

A PIVOT TO INDIA? THE US-INDIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND MULTIPOLARITY IN ASIA

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The United States, as articulated in the 2012 US Department of Defense Strategic Guidance document, anticipates that India will be both an active partner in helping provide security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and an “economic anchor” that will sustain growth in South Asia. This paper seeks to identify and analyze Indian perspectives on the state’s expected role by assessing the perceptions of Indian foreign and security policy experts in areas such as the US “pivot” to Asia, the 2008 US-India nuclear agreement, India’s “Look East” policy, and other pertinent regional issues.

INTRODUCTION

The US-India strategic partnership has been reaffirmed in the Obama administration’s “rebalancing” or “pivot” to Asia.¹ The Department of Defense prominently emphasized India’s role in the rebalancing in DOD’s 2012 Strategic Guidance “*Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*,” which states that the United States’ “economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia to the Indian Ocean region and South Asia...The United States is also investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to be a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean.”² The guidance makes it explicit that the United States views India as the southwestern cornerstone of its strategic rebalancing towards Asia. In focusing on India, the Obama administration is building upon the Bush administration’s 2001 opening to India, the 2004 “next steps in the strategic partnership,”³ and the 2008 civilian nuclear energy agreement in which the United States recognized India as a legitimate nuclear energy state that also possessed nuclear weapons but had not acceded to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).⁴ In March 2005, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced the Bush administration’s intention to assist India in becoming “a global power.”⁵ In November 2009, President Obama called India and the United States “natural allies” because of their shared free market-democratic values and “core goal of achieving peace and security for all peoples in the Asian region.”⁶

India has responded to US actions by continuing its unilateral nuclear testing moratorium that began after its nuclear tests in May 1998,⁷ as well as participating in the Obama administration’s “nuclear security initiative” to prevent violent extremists from obtaining weapons of mass destruction.⁸ New Delhi voted in International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) meetings in 2005 and 2009 against Iran’s lack of

* The opinions expressed in this research report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions and policies of the US Air War College, the US Air Force, the Department of Defense, or any other US Government branch.

transparency in its nuclear program.⁹ India has worked with the United States in efforts to start negotiations on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT).¹⁰ Washington and New Delhi have been cooperating to realize India's intention of joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement on nuclear export controls, and the Australia Group on chemical and biological export controls. The United States and India are also cooperating on strengthening cyber-security.¹¹ In 2005 New Delhi and Washington negotiated the New Framework in the India-US Defense Relationship.¹² This marked a significant leap forward in military cooperation, including the holding of several joint exercises every year, and India has bought billions of dollars' worth of US military hardware.¹³ The Indian military now has more joint exercises with the US military than with any other country.

In spite of the progress that has been made in US-India relations, it is questionable if India will move from being a partner of the United States towards becoming an even closer partner or an ally.¹⁴ Seven decades of non-alignment and a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Soviet Russia from 1971-1991 established patterns in India's foreign policy that have been slow to change. India has a long-established relationship with Iran, which tends to complicate New Delhi's partnership with Washington. In addition, the US tendency to lean towards India's long-time adversary, Pakistan, has fostered Indian suspicions of US intentions. After September 11, 2001 these suspicions were regenerated when the United States was compelled by the war against Al Qaeda along the Afghan-Pakistan border to renew its partnership with Pakistan as a "major non-NATO ally."¹⁵ These and other factors have made it difficult for India to draw closer to the United States.

After a dramatic improvement in relations in the last decade, capped by the 2008 nuclear agreement, the trajectory of the growing partnership has slowed and reached a plateau. In 2009, the Obama administration prioritized strategic dialogue with China over focusing on moving the strategic partnership with India further forward. On the military front, India decided not to purchase US F-16 fighters in 2011. The purchase of American fighters could have marked a major step forward in interoperability between the two air forces and in Indo-US relations. However, Indian leaders and bureaucrats were wary of interoperability and appeared to equate it with alliance formation.¹⁶ In November 2011, the Obama administration announced US rebalancing and emphasized India's prominence. However, the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has reacted cautiously to US appeals for a closer relationship.¹⁷

GROWING MULTI-POLARITY IN ASIA

The growing US-India strategic partnership comes at a time in which Asia is moving away from the "unipolar moment" of the last two decades and towards bipolarity or multipolarity.¹⁸ US efforts to

maintain unipolarity in Asia are increasingly challenged, especially when China and (to a lesser extent) India are rising as major powers and are pursuing national interests on their own continent.¹⁹ Also, Russia appears to be moving towards a closer relationship with China, partly in opposition to the US rebalance.²⁰ Japan is moving to adopt a more assertive defense and security stance, as it faces an increasing challenge from China, which has led to confrontation.²¹ In contrast, the United States must play an “away game” in Asia and depend on allies in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand to help maintain a presence on or near the continent. Also, the United States has declined in relative power in Asia, especially since the financial crisis of 2008, while China has gained in power and influence.

An issue is how Asian peace and security can best be maintained as the continent moves towards multipolarity and as rising powers challenge what was the US-dominated Asian security order. In an emerging multipolar Asia, the question is how much China’s increasingly assertive behavior might compel the United States and India towards forging an even stronger relationship.²² The relationship that is developing among China and the United States and (to a lesser extent) India will be a highlight of Asian and global security this century.²³

To many Chinese observers, the “pivot” to Asia means increased US and allied efforts to contain China. To many American observers, China’s ultimate goal appears to be to push the United States out of Asia and the Western Pacific and make the region safe for Chinese hegemony. In order to challenge the United States over its commitment to Taiwan and confront Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, China is pursuing an anti-access and aerial denial (A2/AD) military strategy intended to blunt the effectiveness of the US Navy and Air Force in East Asia and the Western Pacific.²⁴

In order to succeed in its strategy, China does not want an unnecessary conflict with India. At the same time, China wants to keep its southern neighbor inferior in power and position and prevent it from mounting a challenge over border issues and supporting the desire of Tibetans for self-determination.²⁵ China also continues to increase trade interdependence with India, which has raised the stakes of a military confrontation. China’s close relationship with Pakistan has reaped strategic rewards. The regime in Islamabad has kept New Delhi focused on their confrontation and prevented India from devoting more of its attention to China and broader Asian affairs. This also allows China to focus on East Asia. In addition, Pakistan is providing China with access to the Indian Ocean. China is in the process of developing the port of Gwardar in Baluchistan and plans to develop an overland route from western China.

