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IN THE CONTEXT OF
VAJPAYEE'S 2003 VISIT

by
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INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF VAJPAYEE'S 2003 VISIT

SURJIT MANSINGH

When a head of government visits another country it is always an important event, not a routine matter. This is all the more so in the case of India and China, between which high-level visits were initiated only in the 1990s and Atal Behari Vajpayee was only the fourth Indian prime minister to make a state visit to China. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the first to do so in October 1954, when he “sensed such a tremendous emotional response from the Chinese people that [he] was amazed.”¹ Nehru’s considered policy of friendship with the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) was wrecked in the often-analyzed events of 1959-1962² and the border war of October 1962 that proved traumatic for the collective Indian psyche. Notwithstanding a restoration of ambassadorial representation in 1976; visits by Foreign Ministers Vajpayee and Huang Hua in 1979 and 1981 respectively; and the institution thereafter of annual dialogues to exchange views on bilateral, regional, and international matters, it was only the visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China in December 1988 that ended the long interlude of disrupted relations. Rajiv Gandhi’s substantial discussions with Deng Xiaoping, Zhu Rongji, and other top Chinese state and party leaders were accompanied by the establishment of two Joint Working Groups (JWGs) for negotiation on the boundary question and for promoting trade and

investment; three Agreements on cooperation in science and technology, civil aviation, and cultural exchanges; and the reiteration of the need for a peaceful environment and Asian cooperation on the basis of the Five Principles of *Panchsheel* or Peaceful Coexistence.

Chinese Premier Li Peng visited India in 1991, followed by a majority of the Politburo’s Standing Committee, and then President Jiang Zemin in November 1996. Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao went to China in September 1993 and President R. Venkataraman and Vice President K.R. Narayanan also made visits in the early 1990s. Tangible outcomes of these visits included the 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LOAC) in the India-China border areas that provided for meetings and consultations between border defense personnel as well as confidence building measures (CBMs) and verification procedures to prevent inadvertent conflict. Consequently, the 1996 Agreement on CBMs in the Military Field Along the LOAC stipulated in its first article that neither side shall use its military capability against the other and also agreed to reduce troop deployments and speed up the process of clarifying the alignment of the LOAC.

Possible intangible gains of better understanding in the top leadership as well as the general public, and sensitivity to each other’s con-

cerns, were not evident in the years that followed when differences in security perceptions surfaced again and the level of interest and knowledge about each other, even among educated Chinese and Indians, remained appallingly low. By 1998, when the coalition headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power, the self-styled Indian 'strategic community'—consisting of both officials and non-officials—more or less accepted a 'China threat' theory. This concept was based upon China's identification as a 'Great Power,' its status as a nuclear weapons state, and its permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (P-5). Other factors that contributed to Indian fears of Chinese intimidation or encirclement included China's phenomenal economic growth; its military modernization; its supply linkages with Pakistan in nuclear technology, missiles, and arms; and its active and growing presence in India's other neighbors—particularly Myanmar. While Defense Minister George Fernandes was the most outspoken proponent of the 'China threat,' he was not the only one to perceive it, and Vajpayee's letter to foreign leaders justifying India's nuclear tests in May 1998 implied as much. But PRC President Jiang Zemin stood alongside U.S. President Bill Clinton in condemning India's May 1998 nuclear tests as a threat to the international nonproliferation regime and refusing to recognize the objective reality of India as a nuclear weapons state. People's Liberation Army (PLA) analysts who had not formerly paid much attention to South Asia now published articles attacking "Indian hegemony" and growing military capabilities.³ Meanwhile, the enormous potential for broad based bilateral interchange and international cooperation between India and China on subjects of common interest was barely touched. Both countries were endeavoring to establish closer economic and political relations with the rest of the world, but the main direction of their focus was the West, especially the U.S.,

rather than with each other. Vajpayee's June 2003 visit to China must be assessed against this briefly sketched background.

II. Comparability of India and China

I have long been interested in the comparability of India and China in their international dealings.⁴ It has a bearing on bilateral relations too, because self-perceptions and the perceptions of others affect the equality of diplomatic interactions. I see broad similarity between India and China in their national aspirations and international challenges, as well as in the pride each takes in their equally ancient and great civilizations, and in their various responses to the Western impact in the 19th century and to modernization in the 20th. But the differences between contemporary India and China are striking, and go beyond the basic contrast of political systems—between a multiparty parliamentary democracy and federal structure in India and a unitary structure exclusively controlled by the still authoritarian Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The approximations and distances between traditional Indic and Sinic civilizations need not concern us here except to emphasize the importance of perceptions in international relations. The differences between India and China as modern 'nation states,' however, may be summed up in five assertions.

