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# India and Russia

## The End of a Special Relationship?

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Vidya Nadkarni

**T**HE TECTONIC SHIFTS IN THE GEOPOLITICAL WORLD caused by the implosion of the USSR have left in their wake a deeply fractured global landscape. The Soviet breakup has also upset the balance between carefully crafted networks of interstate relations based on norms and priorities of the Cold War. The crumbling of one of the two main pillars supporting the post-World War II bipolar international structure signals vast and continuing systemic changes as each country attempts to redefine its world view, reassess its opportunities and threats, and recast the status and basis of its relations with other states. Nowhere is this process of redefinition and readjustment more evident than in the Indian-Russian nexus. For decades the object of lavish Soviet attention, India now finds that it cannot count on automatic Russian support in international fora for its domestic and foreign policies. Russia, for its part, consumed by domestic obstacles to economic and political reform, is caught in the vise, familiar to many Third World countries, of seeking economic assistance through bilateral and multilateral channels while attempting to preserve a measure of independence in the pursuit of its policies at home and abroad. Russia's India policy epitomizes the vagaries of this dilemma confronting its political leadership. As a result, the Indian-Russian relationship is more vulnerable to external pressures than was the erstwhile Soviet-Indian connection.

Close Soviet-Indian ties had developed gradually, in response to shared socialist sympathies (however diluted on the Indian side) and a shared

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anti-Westernism (which in India was a direct offshoot of anticolonial tradition). Above all, however, were geopolitical realities in which India, by its vigorous pursuit of a nonaligned foreign policy, and the USSR, through its aggressive efforts to supplant Western (usually American) influence in various regions of the world, were faced with a triangular association of strategic convenience—Pakistan, China, and the United States. Today the emerging, but as yet shaky, links between Russia and America raise many questions with regard to the nature of the U.S. and Russian roles and, specifically, of changing Russian and American interests in the Indian subcontinent. The South Asian region has generally been accorded a low priority in the U.S. calculation of geopolitical interests; with Soviet disengagement from the region, will the United States follow suit? Or will Russia and America necessarily adopt a common posture vis-à-vis India? Will a weakening of Indo-Russian ties loosen, in turn, Pakistani-American relations? Sino-Pakistani relations? Sino-American relations?

With the disappearance of the sure compass of the East-West axis, political alignments of the past have come unhinged. In South Asia, the United States and China have emerged as primary beneficiaries of this process of post-Cold War realignment. The United States, as the sole superpower, is in a position to exercise leverage in the Indo-Russian relationship, especially because current domestic economic priorities and policies in both India and Russia require for their success a favorable relationship with the United States. Correspondingly for China, the Soviet eclipse has improved prospects for projecting power in the South Asian region and the Indian Ocean, which is bound to complicate the attainment of a nuclear-free South Asia. This article will explore the range and implications of possible directions in which the Russian-Indian relationship may be headed. With this in view, we shall first trace the evolution of the Soviet-Indian friendship; second, study the emerging Indo-Russian nexus in the context of external pressures; then, outline alternative scenarios for Indo-Russian relations; and finally, situate India's security concerns in a wider regional and global context, with respect to both Russia and the United States.

### The Evolution of a Special Friendship

The Indo-Soviet connection began in the mid-1950s, developed fitfully through the late 1960s, peaked early during the decade of the 1970s, and subsided in the 1980s, becoming a pragmatic mutual acknowledgement of complementary as well as divergent interests. During these decades, despite occasional friction, the groundwork was laid for a close economic and defense relationship between the world's largest democracy and the world's original communist state. Thus, for the first time, a long-term strategic partnership of sorts was established between these two countries, each in many ways the antithesis of the other:

India, a political democracy since its independence in 1947, a country with a strong metaphysical tradition and a fiercely individualist and decentralized religion; and the Soviet Union, a communist state, officially atheistic and anti-traditionalist in outlook.

Accounts of early interaction between the peoples of the Indian subcontinent and those of Central Asia and points north start several millennia before the beginning of the Christian era, with the migration of the Aryans through Central Asia into the Indo-Gangetic plain. There are no records, however, of sustained contact between peoples of peninsular India and those of the great Eurasian landmass. It is true that by the seventeenth century Indian traders had established themselves in Central Asian towns like Astrakhan, trading intermittently with Moscow and other Russian cities, and that their commercial links increased during the eighteenth century; but the maturation of such ties was arrested by parallel and ultimately related political developments on the Indian subcontinent and in Central Asia. That is, the eighteenth century witnessed the steady consolidation of the British hold on India even as Russian rulers stretched their imperial reach southward in Central Asia; the two empires clashed in the nineteenth century as each tried to restrain the Asian ambitions of the other.<sup>1</sup> This major hegemonic struggle lasted until the end of the First World War.