Indo-Chinese relations remain unsettled, as China’s enduring strategic partnership with Pakistan continues to concern Indian policy makers and security experts. They are also concerned with continuing disputes over border issues and the buildup of forces along the border.²⁶ Many Indian strategic thinkers interpret China’s close bonds with Pakistan, growing relations with Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka

and access to ports in the Indian Ocean as a Chinese “string of pearls” and as part of an encirclement and containment strategy. Even though India has grown significantly in power over the past two decades, China has grown much faster. Therefore, India remains markedly inferior to China in terms of geostrategic position and economic and military capabilities.²⁷ It appears to observers that India will never catch up with China and will never be able to challenge China on equal terms.²⁸

In relation to the United States, India wants to maintain its strategic autonomy and does not feel compelled to move from a partnership towards an alliance.²⁹ Only sustained aggression by China would compel India to enter into an alliance with the United States and move from the current state of “soft balancing” towards China to “hard balancing” by forming alliances.³⁰ As India engages in soft balancing by strengthening relations with states that are concerned with the rise and expansion of China, Indian strategic thinkers are urging stronger partnerships with Japan and Vietnam and other states.³¹

The United States would like to manage the rise of China and develop a long-term partnership and share leadership of the Asian order with China and perhaps India. The rebalance to Asia emphasizes diplomatic and economic instruments of power to avoid alienating Chinese leaders.³² However, the US defense establishment is also preparing for an eventual military confrontation with Beijing.³³ This is a principal reason why the United States is rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific. In response to China’s A2/AD strategy, the US Air Force and Navy have proposed the “air-sea battle” operational concept, and an office has opened in the Pentagon to put the concept into practice.³⁴

After 2030, China may not pose the same assertive challenge to the United States as it will in the next two decades, because of the “graying” of China. By 2030, at least thirty percent of China’s population will be over the age of sixty, and the rate of economic growth will slow and the number of young people available for military service will drop. However, China will be more technologically advanced and able to confront the United States at a more advanced level.³⁵

Some American strategists recommend that the United States hedge its bets by leaning more towards India in order to balance power in relation to China, without escalating the security dilemma. This would be a difficult equilibrium to achieve.³⁶ Washington cannot be certain that New Delhi will be willing to balance harder against Beijing. Until China exerts sufficient pressure, India will continue to soft balance and take measured actions against Chinese border incursions.

India would prefer that the United States simultaneously end its alliance with Pakistan and prevent a Taliban takeover in Kabul. However, Washington must also maintain its major non-NATO alliance with Islamabad in order to prevent Afghanistan from falling to the Taliban and threatening Pakistan. If Washington diminished its ties with Islamabad and the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, violent extremists would surge, threaten all of South Asia, and perhaps take control of Pakistan’s nuclear

weapons. The best that can be done would be for the United States and India work together after 2014 to prevent the Taliban from coming to power in Afghanistan and to manage relations with Pakistan.

POWER BALANCING IN ASIA

In regard to keeping the peace in Asia, the question is how much international cooperation will be effective and how much the region must rely on power balancing. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has prevented conflicts between member states and has promoted dialogue among major powers in Asia through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). However, there is no sign of an emerging Asian collective security organization, like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which would bring Asian countries together to provide mutual defense against a common adversary.³⁷ In the absence of such an organization, China has preferred to deal with most of its neighbors on a bilateral basis and exploit their differences. In particular, China is challenging Japan in the East China Sea and Vietnam and the Philippines in the South China Sea, which China claims as its own, and has been reluctant to engage in multilateral dispute resolution. ASEAN has tried to persuade China to agree to a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea but to no avail.³⁸

Power balancing, derived from realist theory, appears to be the primary, workable way to maintain order and stability in Asia in the face of a rising power like China. Realists contend that the way to deter a rising power from aggression is either through an alliance or partnership with greater or equal power than the rising power and its allies. In Asia, a number of bilateral security ties have been formed, which might serve as the basis for balancing against and deterring a rising China.³⁹

One possibility is the development of a tripolar balance of power, as existed in Asia in the 1970s and 1980s when China “tilted” towards the United States without forming an alliance in order to counter the Soviet Union. It is likely that India will try to do something similar. It could play the United States and China off against each other, occasionally tilting towards the United States and against China, without entering into an alliance.

The United States could choose to balance power by strengthening existing alliances and partnerships and building up US military presence in the region. However, Washington cannot push too hard in balancing to the point where China acts to counter containment, causing a security dilemma and an escalation spiral. In particular, the United States cannot inadvertently encourage its allies, especially the Philippines and Japan, to act recklessly towards China. Also, the United States must manage each of the bilateral relations carefully and in isolation from each other, especially given the animus between Japan and South Korea. In sum, US “hub-and-spoke” alliances in Asia are weaker in dealing with a rising China than the NATO collective defense alliance that faced the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ Therefore, Washington needs to proceed cautiously in building its partnership with New Delhi in order to avoid unnecessarily

provoking Beijing. However, in the unlikely event that China was to attack India, the door would be open to the formation of an alliance with a mutual defense pact with the United States.