The first assertion addresses national self-image; China's self-projection of being a unified state with a defined territory and centralized government was long standing and strong, reinforced by Mao Zedong and the 'liberation' of 1949. India's sense of selfhood, on the other hand, was more apt to be expressed in cultural and social rather than political and territorial terms. Secondly, the PRC has established a reputation for 'strategic' thinking, that is, of coherent and purposeful policy making and implementation—even when proven disastrously wrong. Successive governments

in independent India are well known for making ad hoc and frequently uncoordinated decisions while implementing even established and continuous policies in a dilatory fashion. Thirdly, Beijing often articulates general principles, such as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and 'no first use' of nuclear weapons, but interprets them 'pragmatically' according to the circumstances of the day, leaving ample room for misunderstanding. New Delhi seldom promulgates 'doctrines' itself but has used terms such as 'suzerainty' and 'autonomy' as well as 'no first use' that are open to different interpretations. In short, China and India do not speak the same English language.

A fourth difference is evident at any gathering. Chinese officials and non-officials alike adopt a unified opinion on a subject that may or may not conceal nuances among the higher leadership and the varying weights pressure groups such as the PLA exert on policy making.⁵ In contrast, the diversity of opinion among Indians is real and vociferously expressed, though pluralism may conceal an actual national consensus on specific topics. Fifthly, the PRC under Mao showed willingness and an ability to isolate itself from the international community and 'stand tall;' this surely has helped Mao's successors in negotiating engagement with the West. The leaders of independent India fully participated in what they believed to be a liberal international order and valued their intellectual and other connections to the Western world. This translated into a widespread perception—at home and abroad—of Indian psychological dependence and hence vulnerability to Western pressure that the factual record does not wholly substantiate.⁶

Similarities in Indian and Chinese national challenges and aspirations are as evident and qualified as the above differences and can also be reduced to five points. First and foremost, both want to overcome the humiliations of the colonial era. The question, of course, is how? Secondly, both wish to be recognized as fully autonomous

centers of decision-making and truly independent powers. Hence both can agree on the desirability of a multipolar world in the post-Cold War era dominated by the U.S. hyperpower. There is no evidence, however, to suggest agreement on what the poles of such a world might be, or how to achieve it. The third similarity is based upon India and China's manifest wish to be acknowledged as the predominant power in their respective regions. But the definition of 'region' is not so clear and it is important to examine New Delhi's and Beijing's dealings with all of Asia, especially Southeast and Central Asia that were 'shared neighborhoods' in the pre-modern era and could be so again.⁷

Obviously, both countries aim toward economic and social development and general improvement of living conditions for their comparably huge populations. They have set about this in different ways and with varying results. The published literature on this topic is too vast to be cited here, but most observers point out that China had outstripped India in every indicator of national power and prosperity—other than political choice and personal freedom—by the end of the 20th century. The fifth similarity in contemporary Indian and Chinese foreign policies is their respective drives to establish cordial and cooperative relations with other political and economic power centers, especially with the U.S., but not excluding the European Union, Russia, and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). U.S. dealings with China and India, both actual and potential, are not symmetrical and have a strong influence on bilateral relations between the two because each is wary of the other's possible closeness to the U.S.⁸

III. Accomplishments of the Vajpayee Visit

High-level visits serve an immediate purpose of galvanizing civil servants and opinion makers to bring themselves and others up to date on the

country concerned, and to prepare seriously for the visit's expected or hoped for results. In the summer of 2003 columns on China appeared in leading Indian newspapers, and columns on India appeared in the official Chinese press. Also, the two countries' Foreign Offices carefully drafted (so as to reduce the risk of subsequent misunderstanding) the three and a half page Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation Between the Republic of India and the Peoples Republic of China jointly issued in Beijing on June 23, 2003. Although it is a framework document and not an enforceable treaty, the declaration still indicates how far the two had progressed beyond the mutual suspicion of 1998. By the end of that year itself China had set about allaying India's fears through the attentions of Ambassador Zhou Gang and his accomplished and well connected wife, Professor Deng Junbing. India's Special Envoy Jaswant Singh and National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra also had publicly denied that either country posed a threat to the other. Additionally, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji had led a lengthy and genuinely friendly delegation to India in 2002 solidifying commercial and economic cooperation. The Joint Declaration of June 2003 expressed satisfaction with this progress and explicitly states: "The common interests of the two sides outweigh their differences. The two countries are not a threat to each other. Neither side shall use or threaten to use force against the other."⁹