The Bolshevik coup d'état in Russia in November 1917 created a reservoir of anti-imperialist sentiment to the north of the British Indian empire but no material support for an Indian anti-colonial revolution, whether bourgeois or proletarian. For Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the consolidation of power in Russia took priority over any ideologically dictated policies elsewhere in Asia. When India gained independence from British rule in 1947, Joseph Stalin, Lenin's successor, refrained from cultivating ties with India's leadership because of its "pro-Western" proclivities. It was not until Nikita Khrushchev's doctrinal reassessments of the mid-1950s, which sought to tap the anti-Western potential of Third World nationalist movements, that the USSR began to explore the implications of a friendly posture toward India.

Meanwhile India, guided by the Fabian socialist ideals of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had since independence unsuccessfully sought Western assistance in the development of a public sector infrastructure, even as it resolutely refused to join Western-sponsored military alliances aimed against the USSR.<sup>2</sup> In the ideologically charged atmosphere of the Cold War, India's nonaligned foreign policy stance was especially irksome to the West and initially also to Stalin's Soviet Union. In the mid-1950s, however, several developments paved the way for a Soviet-Indian partnership. On the Soviet side, as noted, there was a positive reassessment of the ideological value to the USSR of Third World nationalism in the global crusade to undermine Western influence. The development of cordial relations with India formed a key element of

Khrushchev's Asian strategy.<sup>3</sup> The India factor assumed even greater importance in Soviet eyes when, in the latter half of the 1960s, Sino-Soviet differences became clearly irreconcilable.

For India, the Soviet ideological reappraisal brought immediate benefits in the economic area. India had been seeking external assistance in the construction of a state-owned steel mill in Bhilai; the U.S. response had been negative, and Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany had offered help subject to rather stringent conditions. Into this breach stepped the Soviet Union with an offer to aid the Bhilai project on terms acceptable to the Indian leadership. Bhilai represented the beginning of a long and fruitful, though not frictionless, Indo-Soviet partnership in economic, defense, and sociocultural spheres. On the Indian side, as with the USSR, strategic considerations enhanced, even undergirded, the strength of the connection: Pakistan, India's chief rival in South Asia, entered in 1954 into a military assistance agreement with the United States and was soon pulled into a system of U.S.-sponsored anti-Soviet alliances ringing the southern perimeter of the USSR.<sup>4</sup> As Pakistan emerged as an important factor in Washington's global strategy, India's Soviet ties became stronger. The political-strategic aspects of the Indo-Soviet relationship in the mid-1950s manifested themselves in Khrushchev's clear and unequivocal support for India on issues where Indian and Western positions differed. Thus, on Goa and Kashmir, in the United Nations, and in the global public relations arena, the USSR vehemently upheld New Delhi's interpretation of events and vetoed any Western-sponsored resolutions in the Security Council that were inimical to Indian interests.

In the mid-1960s the Soviet focus on India lessened somewhat, as India's disastrous performance in the 1962 Sino-Indian war led the USSR to pursue a more broad-based South Asian strategy in its quest to stem the growth of Chinese influence. Moscow also attempted during this period to cultivate a more evenhanded image in the region by developing ties with Pakistan. Khrushchev's ouster in May 1964 facilitated the policy shift, as did the new leadership's quiet resolve to enhance the USSR's global position and influence. Moscow's neutrality in the 1965 Indo-Pakistani conflict and its subsequent efforts to mediate the conflict testify to the altered Soviet approach in South Asia. The Indian response to this shift was initially cautious. However, in the wake of a July 1968 Soviet decision to supply arms to Pakistan, cordiality between India and the Soviet Union reached its lowest level. The basis for the relationship, however, while shaken, was not completely jeopardized, and India soon regained its importance in Soviet eyes.

The proximate cause of Moscow's reconsideration of India's value was the border clash between Chinese and Soviet forces along the Ussuri River in March 1969, coinciding as it did with the consolidation of the Sino-Pakistani relationship and the prospect of a Sino-American understanding. This combination

of events resuscitated and then strengthened the Indo-Soviet friendship, which in 1971 was formalized by a bilateral treaty. The treaty's security provisions prohibited any form of assistance to a third party with which either country might become involved in armed conflict and required the signatories to render to each other such help as would be necessary to end hostilities and restore peace. In the context of a looming war with Pakistan, the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation provided India with the material and moral support necessary in the event of a confrontation. The subsequent Indo-Pakistan War resulted in the defeat of Pakistan and the creation of a new state, Bangladesh, from the former isolated East Pakistan.