Alternatively, the United States could engage in balancing off-the-shore of Asia. The question is, how far off shore should the United States position itself? By maintaining bases in Japan and the Philippines, the United States could still be able to intervene inside the “first island chain” in the South China Sea and East China Sea and in defense of Taiwan as well as dominating the “second island chain.” Also, Asian powers, such as India, Vietnam and perhaps Japan, could balance against China without US assistance.⁴¹ However, an alliance of India, Vietnam and Japan without the United States would not have the military power to deter China in the East China Sea or South China Sea, and the three countries are too dispersed to act concertedly. As for the United States, it must be careful in considering a balancing strategy that is too far off-shore, because it would make it difficult for the United States to reenter Asia. China’s anti-access and aerial denial (A2/AD) strategy is designed to prevent US reentry. Finally, US alliance commitments to Japan and South Korea would be difficult to end and will keep the United States engaged on or near the Asian continent.

Even though India serves as a cornerstone for US strategy in the Indian Ocean, it fits tangentially into the US rebalancing strategy that is focused on the East China Sea and South China Sea. Though India does have increasing trade with Southeast Asian countries and has adopted a “Look East” policy, India’s interests largely stop on the eastern side of the Strait of Malacca.⁴² For India to enter the South China Sea and establish a permanent presence, perhaps with berthing rights in Vietnam, would constitute an overreach beyond its capabilities and a provocation to China. However, if tensions escalate, India can serve US strategic interests by distracting Chinese ground and air forces towards the Himalayas and away from the Asia-Pacific. The Indian navy can also inhibit the flow of oil and minerals to China through the Indian Ocean in case of a confrontation in East Asia.

China is vulnerable in the Indian Ocean, as much of its energy and mineral supplies pass through its waters. Given China’s vulnerability, the prospect of conflict in the Indian Ocean is low in spite of China’s “string of pearls.” Much more likely is a conflict in the Himalayas, especially with ongoing border issues. Also, China has projects under way to dam the Brahmaputra River and other streams that could deprive parts of India of vital water sources.⁴³ Finally, Tibet remains restive and unrest by supporters of self-determination could spur conflict in the Himalayas. Thus far, the two sides have remained cautious and not escalated beyond skirmishes.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this report is to provide and analyze Indian perspectives on the US rebalance to Asia and India’s expected role. They help to explain why the trajectory of US-India strategic relations has

reached a plateau, in spite of the 2008 nuclear deal. The report incorporates the perceptions of Indian foreign and security policy experts about rebalancing, the nuclear deal and their impact on India's positions on a range of issues as well as on the partnership. These experts hold various theoretical and policy positions on India's security. Also, they provide a variety of perspectives on the different issues facing India. These perspectives on several issues are used to determine the direction in which India-US relations might head.

Previous Research on Indian think tank experts' attitudes: Murray Scott Tanner of the Center for Naval Analysis conducted research on Indo-Chinese relations by interviewing Indian and Chinese think tank experts in 2011.⁴⁴ He assumed that interviews with Indian think tank experts would reflect the views of the Indian government. His findings were that China's virtual alliance with Pakistan was the greatest source of concern for Indian experts.⁴⁵ On border issues, Tanner found that experts in both India and China believed that the other country was not respecting the status quo and was trying to undermine their country's strategic position. Both sides cited nationalist opinion at home as a key obstacle to compromise. In regard to Tibet, experts on both sides believed that Chinese installation of a new Dalai Lama would increase tensions with India but would not spark a military conflict. Tanner found that Chinese and Indian security specialists both feared long-term erosion of their country's strategic position as a result of the other country's buildup of border deployments, conventional capabilities, and strategic forces. Indian experts expressed greatest concern over China's military-logistical buildup along the Sino-Indian border.⁴⁶

In addition, Indian analysts were increasingly concerned about the future presence of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and are developing responses. Indian naval analysts regarded Chinese naval efforts to improve sustainment, tactical air cover, and basing as critical indicators of Beijing's future intentions toward the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).⁴⁷

INDIA, THE US REBALANCE AND THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

India is willing to partner to some extent with the United States in patrolling the Indian Ocean and ensuring freedom of navigation. However, India will be careful not to be drawn into an alliance with the United States and will work to maintain its "strategic autonomy."⁴⁸ In regard to anchoring the South Asian economy, India's high rate of growth over the last two decades has benefited most South Asian countries, except for Pakistan. However, India's failure to adopt further economic reforms has contributed to slower growth rates, inflation and devaluation of the rupee.⁴⁹ Trade with and investment in Pakistan has never taken off due to recurring crises between the two states. Economic growth has been deemed essential for Pakistan to stabilize and roll back the tide of violent extremism. The prospects are murky for India driving growth in Pakistan as long as tensions and crises continue.

After a remarkable period of growth in the US-India partnership from 2001 to 2009, crowned by the 2008 civilian nuclear agreement, relations have settled on a plateau and do not seem to be rising further.⁵⁰ The relationship slowed after the Congress Party won reelection in 2009 to form a government for a second term. Since 2009, the party and government have drifted leftward towards its “Nehruvian” roots, which have dominated Indian foreign policy thinking and have been characterized by nonalignment, internationalism (e.g. support of the United Nations) and strategic autonomy. Nehruvians encountered in this research project are wary that the US rebalance will bring intensified pressures for an elevated partnership and even an alliance with the United States. In the Congress Party, there is a divide between an anti-American wing that clashes with more accommodating centrists. The Defense Minister A.K. Antony has been seen by many as part of the anti-American wing and as the leading figure in the slowing of defense cooperation with the United States.⁵¹ In addition, the Indian bureaucracy is small and slow-moving, Nehruvian in orientation, and reluctant to change India’s traditional foreign policy positions.⁵²