The declaration spells out at some length that India and China "have a mutual desire for good neighborly relations and have broad common interests" that include promoting socio-economic development and prosperity, maintaining peace and stability regionally and globally, qualitatively enhancing the bilateral relationship at all levels, and strengthening multi-polarity at the international level. China and India also agreed to address their differences "through peaceful means in a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable

manner." These means include regular high-level exchanges, annual meetings, greatly expanded trade and economic cooperation, broad defense exchanges to promote trust and understanding between their armed forces, and enhanced cooperation for the benefit of developing countries at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other multilateral institutions.

The unsettled boundary question is the major issue of difference between India and China and it was only in 1988—after seven years of inconclusive talks at the vice ministerial level—that Rajiv Gandhi agreed to drop India's precondition of border settlement before broadening relations. During the 1990s the two governments focused on clarifying the LOAC through meetings of expanded JWG's and had slowly reached the point of exchanging maps on the least controversial middle sector and moving on to the more controversial western sector while maintaining peace and tranquility all along it. In 2003, Vajpayee and his Chinese hosts reiterated the need to clarify the LOAC and maintain peace and tranquility, but then leaped forward to "appoint a Special Representative to explore from the political perspective of the overall bilateral relationship the framework of a boundary settlement."

Indian National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra and Chinese Vice Minister Dai Bingguo, the two special representatives, met in October 2003 and March 2004 without media coverage to bring a welcome political dimension to the dialogue and move toward an eventual border solution. India's earlier geographical-historical-legal approach to the border had been countered by China's use of force. And, while the difficult and ongoing technical task of clarifying the LOAC was very useful, it was by definition temporary. Vajpayee's accomplishment lay in publicly acknowledging the imperative of a politically crafted, lasting boundary settlement. That achievement is diluted, however, by the fact that neither his government, nor his successor Dr. Manmo-

han Singh's Congress-led government, made an effort to craft multi-party and public opinion consensus at home on the shape of an acceptable border. Nor has the 1962 Parliamentary resolution forbidding alienation of India's "sacred soil" been repealed; neither has it been invoked. The Chinese side is similarly not forthcoming on a politically acceptable line and long ago made too many qualifications to the 'package deal' of exchanges reportedly offered by Zhou Enlai in 1960 and Deng Xiaoping in 1981 for it to remain credible today. It is unlikely that either country would surrender territory under its administration and control. Nevertheless, we may reasonably expect clarification of the LOAC, exchanges of maps, and negotiations on a mutually acceptable border to proceed hand in hand—albeit slowly—if the first step taken in the Joint Declaration of June 2003 is to be honored.

Another document signed during the Vajpayee visit was a Memorandum on Expanding Border Trade pursuant to the 1991 agreement on resuming border trade, which had opened two routes via Shipki La near Simla and Lipulekh La near the western Nepal-India border. Though border trade along these routes is statistically insignificant, it makes a huge difference to the lives of people living in the Himalayan region. I give only one illustration of this fact: when I traversed Lipulekh Pass along a narrow pony track on foot in 1994 I asked a villager installing solar panels on his newly built house in the high village of Gunji where the money for all this construction activity came from. He answered with a broad grin "*Tibet khul gaya*" (Tibet has been opened), obviously recalling the thriving market of pre-1962 days. A third route in the east originating either in Sikkim or in West Bengal was envisaged in 1993 but not announced, probably because China was unwilling to make the explicit recognition of Sikkim as part of India that India demanded. The 2003 Memorandum on Expanding Border Trade finesses that issue by agreeing to open Nathu La (in Sikkim) as another

pass for border trade. India designated Changgu of Sikkim state and China designated Renqinggang of the Tibet Autonomous Region as the venues for border trade markets. Customs posts and checkpoints at appropriate locations are yet to be established, but more than the implicit Chinese recognition of Sikkim as an Indian state achieved by the agreement, important state maps now issued in China follow international practice and show Sikkim as part of India. Though no formal announcement has been made, the website of the Chinese Foreign Ministry has amended its list of independent countries so that it no longer incorrectly includes Sikkim. (Sikkim was a Protectorate of British India, recognized as such by China in 1890, was confirmed as a Protectorate of independent India by treaty in 1950, and integrated with the Indian Union only in 1974-1975.)