The year 1971 represented the peak of the Indo-Soviet partnership. India's vindication as a competent military power (the defeat of Pakistan blotted out much of the stain from the 1962 Sino-Indian debacle) and the nation's growing economic and political importance in the region reduced Indian's dependence on Soviet support. From 1971 until the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev, it seems fair to say, the bilateral relationship was characterized by greater interest on the Soviet than on the Indian side.<sup>5</sup> Both countries maintained civility in the relationship despite often divergent interests. For instance, though India's nuclear explosion of May 1974 in the Rajasthan Desert disconcerted the Soviet Union, which was wedded to the principles and priorities of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the USSR refrained from publicly censuring India. Likewise, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 deeply disturbed India, both because of its implications for security in the South Asian region, in which India hoped to maintain preeminence, and because of the resulting American rearming of Pakistan. Nonetheless, while India privately exerted pressure on the USSR to withdraw, publicly it chose neither to endorse nor to criticize Moscow's action.

The mid-1980s saw liberalizing trends in both India and the Soviet Union. In 1984 India's newly elected prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, began to take small steps toward freeing the Indian economy from the stifling hold of governmental bureaucracy, and to campaign for the scientific and technological modernization of the country. Both of these moves required a more Western-oriented approach than had been taken previously. In the Soviet Union, appointment in 1985 of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary heralded even greater changes, in the form of political and economic restructuring ("perestroika"). In the foreign policy area, Gorbachev, moving simultaneously on many diplomatic fronts, sought to improve relationships with the United States and China by removing major irritants: the USSR eased its hard-line arms control posture, decided in 1988 to withdraw from Afghanistan, and softened its support of Vietnam in order to enhance Moscow's chances of mending fences with China (with ancillary benefits in relations with the United States). These significant developments

## 24 Naval War College Review

could not fail to have an impact on the USSR's South Asia policy. Appreciating the importance of conflict resolution, Gorbachev cultivated relations with Pakistan while continuing to declare Moscow's commitment to its friendship with India. As the Soviet Union was teetering to its collapse in 1991, the political-strategic foundations of the Indo-Soviet relationship established in the 1950s were already crumbling under the impact of forces unleashed by Gorbachev's reforms.

These changes in the strategic dimension of the Indo-Soviet equation most notably appeared in the economic and defense aspects of the relationship. Both, of course, were interlinked, as military sales underwritten by Soviet credits have often been paid for by Indian exports to the USSR. After almost total Indian dependence on British-made arms in the 1950s, the Soviet share of total Indian military imports stood at over 60 percent by the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> This shift was a result largely of the refusal of Western powers (Britain, France, and the United States) to accede to Indian requests for the purchase of certain types of weapon systems; Moscow, by contrast, was willing for political and strategic reasons to offer military hardware and even license the manufacture in India of aircraft such as the MiG-21 and MiG-27L, vessels including Tarantul missile patrol boats, and other systems. Credits for arms purchases were offered at low rates of interest and were repayable through trade surpluses accumulated on the Indian side, using a periodically revised rupee-ruble exchange. New Delhi was thus able, without expending hard currency reserves, to acquire fairly advanced weapons. While Soviet aircraft, missiles, ships, and ground force equipment were not always as technologically sophisticated as their Western counterparts, they were economical, modern, dependable—and available. India could not improve upon this combination of advantages.

Soviet arms sales to India had begun in 1961 and, except for a brief hiatus during the Sino-Indian war, continued unabated into the 1980s, even through the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. Interestingly, India's efforts in the mid-1970s and early 1980s to diversify its sources of arms led to concessionary Soviet offers for the sale of the most advanced aircraft, conventional submarines, and tanks. For instance, in 1984 India was offered the MiG-29 fighter aircraft (the Soviet equivalent of the U.S. F-16) ahead of the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact allies; MiG-31s were scheduled for delivery to the Indian Air Force almost as soon as to the Soviet air forces; Moscow agreed to purchase MiG-21 components manufactured under license by India's Hindustan Aeronautics, Ltd., for delivery to Warsaw Pact countries and other countries flying MiG-21s; advanced T-72 and T-80 tanks were promised; and above all, manufacturing license agreements for weapons were modified to allow India to install non-Soviet systems on Soviet platforms.<sup>7</sup>