From 2001-2004, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government initially forged the strategic partnership with the United States. The BJP espouses Indian nationalism, which constitutes the other main strand in Indian foreign policy thinking. This strand is realist in orientation and is concerned with increasing India’s power and countering the Pakistan-China alliance.⁵³ The BJP is not as attached as the Congress Party to nonalignment and internationalism and would like to bring the private sector and companies, such as Tata, into the formulation of India’s foreign and defense policy.⁵⁴ The private sector would energize Indian foreign policy and commercial relations.⁵⁵ The party could take power in 2014, and there are debates about how much change will take place and how this could affect the strategic partnership with the United States.⁵⁶

In India, there are doubts about the US rebalance and US credibility.⁵⁷ For example, as Japan and Philippines have clashed with China over territorial claims, there is a perception that the United States has not come sufficiently to the aid of its allies. Some believe that the United States is “leading from behind” and that the rebalance will not lead to a dramatic change in its behavior. Others see the United States as a resident power in Asia already and that the rebalance is not so significant.⁵⁸ Furthermore, budget cuts may reduce the scale of the rebalance. Also, the US strategic and economic dialogue with China leaves India and other US allies and partners fearing that deals may be made concerning their interests without their knowledge. Finally, there is a belief in India that the US rebalance will mean less attention to the transition in Afghanistan and to constraining America’s Pakistan “ally.”

THE US REBALANCE, SECURING THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION AND THE INDIAN NAVY

The Indian Navy will be important in helping to achieve the US strategic rebalance to Asia and central in attaining objectives in securing the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). At present, the Indian Navy is able to help provide security with anti-piracy and anti-submarine patrols, especially in the sea lanes running from the Gulf of Aden to the Strait of Malacca. Currently, there are debates about how capable and modern the Navy is in regard to doctrine, warships and weaponry. There are also concerns about where and if the Navy fits in India's unwritten national security strategy.

Even as the importance of the navy to India has grown along with its widening maritime interests – most strikingly the rapid rise of seaborne imports of oil, gas and now coal – the navy's share of defence expenditure has fallen by 16%.... India has no naval strategic doctrine. There is little coordination among the many government agencies. Over the past 12 years, the creation of a national maritime advisor, a cabinet committee on maritime affairs and a maritime commission has been recommended within the government. None of these have been implemented.⁵⁹

The Indian Navy is much less capable than the Chinese Navy, though the latter is engaged mainly in the East and South China seas. However, China is increasingly involved in the IOR through the “string of pearls” – a series of ports that provide naval access. Indian Navy exercises with other Asian navies constitute a form of “soft-balancing” towards China but do not threaten China or the Chinese Navy. Nevertheless, China has protested against India-initiated multilateral naval exercises, and those protests have caused India, on occasion, to alter its plans. The explanation has been that India must live in the same neighborhood as China and must heed its protests.

The United States and Indian navies have formed what can be termed as an “exercise partnership” developed through frequent joint interactions over the last decade. The United States would like to see more interoperability with the Indian military and, especially between the US and Indian navies. Progress could be made in developing interoperability in disaster relief operations and then using this as a stepping stone towards greater interoperability. However, the current Indian government views the development of interoperability as the path to a possible alliance, which would impinge on India's strategic autonomy.⁶⁰

The future path of the Indian Navy will determine how much security India will be able to provide in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In regard to modernization, the aircraft carrier *Vikrant* and the nuclear submarine *Arihant* should be operational by 2020. The Indian Navy could allow the US Navy to shift its attentions eastward from the IOR in the 2020s. Also, India may find that it is eventually confronted by China's anti-access and area denial (A2AD) strategy in the Indian Ocean and may have to develop its own “air-sea battle” operational concept that will require modernization and assistance from the United States.

Some Indian observers term the relationship between US-India as a “transactional partnership” in which the United States continually tries to sell India military hardware with no benefit to the Indian economy. India would like to see more US technology transfer and production of US defense items inside

the country.⁶¹ In 2012 and 2013, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, worked with the Indian government on these issues. However, progress has been slow due partly to bureaucratic barriers on both the Indian and US sides. Greater US technology transfer and local production are measures that will strengthen the partnership, while not provoking China.⁶²

The problem that India faces is that weapons production and procurement processes are not capable of producing advanced weapons systems. As Debar Mohanty observes, India is capable only for replenishment not modernization and capability development and that modernization and advanced technology capabilities are inadequate. Nidhi Goyal finds that “In spite of these encouraging policy pronouncements, the indigenous defence industry continues to face challenges in terms of the existing policy and regulatory environment such as industrial licensing, offsets, imports and exports licences, regulations, tax regime, and so forth.”⁶³

The reason is vertically rigid security institutions that do more harm than good for military transformation. Capability-oriented modernization tests the politico-strategic resolve of the Indian decision-makers.

Four distinct institutional pillars – political class (government of the day and opposition parties), civil bureaucracy (MoD and related ministries), military bureaucracy (armed forces headquarters), defence scientific bureaucracy (DRDO) – and lack of inter-institutional interactions among themselves have perpetuated the pathetically inefficient course of military modernisation in India. Private industry, media and academia have been practically kept out of this quadrangular, virtually unaccountable system.⁶⁴

Therefore, even if the United States wanted to transfer technology and promote local production, India may not be capable of producing advanced weapons systems.

US REBALANCING, INDIA’S “LOOK EAST” POLICY, AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The US rebalancing is aimed mainly at strengthening influence in East Asia and Southeast Asia. To some extent, US rebalancing activity focused in Southeast Asia will be complemented by India’s “Look East” policy. India’s policy achieved its greatest success in its engagement with Myanmar-Burma. The policy helped open the door to US engagement and will enable the United States and India to compete for influence with China. The United States and India both have partnerships with Vietnam, and it is possible that the three countries will cooperate with joint exercises and other activities in the future. India plans to eventually help build an “east-west Indo-ASEAN/Ganges-Mekong overland corridor.” It will connect India with Vietnam and provide greater Indian involvement and influence in mainland Southeast Asia.⁶⁵ However, at the moment, deliberations about the corridor are considered by some to be largely a “talk shop.”⁶⁶ Finally, the United States is interested in India’s eventual inclusion in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which aims to establish a multilateral free trade area among more than a dozen countries.

