through education, the economy, and military sales. The US State Department could work with the United States Indian Political Action Committee to encourage US community colleges and universities to increase collaboration with Indian schools and educators to expand educational opportunities for Indian youth by making cheaper and more accessible coursework available through automation.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, the United States should continue to encourage economic liberalization in all sectors of the Indian economy, prioritize US foreign investment in India, and encourage US private sector businesses to work directly with the states in India. India can facilitate the US desire to help by improving its abysmal transportation infrastructure and growing its manufacturing base. With regard to military sales, India's burdensome bureaucratic process for

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<sup>67</sup> Jaskaran Teja, "The New India – U.S. Reset," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 36, no. 6 (November/December 2014), 382, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10803920.2014.994418>.

<sup>68</sup> Manuel, *This Brave New World*, 144-146.

managing arms acquisitions and cumbersome US regulations for selling technologically advanced weapons continue to limit bilateral defense cooperation.<sup>69</sup> Russia does not have the same qualms and continues to supply India with advanced ships, submarines, and airplanes, which compels India to keep all options open with regard to security and defense acquisition. For this reason, the United States should consider selling more advanced weaponry to India as a true signal that a strategic partnership is developing. Setting conditions that could make a future mutual defense treaty with India beneficial to both nations is a prudent approach for the United States, but there are others.

William Antholis, Anja Manuel, and Robert Kaplan all acknowledge the complexities in the Indo-Pacific region and specifically the dynamic among the United States, India, and China. The authors also envision solutions and actions where all three nations cooperate and maintain or increase economic prosperity while creating a peaceful security balance in the region.<sup>70</sup> History is not on their side. At some point, the United States and India will probably have to make choices. Due to India's strategic location, any conflict in the Indo-Pacific region will not allow it to remain neutral. The United States should work with India to balance Chinese power to the west in the same way it works with Japan in the east. US policy makers complicate the relationship with India by not making this an explicit goal.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, the US must understand that India will maintain a relationship with Tehran to balance Pakistan and secure resources. This is an opportunity, not a hindrance. India wants economic access to Central Asian markets. India is developing and accessing the Iranian port at Chabahar as a method to achieve this goal. Indian dialogue with Tehran can be used to US advantage if the United States builds the consistent trust

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<sup>69</sup> Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 105.

<sup>70</sup> Generally the authors of *Inside Out India and China, This Brave New World, and Monsoon* describe a situation where the United States, India, and China can all peacefully prosper if the countries work together and the United States balances, understands, and supports both India and China.

<sup>71</sup> Blumenthal, "Will India Be a Better Strategic Partner than China?" 344.

with India required to ally more closely. Indirectly influencing Iran with India's help could become an option for the United States in this scenario.

Ultimately, the United States should attempt to align Indian and US positions regarding the geopolitical situation in the Indo-Pacific region more closely during the next decade. In doing so, each country should seek consistent foreign policy ends while mitigating large deviations in foreign policy goals during political transitions. Currently, India's inability to build consensus domestically and a lack of institutional capacity in its foreign policy and traditionally land-based security apparatus inhibit India's ability to become a regional power. Much like the United States, there are often disconnects between political ends and military means. In both countries' cases aspirations and extreme optimism often lead to underachievement in action. A realistic appraisal of capabilities and limitations can lead to a strategic partnership or alliance that hastens India's growth to a major power and maintains US strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

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