So long as Cold War political realities persisted and Moscow's global ambitions remained unaltered, the Soviet leadership tolerated the economic costs of its defense relationship with India. Gorbachev's new and de-ideologized approach to interstate relations, however, and his conviction that a more efficient and innovative domestic economy required global integration, soon affected that view, especially with respect to the rupee-ruble arrangement. For New Delhi, too, many of the underlying assumptions for this economic relation eroded as India's progressive industrialization undercut the advantages of its ties with the USSR in this area, and as Soviet global retrenchment reduced Moscow's political value in the eyes of the Indian leadership. In 1990 the USSR began demanding payment in hard currency for Soviet weapons components, and a note of uncertainty crept in.<sup>8</sup> Both countries moved more openly to cold calculation of interest and gains.

Over the course of 1990–1991, the Soviet Union withdrew from India its prior unequivocal support on the Kashmir issue. For Gorbachev, who now recognized the right to self-determination of the Baltic republics and subsequently for other largely non-Russian Soviet republics, the earlier position was clearly inconsistent. Along with the United States, in the summer of 1990 the Soviet Union endorsed Pakistan's call for a nuclear-free zone in South Asia and for multilateral efforts to deal with the nuclear issue.<sup>9</sup> Dislocation in the Soviet economy now also affected areas of functional cooperation; economic deals, both military and otherwise, were jeopardized when supply lines in the USSR were disrupted by the effects of economic reforms and political uncertainty. The Indo-Soviet special relationship was already unraveling when in late 1991 the dissolution of the USSR changed the very terms of the equation.

### A New and Pragmatic Phase

Under the prevailing political and economic circumstances, the possibility of a smooth transition from Indo-Soviet to Indo-Russian ties was slim. The Indian government's acceptance without protest of the anti-reformist August 1991 coup added psychological hurdles. In December, Russian Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoi visited Pakistan to secure help in obtaining the release of Soviet prisoners of war captured by the mujahedin during the decade-long engagement in Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> The visit underscored the Russian government's stated commitment to replace ideology with geopolitical interest as the guiding light of foreign policy. However, the level and extent of erstwhile Indo-Soviet commitments meant that, for the near term at least, recasting its Indian relations would occupy the bulk of Russian attention in South Asia.

The unhinging of ties came about largely because of two circumstances, neither of which, in fact, directly involved Pakistan. The first of these was the



pro-Western stance adopted by the Russian leadership, marginalizing India as a counterweight to American and Chinese influence and requiring Russian policy makers to give greater weight to U.S. concerns and priorities in the area. The second circumstance was related to the severe economic dislocation wrought in the Eurasian region by the breakup of a previously integrated economic unit. Trade and military arrangements negotiated between the Soviet and Indian governments fell victim to changing economic and political realities; many institutions participating in Indo-Soviet agreements, for instance, now found themselves in independent successor states beyond the reach of Moscow's control or even influence. The combined effect was a rapid deterioration of Indo-Russian relations, in 1992.

In January 1993 President Boris Yeltsin made a long-awaited and twice-postponed visit to New Delhi to mend fences. The visit provided an opportunity for both countries to articulate and usher in a new and pragmatic phase in the relationship. The status of Indo-Russian cooperation today is reflected in the results of the Yeltsin trip and that of Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao's visit to Moscow a year and a half later. Yeltsin's visit culminated in the signing of a twenty-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (without a continuation of the security clause of the 1971 Indo-Soviet treaty). The banality of this document reflected the end of the old "special relationship," but the present understanding is far from bereft of political-strategic meaning. Russia and India remain important to one another.

While in India, Yeltsin pledged to support his hosts' position that the Kashmir issue is one between India and Pakistan and can be resolved only in a bilateral context. Although the strength of the promise has yet to be tested, one must note that Yeltsin's Russia has a greater impetus than did Gorbachev's USSR to support the principle of territorial integrity, in view of demands for autonomy within Russia itself. Chechnya is a case in point. In this vein, Rao's visit to Moscow in June 1994 yielded the Moscow Declaration, which outlined principles for safeguarding the integrity of pluralistic states against threats from religious extremism, terrorism, and separatism.