The United States also hopes that India will assist in patrolling the Strait of Malacca. More than half of Indian shipping and Indian trade pass through the strait, therefore India has an interest in becoming involved in helping to maintain security in the strait. In the future, unmanned and unarmed aerial surveillance vehicles based in India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands could help patrol the strait.⁶⁷ In regard to the South China Sea, India has participated in joint exercises there, but the sea is too far away for the Indian Navy to patrol persistently given the Navy's limited reach and power.

In regard to the Philippines' confrontations with China over the Scarborough Shoals, the United States has been criticized in India for not being supportive enough. In the long run, the United States will have to balance support for its allies and partners with the need to maintain cordial relations with China and avoid escalation of tensions and a spiral towards conflict. Ideally, the United States and ASEAN nations need to convince China to accept a multilateral approach to resolving disputes, especially in the South China Sea.

The US rebalance in East Asia is aimed at strengthening its alliances with Japan and South Korea and forestalling Chinese hegemony. India's strategic partnership with those two countries may complement the US rebalance in "soft balancing" in relation to China. India is building closer relations and cultivating its strategic partnership with Japan.⁶⁸ On Japan's part, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the Japanese government are pushing hard for a stronger partnership with India.⁶⁹ However, there is little that India can do to assist Japan and the United States in the East China Sea. The distance from the Indian Ocean to the East China Sea is too great for India given the limited scope of its interests and capabilities.

In regard to the ongoing US-China strategic dialogue, India would like it to avoid any moves towards cooperation in "solving Asian security problems." In particular, India rejects any outside meddling in the Kashmir dispute. India asserts that it is solving the Kashmir issue itself and that dialogue with Pakistan will eventually bring peaceful resolution.

India was a close partner with Russia during the Cold War. Today, India is concerned about Russia's direction. Given Russia's alienation from the United States, Russia appears to be leaning towards China. Russia still wants to sell military hardware to India, but the relationship is no longer as close as it was. There is concern that China and Russia will collude through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to keep India out of Central Asia.⁷⁰ However, India-Russia defense ties and joint weapons production will remain strong.⁷¹

CHINESE BORDER VIOLATIONS AND THE INDIAN RESPONSE

India is concerned about the persistent Chinese violations of border areas as well as a military buildup north of the border. In response to a recent Chinese border incursion, the Indian Air Force sent a C-130J that it had purchased from the United States. A number of Indian security experts are thinking

about what the United States could do to support India as part of the US rebalance to Asia. They assert that it is possible that India eventually will ask the United States for assistance and that the United States could do more.⁷² For instance, some Indian security experts think that the United States should work to prevent China from strengthening its already close relations with Pakistan. At issue is what more the United States can do to assist India beyond helping to modernize India's air force and army. An alliance with the United States would put India in a difficult position with China, so a strengthening of the strategic partnership is as far as India is prepared to go.⁷³

WEST ASIAN CHALLENGES THAT HAMPER REBALANCING TO EAST ASIA

The US rebalance to East Asia and India's "Look East" policy could be hampered by security challenges in West Asia, especially from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran's nuclear ambitions and intentions in the Gulf will continue to keep the United States and the Fifth Fleet busy. India and the United States diverge on how to deal with Iran. India favors engagement and the United States sanctions and containment. Both nations hope that the new Rouhani government in Tehran can negotiate in good faith. India needs to maintain relations with Iran in order to maintain access to Central Asia and Afghanistan and meet growing energy needs.⁷⁴

India's ability to partner with the United States will be hampered by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and by the resurgence in militancy in Afghanistan and Pakistan after 2014. Afghanistan 2015 remains a major source of concern in New Delhi. The negotiation of a status of forces agreement with the Karzai government in Kabul is essential to keeping 5,000 to 10,000 US troops in Afghanistan and helping to fortify the government against the Taliban. The "zero option" has been mentioned by the Obama administration and is a source of concern in New Delhi. There is the danger that – as in the 1990s – the dominoes will fall with Afghanistan succumbing to the Taliban, large parts of Pakistan falling to the Taliban, and a rise in violent extremist activity in Kashmir. There is also concern about the rise of violent extremists within the rest of India.⁷⁵ India has problems of access to Afghanistan (it must go through Iran to resupply its aid activities there). In regard to the idea of placing Indian forces in Afghanistan, this would cause a crisis with Pakistan. There could be no more than a couple hundred Indian military advisors in Afghanistan.⁷⁶

Indian attitudes towards the US "alliance" with Pakistan fall into two camps. There are those who would want the United States to woo Pakistan away from its close partnership with China. Others would like to see the United States move away from Pakistan and move closer to India.⁷⁷ The United States must maintain its major non-NATO alliance with Pakistan in order to continue to have access to Afghanistan and press Pakistan to continue to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the long run.⁷⁸ Over time, the United States will continue to grow closer to India and move away from Pakistan.

The “major non-NATO alliance” with Pakistan will remain to guarantee US access to Afghanistan, even with the zero option. The United States will continue to press Pakistan to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda, work to prevent loose nukes, and counter China from monopolizing relations with Pakistan. Indian perceptions are that the US-Pakistan alliance will slow the advance of the Indo-US partnership. For both India and the United States, Pakistan will continue to be a distraction that will inhibit rebalancing to the east.

The partnership between the US and Indian navies, which is part of the US rebalance, will not be greatly affected by distractions coming from Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, the situation could change as a result of China's activities in the Pakistani port of Gwardar and partnership with Pakistan's navy.