Some Indians criticized the absence of explicit Chinese recognition of Sikkim's integration and said Vajpayee had gone too far in signing the bald statement in the Joint Declaration: "The Indian side recognizes that the Tibet Autonomous Region is part of the Peoples Republic of China and reiterates that it does not allow Tibetans to engage in anti-China political activities in India." But this statement only reflects a reality accepted by previous Indian governments—one that was exhaustively discussed in New Delhi with the Dalai Lama and his advisers before being signed in Beijing. On this occasion, unlike in the past, the "Chinese side expresse[d] its appreciation for the Indian position." Moreover, delegations from the Dalai Lama offering to reopen dialogue were well received in Beijing in December 2002 and early June 2003, keeping open the possibility of a negotiated settlement between them. Significantly, recent exchanges of military delegations at a senior command level between India and China have included visits to Tibet by the former and to Arunachal Pradesh by the latter. Perhaps each side was impressed by the other's firmness of control in border areas. At minimum, direct

military-to-military exchanges reduce the risk of misunderstanding and clashes as had occurred in 1986-1987 at Sumdorong Chu in the eastern sector. Direct military-to-military contacts have also commenced between the Indian Navy and the PLA Navy. A small 'search and rescue' Joint Naval Exercise held in the South China Sea in November 2003 supplemented the formal and very limited port visits made by Indian and Chinese warships during the 1990s. While these measures are not likely to have allayed Indian suspicions of Chinese blue water navy plans and activity in the Cocos Islands, or Chinese disapproval of Indian predominance in the Indian Ocean, the two governments do recognize that their common interests in keeping open sea lanes of communication and safeguarding their sea-borne trade from pirates necessitate some level of understanding between their navies. Chinese Defense Minister General Cao Gangchun visited India in March 2004 to accelerate military-to-military interaction and called at Western Naval Command in Mumbai.

China and India are two of the fastest growing economies in the world. The low level of trade and investment between them is a striking illustration of their different development paths and their mutual suspicions. The Joint Declaration of June 2003 states: "Both sides shared the view that existing complementarities between their two economies provide an important foundation and offer broad prospects for further enhancing their economic relations....[And] will take necessary measures...to remove impediments to bilateral trade and investment."¹⁰ Accordingly, among the nine Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed during Vajpayee's visit, one was on judicial cooperation, one was on procedures facilitating the export of Indian fresh fruits and vegetables to China, one was on renewable energy cooperation, and one was on simplifying visa procedures—without which people-to-people interaction in any area would remain very difficult.

In 1991 India-China two-way trade amounted to only US\$265 million; by the end of 2003, the figure was US\$6 billion, and climbing upward. In 2002 Zhu Rongji envisaged a US\$10 billion figure by 2007, a number that has already been exceeded. Though the baskets of exports and imports on each side needed to be diversified beyond the traditional, and though respective shares in total trade were small—calculated at 0.5 percent of China's trade and less than two percent of India's trade, the growth rates have been explosive. In fact, 2003-2004, bilateral trade amounted to US\$12.6 million.¹¹ Traders are counting on continued improvement in political relations so as to expand trade, and governments (and theorists) expect commerce to underwrite and cement improved bilateral relations.