In the larger South Asian context as well, Moscow's renewed relationship with India, noted Victor Samoylov (director general of Rosvooruzhenie, Russia's state corporation for armaments trading), is part of a "strategic policy in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. We consider India to be the main guarantee of stability in the region. And we shall do our best to ensure India's position in this region. We realized it would be silly to lose such a partner."<sup>11</sup>

Such an assessment is unlikely to go unnoticed in India. But the leadership, the opposition parties, and the attentive public all are very much aware of the limitations in Russian support. From the Indian perspective, the external constraints on the Indo-Russian relationship, as evidenced in

Moscow's alteration in July 1993 (under American pressure) of a cryogenic rocket engine deal with India, are considerable. The Clinton-Yeltsin joint statement from Moscow in January 1994 calling upon India and Pakistan to sign the nuclear nonproliferation treaty and to join a multilateral forum to make South Asia nuclear-free was also seen by many in India as a "sinister anti-India move" on the part of the United States.<sup>12</sup> In this context, it is small consolation for New Delhi that Russia is not itself pushing India hard on the nonproliferation issue.

The defense link continues to be of critical importance to both countries: for Russia, because arms sales bring in hard currency and, in a competitive market, India is a prize Russia would like to keep; for India, because it is dependent upon Moscow for a large percentage of its defense equipment and spares. During Rao's June 1994 visit to Moscow, two declarations and nine agreements covering mutual strategic interest, defense, trade, and technology were announced.<sup>13</sup> Of these the most important was the signing of a joint venture between Hindustan Aeronautics and Russian agencies for spares and servicing of aircraft of Soviet origin. The Russian side also offered for sale a range of new aircraft including the Su-30 (two-seat Su-27) and more MiG-29s, combat helicopters, the T-80 main battle tank, plus anti-aircraft, anti-tank and anti-ship as well as other missiles and systems.<sup>14</sup> Beyond the possible purchase of thirty more MiG-29s, the Indian government, for its part, has made a concerted attempt to downplay the defense component of the Indo-Russian relationship in view of concerns in Islamabad and Washington.

In the area of trade, India is in the process of a slow and difficult rebuilding of ties with Russia following the scrapping of the rupee-ruble arrangement, with competition from China, other Southeast Asian countries, and the West. Economic trade issues, however, run a distant second at present to defense criteria—but in the long run, even the latter may slowly erode. India's defense establishment would like the government to keep its options open, specifically to examine closely a proposal from the Indian Air Force to obtain two squadrons of the French Mirage 2000 as an answer to efforts by Pakistan to obtain next-generation fighter aircraft.<sup>15</sup> Diversification of sources for military supplies and equipment has been made more attractive by Russian insistence on hard currency sales, so India has been actively shopping for defense equipment in Israel, South Africa, and other Western countries.

In the short run, the importance to India of the Russian relationship cannot be underestimated. Rightly or wrongly, Indian political leaders perceive—in the unrelenting American pressure on India in the areas of nuclear nonproliferation, Kashmir, human rights, and trade—a deliberate attempt to diminish India's status in the region and ignore its legitimate security concerns. The response, Indians

argue, must be to build “flexible coalitions” and to search for “tactical allies” on each separate issue.<sup>16</sup> Russia, with all its shortcomings, seems one such useful partner.

In the long run, India’s economic and technological priorities necessitate a stronger relationship with the West, especially the United States. The implications of various facts are not missed by the Indian leadership or public: the U.S. is India’s largest trading partner; American companies are the biggest private foreign investors in India; and Washington has a dominant influence in the international financial institutions from which India receives assistance. Thus, were American efforts toward peace and stability in the South Asian region perceived to be taking account of the security context within which India operates—and which most certainly includes Indian apprehension about Chinese ambitions—one might see a more attenuated Indo-Russian relationship.

### If Not “Special,” What?

Under most foreseeable post-Cold War conditions, a special Indo-Russian relationship would not be a meaningful alternative to the current arrangement. Russia does not have the international influence of the Soviet Union; the political rationale that underlay the Indo-Soviet friendship, therefore, no longer exists. For President Yeltsin, India is not—as it was for his Soviet predecessors—Moscow’s sole strategic ally in Asia; the USSR, as he observes, “regarded India as a partner in the capacity of a counterweight against the United States and Beijing,” whereas Russia is interested in “healthy and mutually advantageous relations with India, not directed against any third country at all.”<sup>17</sup> Ties with India are important for Russia, however, perhaps even more than those with Pakistan, if only because the long Soviet-era partnership bequeathed enduring functional linkages in the economic and military spheres. But India no longer figures prominently in Russian global strategy and therefore no longer plays a “special” role.