INDIA'S ROLE IN ARMS CONTROL

After the 2008 nuclear deal, there is a US expectation that India will work with the United States in arms control efforts, especially involving Asia. The United States is working to bring India into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the Wassenaar Arrangement. The United States and India are working together to promote the Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) and a nuclear weapons convention. However, the FMCT has been blocked for years by Pakistan and China, because China wants a space weapons treaty (PAROS) in part to counter US space capabilities.

The United States and India could eventually collaborate on a multilateral START treaty involving Russia, China, France, and Britain, though there is no sign of negotiations on the horizon. Eventually, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea could be brought into negotiations. In regard to the US-Indian partnership that emerged out of the 2008 nuclear deal, the United States will soon succeed to securing Indian membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Among Indian experts, there have been no regrets in India about the 2008 deal, and some count it as one of India's greatest foreign policy achievements. On the US side, one disappointment is that no US nuclear power stations have been sold to India because of liability issues.

Since 2001, the United States and India have worked together to develop missile defense for India, including strategic dialogue about the utility of missile defense and purchase of US systems and technology as well as some technical cooperation. In the meantime, India continues to pursue the development of its own missile defense system. Among Indian security experts, there continue to be debates about whether or not India should develop missile defense, based upon arguments about whether or not missile defense will bring stability or conflict to Asia.⁷⁹

THE 2014 ELECTION AND THE FUTURE OF THE US-INDIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The 2014 Indian election may have much to do in determining the direction of the strategic partnership and India's defense stance. A victory by the Congress Party or no victory by one of the two leading parties will keep the partnership on its present plateau. A victory by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) may draw India closer to the United States. A BJP-led coalition will tend to place India's national interest above non-alignment, take a strong stand towards Pakistan and China, and undertake economic reform that could regenerate rapid growth. The nationalist BJP governed India from 1998 to 2004 and initiated the strategic partnership with the United States as part of efforts to grow Indian power and counter the Pakistan-China alliance. However, the BJP did oppose the nuclear deal, taking a nationalistic line against the Congress Party-led government that negotiated the deal. Given past performance and current rhetoric, a BJP-led government may become more willing to allow a closer partnership with the United States and greater interoperability with US forces.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

India is willing and able to be a partner with the United States in the rebalance to Asia, primarily by maintaining security and stability in the Indian Ocean Region. This is especially evident through the US-India "exercise partnership" and the slow development of India's naval forces. In regard to anchoring economic growth in South Asia, India is already playing a role. However, it could do much more if economic reforms are implemented and if India is able to overcome differences with Pakistan and engage more economically. To some extent, US activity focused in Southeast Asia will be complemented by India's "Look East" policy. There is the prospect of joint Indo-US partnerships with Myanmar, Vietnam and other ASEAN nations. However, many US officials still see India as a geopolitical underperformer, which may not be able to deliver as much in the way of a strategic partnership as Washington would like.

On the US side, it will find it difficult to reassure partners, such as India, and allies, such as the Philippines and Japan, that it will follow through on its security commitments. US credibility will remain suspect, while it engages China in strategic and economic dialogue and trade and attempts to mitigate Chinese fears of containment. India will continue to press for transfer of technology and local production of weapons and other defense items, which will cause frustration in New Delhi.

Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Middle East will continue to distract the United States and India from "looking east." However, the US and Indian armies and air forces should be the most involved. Naval forces that are crucial to the rebalance and the "Look East" policy will not be greatly affected, unless there is a threat to the Strait of Hormuz by Iran. Therefore, the US plan to rely on the Indian Navy to help maintain stability and security in the Indian Ocean should come to fruition.

The US-India strategic dialogue continues, though relations have reached a plateau. The partnership is not advancing as rapidly as many in the United States might have wanted to see. This is

because the “Nehruvian” strand remains dominant in Indian foreign policy thinking and will keep India from drawing too close to the United States. Election of a BJP-led coalition would bring a return of nationalism and perhaps closer relations with the United States. If there is a BJP-led government in 2014, the US-India strategic partnership might develop more in line with the US vision of the partnership and its role in the rebalance to Asia. The US-India “exercise partnership” would have a better chance of moving towards military interoperability and a real strategic partnership. If there is no BJP-led government, the partnership will remain on a plateau, as it has since 2009. In regard to arms control, India is working with the United States but a multilateral effort is needed for further arms reductions measures.

In sum, the rebalance should add to the US-India strategic partnership. The United States will pay more attention to Asia and less to the rest of the world. However, the major flashpoints in Asia are and will remain in the East and South China seas and less so in the Indian Ocean. India may eventually ask the United States for military aid and security assistance in dealing with China over their border dispute. However, moves toward a US-India alliance are highly unlikely unless China pushes India too far. Much depends on how China behaves on the border and how it conducts relations with Pakistan and other South Asian countries.

ENDNOTES

¹ Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century (accessed July 30, 2013). In the article Secretary of State Clinton refers to the “pivot” to Asia. The term was later changed to “rebalance.”

² *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, U.S. Department of Defense, 2012, p. 2. http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf (accessed May 23, 2013).

³ “United States - India Joint Statement on Next Steps in Strategic Partnership,” US Department of State Press Statement, September 17, 2004. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/36290.htm> (accessed July 5, 2013).

⁴ C. Raja Mohan, “India: Between ‘Strategic Autonomy’ and ‘Geopolitical Opportunity’,” *Asia Policy*, Number 15, (January 2013), pp. 21-25.

⁵ Chidanand Rajghatta, “India a global power: US” *Times of India*, May 29, 2005. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2005-05-29/us/27835558_1_global-power-india-and-china-reliable-partner (accessed July 25, 2013).

⁶ Kevin Whitelaw, “Obama: U.S.-India ‘Natural Allies’ in the 21st Century,” National Public Radio, November 24, 2009. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120712790> (accessed July 14, 2013).