An unprecedented large business delegation drawn from the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) accompanied Vajpayee in 2003 to explore the possibilities of investment in China and joint ventures there. The CII had taken several initiatives during the 1990s to educate Indian entrepreneurs and opinion makers about China with only modest success. China was regarded as a high-risk country and Indian business houses are habitually cautious. Ranbaxy Laboratories Limited was exceptional in being well established in the pharmaceutical field and had built a secure position for itself in China, employing Chinese and Chinese speaking Indians since the 1980s. As China brought its domestic commercial laws closer to international norms and negotiated entry into the WTO (of which India is a founding member) more Indian enterprises showed interest in China. Financial and banking experts as well as information technology and software entrepreneurs flocked to Shanghai even before Vajpayee's visit. As Zhu Rongji had said in Bangalore in 2002, a combination of Indian software and Chinese hardware would

be virtually irresistible to the global market. By 2003 Infosys, the Tata Group, Bank of India, and State Bank of India were investing in China and Ratan Tata, chairman of Tata, had been appointed Honorary Economic Advisor to the Chinese city of Hangzhou. Welcome as these developments are, they are small steps. Indians have not yet leaped into China's vast Western Development Project covering the ten most impoverished provinces and autonomous regions, including Tibet and Xinjiang (bordering India) and administered from Chongqing. High-level Chinese functionaries were actively peddling this ambitious project at the "China and the World in the 21st Century" conference held at Beijing in September 2003. While the former heads of government or government departments from Australia and Europe that attended the conference undoubtedly had good connections with the financial hubs of their countries, this was not true of myself and the other academic who were the only two Indian delegates attending—without any commercial backing whatsoever.

Similarly, the Kunming Initiative launched in the 1990s to link the economies of Yunnan (designated a 'hub' for a growth triangle in southwest China and Southeast Asia), Myanmar, Bangladesh and the Northeastern States of India had evoked an enthusiastic response from Chinese businessmen and Indian academics, but not yet Indian businessmen. The low level of mainstream Indian investment in the Northeastern States and a security mindset among officials based upon past PRC assistance to insurgents and lasting suspicions of any new Chinese presence in the region probably accounts for this lapse. Also, India's participation in the Hainan Forum—intended as an economic bridge among China, India, and ASEAN members—hitherto has evoked more interest among Indian academics and former officials than among entrepreneurs. New Delhi has promoted its Mekong-Ganga Cooperation plan avidly but progress is impeded by the lack

of cross-continental infrastructure in the form of roads and railways or banking facilities, as well as Indian dissatisfaction with the performance of Chinese construction contractors¹², and the continuing political ambivalence in Bangladesh on the subject of meaningful economic cooperation with India.

The Vajpayee visit was envisaged as a way to enhance India-China economic relations by emphasizing complementarities rather than competitiveness between the two countries. These initiatives have the potential of recreating in modern conditions the thriving trade of the ancient southern Silk Road traversing land and sea. Realizing this potential depends largely on the dynamism of the Indian economy and a more determined pursuit of India's "Look East" policy initiated in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, China has made substantial progress toward integrating its vast economy and markets with those of Southeast Asia and has offered ASEAN a Free Trade Agreement. It does not fear Indian competition there. Instead, the 2003 India-China Declaration of Principles contained the paragraph: "The two sides supported multilateral cooperation in Asia, believing that such cooperation promotes mutually beneficial exchanges, economic growth as well as greater cohesion among Asian countries. The two sides viewed positively each other's participation in regional and multilateral cooperation processes in Asia."

India and China have acted in consonance with the Declaration of Principles statement: "The two sides agreed to enhance cooperation at the WTO, which is not only to mutual benefit but also in the broader interest of developing countries." Regular dialogue between the two countries and with others resulted in a common position taken along with Brazil and South Africa at the Fifth Ministerial Conference in Cancún later that year to press advanced economies to withdraw or reduce their farm subsidies and to resist pressures from advanced economies to link

trade negotiations with other issues. Agreement was reached at Geneva in August 2004 and praised as a victory for both developing and wealthy countries; the U.S., the European Union, and Australia invited India and Brazil to join in separate talks to forge a consensus on agriculture. Both India and China have the majority of their populations employed in agriculture, mainly at the subsistence level; both face acute problems of rural poverty and heavy rural-urban migration; neither can afford to open its markets to the products of huge Western agro-conglomerates and risk social disruption. Their taking, and keeping, a common position on the subject in the WTO contrasted pleasantly with China's sudden abandonment of India during the 1996 negotiations in Geneva on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in order to take a privileged position as a P-5 state.¹³

Vajpayee's visit to China was the occasion for signing other agreements that seek to establish cooperation and exchange between educational institutions, scientists and technicians in several fields including ocean research, and ministries of energy and water resources. One benefit of the latter agreement was China's alerting India that water levels of major rivers like the Sutlej and Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo) that originate in Tibet would very likely rise and pose downstream risks. Ambitious Chinese projects in Tibet as well as natural factors caused these risks to develop but information imparted in time enabled some preventive measures to be taken in India, in contrast to the unanticipated but similar situation in 2000 that caused major damage. Should China attempt to divert Tibetan rivers northward, however, the ecological consequences could be dangerous.