However, were Russia’s pro-Western strategy to falter, perhaps through disillusionment with the West (particularly the United States), failure of domestic reform, or the predominance of a conservative chief executive, the search for a kindred spirit in a “neocolonial” North-South contest might well lead Russia to look toward India (and perhaps China). But from the Indian perspective, to reciprocate in such a case would be enormously self-defeating both politically and economically, because Russia has much less to offer than do countries in the West and in Southeast Asia, and also because economic regeneration would go farther to ease ethnic and religious tensions than would military modernization.

One scenario that might effectively pull Russia and India closer is a shared perception of an Islamic threat. Currently, India's concerns in this regard, whether justified or not, are greater than Russia's. Pakistan's assiduous efforts, arising from geographical proximity and religious affinity, to cultivate the newly independent Central Asian countries have alarmed Indian leaders, who have in turn attempted to woo these countries themselves. Still, conservatives in Russia worry about "the threat from the South"; in parliament and government bureaucracies, this apprehension extends to Turkish and Iranian attempts to gain greater influence in that region. Were common concern to drive India and Russia into an anti-Islamic partnership, however, the results would be disastrous, for two reasons. First, such a link would, in the nature of a self-fulfilling prophecy, strengthen if not generate the very threat against which it was aimed. Second, the Muslim populations of both countries would feel alienated and each group would become a source of internal political instability and separatism.

Might the Russian-Indian relationship deteriorate? Given the extensive economic and military links already existing, a swift deterioration does not appear likely. Further, the prospect of a complete rupture or the rise of enmity seems remote. Historically, neither country, in any of its incarnations, has pursued lasting rivalry against the other in any sphere. (The competition between the British and Russian empires did spill over into the Indian subcontinent, but only peripherally; the British took great pains to maintain a physical separation between the two empires in South Asia.) Also, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's borders have moved even farther north, increasing the physical distance between India and Russia and thereby easing earlier Indian concerns about conflicting Indian regional and Soviet global ambitions.

How *should* the future relationship of India and Russia be depicted? The connection, now bereft of ideological significance, is shaped largely by specific issues, by the interplay with other major powers, and by domestic concerns, so at least in the near term it is likely to continue in an understandable but fluid pattern. Thus, in areas of converging interest—such as the economic and military spheres, where there is a common need for cooperation—efforts to arrive at mutually advantageous arrangements are almost certain to succeed. In cases of divergence, clear expressions of disagreement are likely, but with little recrimination. Since Russia and India appear to have no conflicting "vital interests," neither acrimony nor bellicosity is imaginable without another epochal change in world politics. The relationship, then, will remain pragmatic, having neither the seeds of an alliance nor the germs of total rupture.

## India's Regional and Global Security Concerns

From the Indian perspective, Chinese and Pakistani ambitions and policies represent significant security threats. China's nuclear weapons program, nuclear testing, sales of missile systems and components to Pakistan, and increasing power projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean have raised considerable alarm in New Delhi.<sup>18</sup> Memories of the Indian debacle in the 1962 Sino-Indian War, in which China occupied the Aksai-Chin (northeastern) region of Kashmir, are deeply imprinted in the Indian psyche.

India's long-standing conflictual relationship with Pakistan predates the independence of the two countries in August 1947. It has its origin in the differences between philosophical bases for nationhood: the bedrock of Pakistani nationalism is Muslim identity, while India forged a domestic consensus based on secularism, democracy, and liberal-socialist policy. The dispute over Kashmir encapsulates the hostility. Pakistan argues that the rights of the Muslim majority in the state of Jammu-Kashmir can be safeguarded only within Pakistan, whereas India, upholding the original instrument of accession that brought Jammu-Kashmir into the Indian Union, disputes Pakistani and Chinese control of, respectively, the northwestern and northeastern portions of Kashmir. As a secular democracy, India objects to casting the Kashmir issue solely in religious terms.<sup>19</sup> The growth in the state of Kashmir since 1987 of Muslim insurgency, to a great extent encouraged and supported by Pakistan, has added new urgency to India's perceptions of its security risks; it has also drawn India into the center of an ugly human rights controversy arising from the often repressive treatment of insurgents by Indian forces. Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability further complicates the Kashmir scenario.