⁷ “UN chief renews call for entry into force of treaty banning nuclear tests,” UN News Centre, June 17, 2013. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45196&Cr=nuclear&Cr1=> (accessed July 14, 2013). Out of a total listed number of 195 States, 183 have so far signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and 159 have ratified it. For the treaty to enter into force, ratification is required from the so-called Annex 2 States. Of these, China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and the United States, have yet to ratify it.

⁸ “U.S.-India Partnership: The Fact Sheets,” The White House, November 8, 2010. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/08/us-india-partnership-fact-sheets> (accessed July 15, 2013). In November 2010, the United States and India signed a memorandum of understanding that provides a general framework for cooperative activities in working with India’s Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership, which India announced at the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit.

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- ⁹ Irani Bagchi, "India supports Iran's presidency of the Conference on Disarmament," *Times of India*, June 17, 2013. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-06-19/india/40068688_1_nuclear-programme-ranjan-mathai-former-nuclear-negotiator (accessed July 14, 2013). New Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was elected president of the conference, and the US delegation walked out.
- ¹⁰ "India calls for starting negotiations for FMCT," *IndlawNews*, June 19, 2013. <http://www.indlawnews.com/newsdisplay.aspx?93aac88-0b90-4130-9287-93d95a8141ce> (accessed July 14, 2013).
- ¹¹ "Joint Statement: Fourth U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue," U.S. Department of State, June 24, 2013. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/06/211084.htm> (accessed July 14, 2013). The United States has also welcomed India's March 2013 update to the special chemicals, organisms, materials, equipment, and technology (SCOMET) list.
- ¹² The New Framework in the India-US Defense Relationship signed by the Defense Minister of India and the US Secretary of Defense on June 28, 2005 charted a course for defense relations. Under the New Framework, India and the United States agreed to: a) Conduct joint and combined exercises and exchanges; b) Collaborate in multinational operations if it is in common interest; c) Strengthen capabilities of militaries to promote security and defeat terrorism; d) Promote regional and global peace and stability; e) Enhance capabilities to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; f) Increase opportunities for technology transfer, collaboration, co-production, and research and development; g) Expand collaboration relating to missile defense; h) Strengthen abilities of the Armed Forces to respond quickly to disasters, including in combined operations; i) Conduct successful peacekeeping operations; and j) Conduct and increase exchanges of intelligence.
- ¹³ S. Amer Latif, "U.S.-India Military Engagement: Steady as They Go," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2012, pages 1-61.
- ¹⁴ Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, "The New New Thing in U.S.-Indian Relations?" *The New York Times*, June 22, 2013.
- ¹⁵ "Bush names Pakistan as 'major ally'," BBC, June 17, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3814013.stm> (accessed July 24, 2013). Pakistan as a "major non-NATO ally" became eligible for priority delivery of defense material; could stockpile US military hardware; could participate in defense research and development program with the United States; and could benefit from a US loan guarantee program. The alliance sealed a working relationship and not a mutual defense pact.
- ¹⁶ Latif, "U.S.-India Military Engagement," pages 1-61.
- ¹⁷ Simon Denyer and Rama Lakshmi, "India Appears Ambivalent about Its Role as U.S. Strategy Pivots towards Asia," *Washington Post*, October 13, 2012, <http://www.cnas.org/node/9319> (accessed June 6, 2013).
- ¹⁸ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, *Clashing Titans: Military Strategy and Insecurity among Asian Great Powers*, New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2012.
- ¹⁹ George Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham, *Chinese and Indian Strategic Behavior: Growing Power and Alarm*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 264-300.
- ²⁰ Jeffrey Mankoff, "The Wary Chinese-Russian Partnership," *International Herald Tribune*, July 12, 2013, p. 6.
- ²¹ Tomohiko Satake and Yusuke Ishihara, "America's Rebalance to Asia and its Implications for Japan-US-Australia Security Cooperation," *Asia-Pacific Review*, Volume 19, Issue 2, (November 2012), pp. 6-25.
- ²² Aaron Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, W.W. Norton, 2011, chapters 4-11, 88-283.
- ²³ Tanvi Madan, "A Note on the China-India-US Triangle and India's Strategy," in Krishnappa Venkatesh and Princy George, eds. *Grand Strategy for India 2020 and Beyond*, IDSA, 2012, pp. 194-203. http://www.idsa.in/system/files/book_GrandStrategyIndia.pdf (accessed July 9, 2013).
- ²⁴ Jose Carreno, Thomas Culora, George Galdorisi, and Thomas Hone, "What's New About the AirSea Battle Concept?" *Proceedings Magazine*, US Naval Institute, Vol. 136/8/1, (August 2010), 290. <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2010-08/whats-new-about-airsea-battle-concept> (accessed July 1, 2013).

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- ²⁵ Shafi Rahman and Sandeep Unnithan, "China Plays Rough: India breathes fire as dragon China dominates," *India Today*, January 23, 2012. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/china-continues-to-dominate-india/1/168684.html> (accessed July 12, 2013). See also Namrata Goswami, "Indo-Chinese Relations and Border Issues in Northeast India: A View from India," National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies, April 11, 2013, http://inss.dodlive.mil/files/2013/06/TRANSCRIPT-Indo-China-Relations-and-Border-Issues-11Apr13_FINAL.pdf.
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- ³⁸ The two Asian security organizations are the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), focused on Central Asia, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN has not adopted a mutual defense pact in the nearly five decades of its existence. The SCO is overshadowed by the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).
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- ⁴¹ Douglas Stuart, "San Francisco 2.0: Military Aspects of the U.S. Pivot Toward Asia," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (November 2012), pp. 202-218.