Exchanges initiated in 2003 between students, research personnel, language instructors, and educational administrators could help to reduce mutual ignorance of each other's countries among Indians and Chinese and gradually build a broad base of support for cordial relations in civil society

to supplement business and commercial interests. At the same time, the two governments agreed to set up cultural centers in Beijing and New Delhi, leaving the details to be negotiated later.

IV. Continuing Challenges & Possible Scenarios

As outlined above, Vajpayee's visit brought tangible achievements and presaged intangible benefits to the India-China relationship. Obstacles remain, however, to a meaningful consolidation of ties. The highest such obstacle is a legacy of mutual distrust caused by the events of 1959-1962 and strengthened by Cold War developments from 1971 onwards, in which India saw China aligned against it with Pakistan and the U.S., and China saw India ranged against it with the Soviet Union. Distrust may have been mitigated but did not evaporate with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. China's well documented supply of arms, missiles, and nuclear technology to Pakistan, consistently hostile to India and waging a low intensity conflict against it in Kashmir since 1989, fuels two threats perceived in India.

First is the threat of nuclear blackmail or intimidation by a superior power and India's own inferior international status. The second threat is external support that encourages Pakistan's adventurism, discourages acceptance of ground realities in Islamabad, and alters the balance of power on the Indian subcontinent. Those who underline this threat are not assuaged by China's declarations that military transfers are part of the sovereign rights of independent states and that China seeks good relations with all the nations of South Asia. Nor are they greatly impressed by China's gradually changing position on Kashmir, from outright (but little more than verbal) support of Pakistan in 1965, to emphasizing the bilateral nature of the dispute and the need to settle it peacefully, to Jiang Zemin pointing out while in

Pakistan in 1996 that unresolved disputes can be put aside while constructing broader relations, to refusing to support or endorse Pakistan's daring incursions into Kargil in 1999, and reiterating the sanctity of the Line of Control in Kashmir.

On the contrary, the strong China-Pakistan link combined with Pakistan's repeated military confrontation at varying levels is an effective method of tying down India and preventing realization of its potential as an Asian Great Power.¹⁴ Pakistan's geographic location and fragile polity also obstructs Indian access to the oil and gas resources of Central Asia and inhibits Indian membership in the Shanghai Cooperative Organization. Further, China's diplomatic and economic activities throughout South Asia, especially in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, are read in New Delhi as evidence of malevolent intent and encirclement of India. Unsurprisingly, such attitudes openly expressed within the Indian security establishment make it easier for China to charge India with "hegemonism" and reinforce its own presence on the subcontinent. China officially supports the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) but its long standing semi-alliance with Pakistan will cease to pose a threat to India only when Pakistan and India normalize their own relationship along realistic and non-hostile lines that do not appear immediately likely.

The Chinese nuclear threat to India is often calculated in terms of the number and quality of weapons and deployment of missiles as well as the ambiguity of China's 'no first use' (NFU) declarations. Beyond these factors lie questions of relative status and possibilities of nuclear CBMs and negotiations. China has consistently refused to discuss any nuclear topic with India at all, much less CBMs or mutual NFUs on a bilateral basis. Indeed bilateral India-China talks on security only became possible after India openly conducted nuclear tests in 1998 and such talks are cloaked in secrecy. Since then, however, Indian

officials and non-officials have been more willing than previously to pose hard questions about China's nuclear proliferation activities in open and closed sessions with their Chinese counterparts. Furthermore, India's evolving doctrine of 'minimum nuclear deterrent' and development of the Agni III indigenous missile clearly factors in China's capabilities. It is an unfortunate fact of international relations since 1945—strengthened since the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995—that possession of nuclear weapons is equated with power and prestige. The P-5 all are recognized nuclear weapons states and value preservation of the status quo. India's claim to a permanent seat on the Security Council, therefore, meets frequent rebuffs from China and the U.S., but verbal support from the other three P-5 members. In June 2003 Vajpayee made a bid for Chinese endorsement of India's claim but received only the following short paragraph in the Declaration of Principles: "The two sides acknowledged the vital importance of the United Nations in world peace, stability and development. They are determined to continue their efforts in strengthening the UN system. They reaffirmed their readiness to work together to promote reform of the UN. In reform of the UN Security Council, priority should be given to enhancing representation of the developing countries." The nuclear question goes far beyond India-China relations and is fraught with many contradictions and uncertainties about the so-called international nonproliferation regime.