In light of these developments, a national consensus has emerged within India on key issues: that the status of Kashmir is non-negotiable; that India will not give up its nuclear option; and that outside pressure on India to resolve the Kashmir dispute and sign the nonproliferation treaty (NPT) is unacceptable. However, these positions may not be quite as inflexible as they seem. On Kashmir, the Indian government recognized that in preventing human rights groups such as Amnesty International from having access to Kashmir it has unwittingly fostered reports based on second-hand information which may have been exaggerated, and it has taken steps to correct the situation. The establishment in September 1993 of a Human Rights Commission composed of jurists reinforced India's commitment to put an end to violations of human rights on its territory. While Indian observers often criticize what they see as American "meddling" in Kashmir, they recognize

that “India must restore normalcy in the Kashmir Valley” through an “acceptable political instrumentality.”<sup>20</sup>

India's nuclear position has also come under careful scrutiny. Most Indian analysts chide the government for its ambivalence and argue in favor of a new approach that is either clearly “NPT-friendly” or “opposed to NPT.” As a respected Indian academic argues, “An NPT-friendly diplomacy may not require India to sign the treaty. But it will require India to negotiate with Pakistan and China a series of separate agreements.”<sup>21</sup> Such a stance would bring India many benefits by easing restrictions on the transfer of high technology. Nevertheless, public opinion in India is staunchly anti-NPT; an editorial in a leading newspaper points out, “If a government in New Delhi were to succumb to pressure and sign the NPT against national consensus, its continuance would be in jeopardy under an onslaught of ultranationalist forces.”<sup>22</sup> Thus any NPT-friendly change would have to be carefully crafted and avoid any appearance of capitulation to outside pressure. Here, Russia's status as a nuclear power probably militates against any open effort to sway Indian policy.

Moscow's political disengagement from the South Asian region has occurred at an unpropitious moment in India's domestic fortunes. Though it is an aspiring regional power, India is beset with internal political and economic difficulties that retard, for the time being, the attainment of the preeminence suggested by the nation's population, geography, history, and promise. Externally, when Russia abandoned the Soviet Union's global ambitions, India lost its earlier leverage as a “balancer” in the U.S.-China-USSR triangle. The disappearance of the Soviet threat in Afghanistan likewise reduced Pakistan's importance to the United States. During the last years of the Bush administration, American concern over Pakistan's attempts to build a nuclear bomb led to the termination of U.S. military supplies to that country, which had been for a long time the favored channel for American arms sent to stem the Soviet tide in South Asia. The loosening of Pakistani-American ties paved the way for a brief improvement in the Indo-American relationship; but having resisted Soviet attempts to establish hegemony, the United States is not interested in promoting India's goal of regional leadership.

While South Asia does not occupy a very important place in the hierarchy of its interests, the U.S. desires a peaceful, stable, and nuclear-free South Asia. American attention to the region presently derives from the assessment that the South Asian region is at a potentially high risk for nuclear conflict. This evaluation is seen in India as exaggerated, and as being based upon American acceptance of Pakistani rhetoric at face value. In the Indian view, Pakistan has succeeded in its main aim, which is to bring the United States to pressure India

## 32 Naval War College Review

about Kashmir and about the NPT—areas in which Pakistan's leverage over India in a bilateral context is minimal.<sup>23</sup> The Kashmir disagreement has been explained above. The Indian leadership objects to American, and more generally Western, pressure on India to sign the NPT. More recently, India refused to send a delegation to the NPT Extension Conference and expressed strong objections to the May 1995 decision by NPT signatory states for an indefinite extension of the treaty.

With regard to China, the other major player in the region, Russia and India have moved to improve relations—Russia because of shared concern about the global power imbalance and, especially, interest in economic links; India because, with the loss of Russia as a strategic ally, it needs to mend fences with a nation that is its only competitor in the region—other than Pakistan—and that, unlike Pakistan, could not easily be challenged by New Delhi.

These global shifts have broken many long-standing patterns. Hence we see duplicated in the larger South Asia environment the same ad hoc quality that now marks the Indo-Russian relationship. Thus, on the issue of human rights we may see the United States pitted against China, India, and even Russia. On nuclear proliferation, Russia and the United States may take positions opposed to those of India. And with respect to domestic economic needs India, Pakistan, and Russia may each sometimes woo U.S. investment and assistance but at other times inhibit or repulse American involvement when it appears adversely to affect sovereignty or national self-conceptions. In other words, we are likely to see in post-Cold War South Asia the internationalization of single-issue politics, both in the relationship worked out by New Delhi and Moscow and in the complex of bilateral ties among all the countries whose interests intersect with those of India and Russia.

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### Notes

1. It was in fact largely in order to separate physically the Russian Empire from the British Empire that Britain had carved the territorial barrier of the Wakhan Corridor, separating Tajikistan from what later became Pakistan. The Wakhan corridor created a wedge of Afghan territory between the Russian and British empires. Afghanistan was seen by the British as a neutral country.

