



# US and India align

BY GWYNNE DYER

Chances are you won't hear a single word about U.S.-Indian military links in the mainstream media's reporting about President Bush's first visit to India this week. For months the media in both countries have been encouraged to speculate about whether a deal on U.S.-Indian cooperation on civilian nuclear power would be ready in time for Bush's visit, but that deal is just the quid pro quo.

The actual "quo" was a de facto military alliance between India and the United States, but we don't talk about that in front of the children.

"The largest democracy in the world and the oldest democracy in the world are becoming strategic partners, and that is a very consequential development in international politics," said U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns on Feb. 24 after a visit to New Delhi.

"Consequential" is the right

word. The two countries that will have the world's second- and third-largest economies a generation from now have made an alliance against the country that will have the biggest economy, China - but hardly anybody in the media seems to have noticed.

It's not secret. The joint U.S.-Indian military training exercises of the past few years and the arms sales that are now eagerly awaited by the American defense industry are public knowledge (but only if you have been paying close attention). Indian Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee went to Washington in person last June to sign the 10-year agreement on military cooperation and joint weapons production with the United States. It's just that talking too loudly about all this would upset the Chinese, and it would upset some people in the United States, too.

Not everybody in Washington welcomes the idea of a military alliance to "contain" China. So

let's pretend our priorities are elsewhere, and send the press chasing off down the wrong path.

Happily, there is a different issue that they can be persuaded to believe is important, because New Delhi's defiant series of nuclear weapons tests in 1998, which were followed by a series of Pakistani nuclear tests, triggered not only U.S. sanctions against the two countries but broader sanctions by the Nuclear Suppliers' Group.

After 9/11, the U.S. immediately offered to lift sanctions on Pakistan in return for General Pervez Musharraf's cooperation in the "war on terror." Logically, that meant that sanctions against India should be lifted, too, but because Washington did not need India's cooperation in the same urgent way - the terrorists who attack India are not the same as those who attack American targets - it could demand a political price from India for ending sanctions. The biggest part of that

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price was a military alliance with the United States.

It will never formally be called that, in deference to India's old non-aligned tradition, but the neo-conservatives who run American foreign policy under Bush are determined to build a ring of alliances around China. With the aid of lavish promises about access to next-generation American weapons systems, military co-production agreements, shared intelligence, joint exercises, and general American support for India's aspirations as a great power, the deal was done - except that the United States could not keep its promise to provide India with nuclear fuel and technology unless it could satisfy the Nuclear Suppliers Group that they would not end up in weapons.

All the negotiations of the past few months have been about finding some way of disentangling India's peaceful nuclear power program from its military program, so that it can accept

IAEA safeguards on the former and become eligible for U.S. supplies while keeping the latter free from intrusive foreign inspections. Because the two Indian programs have been thoroughly entangled for the past 30 years, that is taking a lot of time - and this is the problem that journalists covering Bush's visit have been encouraged to focus on. It distracts attention from the military aspects of the relationship and creates the impression that both sides are behaving responsibly.

They are not. They are building an alliance that is bound to alarm the Chinese, who cannot fail to see it as directed against them. There is absolutely no evidence for aggressive Chinese intentions toward India or anywhere in South Asia, but Washington and New Delhi are laying the foundations for a new Cold War in Asia.

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