For good reason, China's mistrust of India is more localized and at a different level from India's mistrust of China. Tibet is the main source of mistrust because the Dalai Lama resides in India and his international and indigenous prestige is very high. This mistrust is due largely to Chinese suspicions of any outside "interference" in Tibet or encouragement of "splittism" there, and because the Sino (Tibet)-Indian border dispute remains unresolved. The PLA focus on planning

for “local wars” during the 1990s included contingencies in Tibet. Such fears may not have been assuaged even by Vajpayee’s forthright statements quoted earlier.

The U.S. and any possibility of a strong U.S.-India partnership pose much greater challenges to China. China’s policy makers are wary of ‘encirclement,’ or ‘containment’ even if in the guise of ‘engagement’ and have taken diplomatic and military precautions against any tightening of the noose, while acknowledging China’s very favorable security environment since the early 1990s. Allen Whiting¹⁵ analyzed China’s attack on India in 1962 in terms of Beijing’s fear of encirclement when both the U.S. and the Soviet Union lent some support to India. He showed relatively low PLA threat perception of Russia or India in the mid-1990’s compared to Japan or Taiwan, both allied to the U.S.¹⁶ When the BJP-led government in India and the Bush administration started exchanging compliments about democracies being “natural allies” and working towards establishing a “strategic partnership,” Chinese strategists were jolted out of their habitual indifference toward India. Hawks on the radical right in both the U.S. and India postulated a ‘China threat’ that they might jointly parry, but their words generated more sound than action. And because it is evident that China enjoys closer and thicker relations with the US than India does across the board, Beijing’s threat perceptions of India probably remain low.

A third possible source of mistrust of India, and one not unique to China, is bewilderment in the face of India’s kaleidoscopic economy, polity, and society. Understanding India is a difficult task even for Indians; only brave souls venture to predict—and are not surprised to be proven wrong. The Chinese love of order is confounded by apparent Indian comfort with disorder. And long ago the Japanese scholar Nakamura demonstrated how the Mandarin language is conducive to concrete, practical thinking while Sanskrit en-

couraged the abstract. Such infrastructural differences in political cultures are bound to impede easy cooperation between India and China, but the very process of overcoming difficulties augurs well for the cooperative ventures that are being created.

What, then, of the near future? The distinguished scholar John Garver postulates continued “protracted conflict” unless India accommodates itself to China’s dominance and pre-eminence as the Asian power in every part of Asia including Southern Asia, or China accepts India’s predominance in South Asia and accommodates India’s expanding reach in other parts of Asia.¹⁷ Cogent as Garver’s arguments are, they are not persuasive to those who do not subscribe to a hard realist theory of frequent inter-state conflict in an anarchical international system. A dynamic international environment such as exists in the post-Cold War world poses a multitude of security dilemmas for both established and aspiring powers. Military conflict is neither the best nor the only means of resolving such dilemmas, the more so in an age and area of nuclear weapons. The vital interests of India and China are not at stake in their differences or even in their rivalry. To my mind, a prediction of protracted Sino-Indian contest is unduly pessimistic.

At the other extreme stand the romantics, the sentimentalists, those who live in dreams of *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* that passed away decades ago because there was no depth then to the renewed contact between India and China. More hard-headed advocates of cooperation between India and China are also ‘realists’ in the sense of prescribing classic balance of power tactics, that is, a banding together of China, India, Russia, (and possibly Iran as well) to “balance” the hyperpower of the U.S. and create a desired multi-polar international system. Such triumverate proposals have emanated from Moscow and been sufficiently well received in both New Delhi and Beijing for them to host and attend talk sessions on

the subject. A good theoretical case can be made for ‘balancing,’ but an even better practical case is obviously being made in all three capitals for ‘band-wagoning’ with the superior power of the U.S., while preserving core areas of sovereignty. In the new hypothetical ‘strategic triangle’¹⁸ of the U.S., China, and India, it seems unlikely that the two Asian powers would together confront the U.S. (even if the new Indian government has the support of communist parties) because each would prefer a strengthening of its own ties with the U.S. and a weakening of the other’s ties.