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- ⁴⁴ Murray Scott Tanner, "Distracted Antagonists, Wary Partners: China and India Assess their Security Relations," Center for Naval Analysis China Studies, September 2011, pp. 13-18. <http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/distracted%20antagonists,%20wary%20partners%20d0025816%20a1.pdf> (accessed July 30, 2013).
- ⁴⁵ In contrast, Chinese experts contended that China has adopted a more balanced approach toward Pakistan and India since 1999, which has greatly eased Sino-Indian tensions. However, Beijing still desires a strong, stable Pakistan, in order to secure its Muslim west, build bridges to the Muslim world, and maintain leverage against India.
- ⁴⁶ Given the views of Indian and Chinese experts, Tanner concluded that the United States may need to revisit its diplomatic, economic, and security strategies in the region to take account of the impact of India and China's competition. The United States would need to assess the impact of China-India tensions on China's balance of strategic attention, resources, and force structure between its "main strategic direction" (its eastern coast and Taiwan) and its "secondary strategic direction" (the south and west), including India.
- ⁴⁷ Chinese military analysts portrayed India as an increasingly offense-oriented power seeking to dominate the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- ⁴⁸ This was the prevailing view of most think tank experts who were interviewed in August 2013. In addition, many of the comments made and asked during presentations to six different think tanks reflected this view.
- ⁴⁹ For many years, 45 rupees bought one US dollar. In 2013, the rupee fell in value against the dollar to 60 to one and inflation rose to close to ten per cent per month.
- ⁵⁰ Asok Sharma, "The U.S.-India Strategic Partnership: An Overview of Defense and Nuclear Courtship," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, July 4, 2013, <http://journal.georgetown.edu/2013/07/04/the-u-s-india-strategic-partnership-an-overview-of-defense-and-nuclear-courtship-by-ashok-sharma/> (accessed November 4, 2013).
- ⁵¹ Interview with Dr. Rajeswari Rajagopalan, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, August 18, 2013.
- ⁵² Daniel Markey, "Developing India's Foreign Policy Software," *Asia Policy*, Number 8 (July 2009), 74.
- ⁵³ Sreeram S Chaulia, "BJP, India's Foreign Policy and the 'Realist Alternative' to the Nehruvian Tradition," *International Politics*, Volume 39, Number 2, June 2002, pp. 215-234.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Sushant Sareen, Research Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, August 21, 2013. The views of Vivekananda Foundation experts most closely represent those of the BJP.
- ⁵⁵ Interview with Bharat Karnad, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, August 21, 2013.
- ⁵⁶ Interview with Major General (retired) Dipankar Bannerjee, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, August 13, 2013.
- ⁵⁷ Interview with Rajiv Nayan, Senior Fellow, Institute for Defence and Security Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi, August 13, 2013.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with Dr. Vijay Sakhujia, Director, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, August 12, 2013.
- ⁵⁹ Presley Thomas, "A Navy under Neglect: Cinderella Service; Governmental apathy leaves the force in a miserable condition," *Hindustan Times*, August 22, 2013, p. 1.
- ⁶⁰ Some US officials see India's problem is a general inability of government officials to make decisions as opposed to China, which decides quickly and moves on its decisions.

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- ⁶² Karl F. Inderfurth and Oliver Backes, "Defense Cooperation: U.S.-India Centerpiece," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Vol. 3. Issue 11, November 2013, pages 1-3.
- ⁶³ Nidhi Goyal, "Indigenisation to make India self-reliant," *The Indian Express*, special section, "Indian Defence: The Pace of Modernisation," August 22, 2013, page 1.
- ⁶⁴ Debar Mohanty, "Making Indian Military Modern: Deficits and Disconnects," *The Indian Express*, special section "Indian Defence: The Pace of Modernisation," August 22, 2013, page 1.
- ⁶⁵ Jaikhleng Basumatry. "Implications of Trans-Asian Highway in North East India," *Symbiosis: Indian Review of Global Affairs*, July 29, 2013. <http://www.irgamag.com/component/k2/item/3970-implications-of-trans-asian-highway-in-north-east-india> (accessed September 20, 2013).
- ⁶⁶ Interview with Bharat Karnad, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, August 21, 2013.
- ⁶⁷ Comments at presentation at the Institute for Defence and Security Analyses, New Delhi, August 14, 2013.
- ⁶⁸ Interview with Dr. C. Raja Mohan, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, August 27, 2013.
- ⁶⁹ Interview with Bharat Karnad, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, August 21, 2013.
- ⁷⁰ Concerns about Russia's intentions were raised at every presentation that was given in New Delhi in August 2013.
- ⁷¹ Karl F. Inderfurth and Oliver Backes, "'A Traditional Friend': India-Russia Defense Ties," in "Defense Cooperation: U.S.-India Centerpiece," CSIS, 3, 11, November 2013, pages 1-2.
- ⁷² Interview with Dr. C. Raja Mohan, August 27, 2013.
- ⁷³ Interview with Bharat Karnad, August 21, 2013.
- ⁷⁴ Interview with Dr. Asif Shuja, Indian Council of World Affairs, Tuesday, 20 August 2013.
- ⁷⁵ Some US officials see India's existential threats as mainly internal, including violent extremists and Maoist insurgents in the eastern part of the country, including Andhra Pradesh Province.
- ⁷⁶ Interview with Sushant Sareen, Research Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, August 21, 2013.
- ⁷⁷ Interview with Sushant Sareen, August 21, 2013.
- ⁷⁸ Daniel S. Markey, *No Exit from Pakistan: America's Troubled Relationship with Islamabad*, Cambridge University Press, 2013. China is Pakistan's leading arms supplier, and the two armies conduct war games and drills together. China, seemingly unconcerned about Pakistan's rapidly expanding nuclear weapons program, is currently building two nuclear reactors to help meet Pakistan's desperate energy needs. China also appears to be moving ahead with providing two much larger nuclear reactors.
- ⁷⁹ Vinod Kumar, presentation on ballistic missile defense and stability in Asia, Institute for Defence and Security Analyses, New Delhi, August 23, 2013.
- ⁸⁰ Interview with Dipankar Bannerjee, August 13, 2013 and Sushant Sareen, August 21, 2013.