2. Fabian Socialists were committed to gradual rather than revolutionary means for spreading socialist ideas. The Fabian Society was founded in Britain in 1884; among its early proponents were Sidney and Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, and H.G. Wells. The name recalled the delaying tactics of the Roman general Quintus Fabius Maximus in the Second Punic War.

3. For a detailed assessment of the Soviet diplomatic offensive toward India during the latter half of the 1950s, see Harish Kapur, *The Soviet Union and the Emerging Nations* (London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1972), pp. 46–52.

4. Pakistan joined both the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).

5. For a study arguing that India was the primary beneficiary in the Soviet-Indian influence relationship, see Robert H. Donaldson, *The Soviet-Indian Alignment: Quest for Influence*, Graduate School of International Studies, Monograph Series in World Affairs (Colorado: Univ. of Denver, 1979), vol. 16, pp. 3-4.

6. Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 94.

7. For further details on the many Soviet concessions to India in the areas of military sales and technology transfer from 1982 to 1988, see *ibid.*, pp. 95-8.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

9. On other military-related matters, an expired three-year lease of a Charlie I-class nuclear submarine was not renewed with the Indian Navy in 1991, either because of its destabilizing effects in a volatile area or because a switch to "unrealistically high" hard-currency payments caused the Indians to balk. See Hamish McDonald, "Looking for Friends," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 September 1991, p. 25. For Soviet criticism of India's obdurately negative stance on the Nonproliferation Treaty, see N. Paklin, "Who Has a Nuclear Bomb Behind His Back?", *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (hereinafter *CDSP*), 18 December 1991, pp. 18-9.

10. V. Lashkul, "Will Mujahedeen Make Goodwill Gesture?" *CDSP*, 22 January 1992, p. 22.

11. Interview, Sudeep Chakravarti and Sunil Dasgupta, "Looking Ahead, Finally," *India Today*, 11 July 1994, p. 32.

12. Editorial, "Pressures Again," *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 17 January 1994, p. 13, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Near East and South Asia* (hereinafter *FBIS-NES*), 25 January 1994, p. 51.

13. For details, see Chakravarti and Dasgupta, pp. 30-5.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

15. "No 'Shopping List' for Arms Submitted," *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 24 June 1994, p. 9, *FBIS-NES*, 28 June 1994, p. 75.

16. S. Nihal Singh in *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 24 August 1993, p. 13, *FBIS-NES*, 17 September 1993, p. 45.

17. Report on President Yeltsin's news conference, Russian Television Network (Moscow), 25 January 1993, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service-Central Eurasia*, 26 January 1993, p. 20.

18. On this issue, see Sandy Gordon, "Capping South Asia's Nuclear Weapons Programs: A Window of Opportunity?", in *Asian Survey*, July 1994, pp. 662-73. On Indian concerns regarding Chinese naval expansion in the Indian Ocean, see Ranjit Kumar in *Navbharat Times* (Bombay), 26 February 1993, p. 4, *FBIS-NES*, 8 March 1993, p. 65.

19. A thorough analysis of Indian, Pakistani, Kashmiri, and non-South Asian views on the Kashmiri conflict is available in Raju G. C. Thomas, ed., *Perspectives on Kashmir: The Roots of Conflict in South Asia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992). For extensive reactions recorded from the Indian and Pakistani news media, see *FBIS-NES*, 22 March 199, pp. 1-86. For an excellent historical survey of the Kashmir problem, see Alastair Lamb, *Crisis in Kashmir 1947-1966* (New York: Praeger, 1967). For a recent study, see Robert Wirving, *India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute: On Regional Conflict and Its Dissolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

20. K. Natwar Singh, in *The Hindustan Times*, 15 October 1993, p. 13, *FBIS-NES*, 27 October 1993, p. 59.

21. Bhabani Sen Gupta, *The Hindustan Times*, 30 April 1993, p. 13, *FBIS-NES*, 11 May 1993, p. 56. See also T. T. Poulouse, *The Hindustan Times*, 28 December 1992, p. 11, *FBIS-NES*, 27 January 1993, pp. 55-7; Afzir Karim (Major General, Ret.), "IDR Comment," *Indian Defence Review*, July 1993, pp. 7-8, in *FBIS-NES*, 3 September 1993, pp. 33-4.

22. "Pressures Again," *FBIS-NES*, p. 52.

23. See, for instance, Jasjit Singh, *Indian Express*, 27 March 1993, p. 3, *FBIS-NES*, 8 April 1993, p. 46