There are numerous other ‘realists’ who tackle the theoretical problem of managing the rising power of China and see the possibility of it becoming unmanageable or unappeasable after 2020. Many of them advocate stern U.S. action against China now in order to obviate serious challenge in the future. Some of these theorists, as well as hawks and thriller writers of various hues, suggest an anti-China coalition or alliance that would include India with its impressive military capabilities and experience. This scenario also sounds to me more appealing as a piece of fiction than a map of state policy. The topic of U.S.-India relations is beyond the scope of this paper, but they would have to change very radically to make such an alliance possible. China is India’s largest neighbor, with which respectful friendship is desired, and non-alignment in any conflict between China and a third party would be prudent.

The scenario in India-China relations that seems to be the most plausible is the one predicated on the principles and agreements jointly endorsed during Atal Behari Vajpayee’s visit to China in June 2003. Both governments showed themselves to be pragmatic, reasonable, and practical. A dramatic change in China’s leadership or political system does not appear to be imminent, and India’s change of government in 2004 is a natural product of a multiparty democratic system that does not threaten either the system or the main tenets of foreign policy that have, for

the most part, consensual support. We can expect India and China to work slowly but methodically toward solving their problems while engaged simultaneously in a range of cooperative and competitive ventures. Both countries place too high a value on peace, stability, and opportunity for economic development for either of them to wish to rock the boat. This is indubitably an optimistic view, but perhaps not unduly so.

Endnotes

¹ Nehru to Congress Parliamentary Party, November 17, 1954. Quoted in S. Gopal. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography. Volume Two 1947-1956*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979. p. 227.

² See Vertzberger, Yaakov. *Misperceptions in Foreign Policymaking: The Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984. And Steven A. Hoffmann. *India and the China Crisis*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

³ For quotations and citations, see David Shambaugh. *Modernizing China’s Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. p.306, notes 77-80.

⁴ See Surjit Mansingh, ed. *India and Chinese Foreign Policies in Comparative Perspective*. New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1998.

⁵ Recently published memoirs of high officials in China indicate that Mao himself made major decisions about India during 1959-1962 as the advice he received was not unanimous. See C.V. Ranganathan and Vinod Khanna. *India and China: The Way Ahead After ‘Mao’s India War*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2000. Chapter 1.

⁶ One example of India’s resistance to pressure is narrated in Strobe Talbott. *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2004.

⁷ See Surjit Mansingh. “Between Asia and Global Community: India and China in Comparative Perspective.” *International Studies*, October-December 2002.

⁸ See Surjit Mansingh. “The United States, China and India: Relationships in Comparative Perspective.” *China Report*, April-June 1999.

⁹ Joint Declaration signed in Beijing on June 23, 2003 by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Wen Jiabao in the Hindi, Chinese and English languages. Website of Ministry of External

Affairs, New Delhi.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹² According to *The Pioneer*, July 31, 2004, the National Highway Authority of India had terminated the contract of a Chinese construction company for poor performance and unacceptable delays in building a 60 kilometer road.

¹³ Ambassador Arundhati Ghose, recalling the CTBT negotiations at New Delhi, in 1999.

¹⁴ This fact is well understood in China. For example, the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations forecast of the world scene in 2004 comments: "the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan has been the biggest obstacle for India to go out of South Asia. Without improving Indo-Pakistan relations at the root, India cannot take full commitment to realizing its 'big power strategy'. Therefore, India actively promotes bilateral relations." CICIR, *Contemporary International Relations*, Vol. 14, #1 p.41.

¹⁵ Allen Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 1975.

¹⁶ Allen Whiting. "The PLA and China's Threat Perceptions." In David Shambaugh & Richard H. Yang, Eds., *China's Military in Transition*. Oxford: Calrendon Press, 1997. pp.332-351.

¹⁷ See John Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001. Also his "The Security Dilemma in Sino-Indian Relations" in *India Review*, October 2002. pp.1-38.

¹⁸ See Harry Harding, "The Evolution of the Strategic Triangle: China, India, and the United States" in Francine R. Frankel & Harry Harding, Eds., *The India-China Relationship: What the United States Needs to Know*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. pp. 321-350.

PROFILE

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