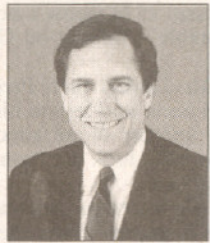


The US and India expanding engagement

India - Foreign Relations - USA



By Karl F Inderfurth

After decades of being 'estranged democracies', the United States and India have entered a new era that can best be described as 'engaged democracies'

EARLIER this year, five former US secretaries of state — Henry Kissinger, James Baker, Warren Christopher, Madeleine Albright, and Colin Powell — took part in a roundtable discussion entitled, "Bipartisan Advice to the Next Administration". During their conversation, this question was posed: "What should a new administration do in terms of dealing with India?"

Former Secretary Kissinger responded: "The relationship with India is one of the very positive things that is happening. We can co-operate with them both on ideological grounds and on strategic grounds. It's one of the positive legacies that the new administration will inherit."

After decades of being "estranged democracies", the United States and India have entered a new era that can best be described as "engaged democracies". Assuming the next US president who takes office on January 20, 2009 views India in the same emerging global power context as the last two administrations — as both Senators Barack Obama and John McCain have indicated they will — how should the new administra-

tion proceed to expand this new strategic partnership?

Seven-point agenda: Clearly that effort should be broad-based, befitting the range of bilateral, regional, and global interests shared by the two countries. Moreover, it should be ambitious, building on the foundation laid over the past several years. The following seven-point engagement agenda should therefore be considered.

1. Strengthen strategic ties:

A strong India is important for balance of power purposes in Asia and for providing stability in the strategically important Indian Ocean littoral area. India is in a position to safeguard sea-lanes that are used to transport more than half the world's oil and gas

A strong India is important for balance of power purposes in Asia and for providing stability in the strategically important Indian Ocean littoral area. India is in a position to safeguard sea-lanes that are used to transport more than half the world's oil and gas. The navies of the United States and India have begun to conduct joint exercises aimed against threats to maritime commerce.

There has been a quantum jump in US-India defence ties in the past several

years — with joint military exercises, the signing of a 10-year defence framework agreement, and increased interest in defence procurement and collaboration between defence industries. These ties should be accelerated.

Another arena for greater strategic cooperation is in counter-terrorism. India has been a target of terrorist attacks longer than the United States. Expanding counter-terrorism cooperation requires increased information sharing and building tighter liaison bonds between US and Indian intelligence and security services.

2. Realise economic potential:

Underpinning the strategic partnership should be a concerted effort to realise the full economic potential of the US-India relationship. Steps need to be taken to deepen commercial ties, identify and remove impediments on both sides (still far too many), and clear the way for a new era of trade cooperation and investment. Deeper economic ties will also have the added advantage of providing needed ballast in the overall relationship when political differences arise, as they surely will.

3. Pursue a broader nuclear dialogue:

It has long been a goal of the United States to engage India as a partner in global efforts to control the spread of nuclear weapons.

But for more than a quarter of a century, the two countries have been on the opposite side of the nuclear divide — unable to reconcile India's nuclear weapons programme and its security compulsions with the nuclear non-proliferation concerns and policies of the United States.

The US-India civilian nuclear agreement announced in 2005 launched a major effort to bridge that divide. With that announcement, the United States explicitly recognised India's status as a full-fledged nuclear power, and committed itself to a partnership in the realm of civilian nuclear energy. The recent deci-

sion of the 45-member Nuclear Supplies Group to approve access by India to nuclear fuel and technology is a major step forward in this regard. It brings to an end, in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh words, "India's decades-long isolation from the nuclear mainstream." Over time these developments may open the door to an even broader nuclear dialogue the United States and India could pursue, especially to counter the dangers posed by nuclear know-how proliferating and

The United States should signal its strong support for India and Pakistan as they seek to improve their relations and resolve their differences, but should defer to them as they grapple with the best approach on how to accomplish this

non-state terrorist groups seeking to obtain and use weapons of mass destruction, something that neither country wants to see.

At the same time, it is also essential to recognise that the civilian nuclear agreement is an important part — but not the sum total — of the much improved and expanding broad-based relationship between the two countries that already includes sensitive areas once virtually off limits to any form of cooperation, such as

high-technology transfers and joint ventures in space. These areas were once considered the "litmus test" of the new US-India relationship. That test is being passed.

4. Highlight higher education: A 2005 policy report by a high-level panel of US and Indian experts states: "Higher education is among the most important, and least appreciated, foundations of the budding partnership between India and the United States". The benefits for India of higher education collaboration with the United States are many: increasing the quality of its higher education opportunities, retaining good talent within the country, and reaping the benefits of foreign investment. For the United States, there will be greater opportunities for exchanges and to learn and collaborate in fields of increasing importance to both countries — including science, public health, and information technology.

5. Support India's United Nations bid:

Enhanced US-India cooperation should also extend to the institutions of global governance. It is time for the United States to publicly support India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and to work actively with India (and others) to accomplish the goal of Security Council expansion. With its thriving democracy, its billion plus population, its expanding economy, and its longstanding contributions to UN peacekeeping, the case for a permanent Indian seat has never been stronger.

6. Collaborate in the neighbourhood:

Another area for greater collaboration should be at the regional level, in the subcontinent itself. Both India and the United States want a South Asia that is prosperous, stable and democratic. Already, the United States and India are working together in Nepal as it pursues a permanent peace and a new political dispensation. India and the United States should

USA

g engagement agenda

high-technology transfers and joint ventures in space. These areas were once considered the "litmus test" of the new US-India relationship. That test is being passed.

4. Highlight higher education: A 2005 policy report by a high-level panel of US and Indian experts states: "Higher education is among the most important, and least appreciated, foundations of the budding partnership between India and the United States". The benefits for India of higher education collaboration with the United States are many: increasing the quality of its higher education opportunities, retaining good talent within the country, and reaping the benefits of foreign investment. For the United States, there will be greater opportunities for exchanges and to learn and collaborate in fields of increasing importance to both countries — including science, public health, and information technology.

5. Support India's United Nations bid: Enhanced US-India cooperation should also extend to the institutions of global governance. It is time for the United States to publicly support India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and to work actively with India (and others) to accomplish the goal of Security Council expansion. With its thriving democracy, its billion plus population, its expanding economy, and its longstanding contributions to UN peacekeeping, the case for a permanent Indian seat has never been stronger.

6. Collaborate in the neighbourhood: Another area for greater collaboration should be at the regional level, in the subcontinent itself. Both India and the United States want a South Asia that is prosperous, stable and democratic. Already, the United States and India are working together in Nepal as it pursues a permanent peace and a new political dispensation. India and the United States should

cooperate in trying to stabilise Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, both of which face significant internal political difficulties. India and the United States also have a shared interest in a secure and stable Afghanistan and one that is at peace with all its neighbours.

The toughest longstanding issue in the South Asia neighbourhood remains India's relations with Pakistan and attempts to advance the nascent Indo-Pakistani dialogue. In recent years, this

Strengthened US ties with India have their own strategic logic and imperatives and should not be part of a China containment strategy. Instead, the task for all three is to manage ties as a co-operative — not a competitive — triangle

dialogue has produced some practical steps on normalising ties and confidence building measures; and there has been a serious exploration of the Kashmir conflict. The United States should signal its strong support for India and Pakistan as they seek to improve their relations and resolve their differences, but should defer to them as they grapple with the best approach on how to accomplish this.

7. Promote a co-operative

triangle: Along with the much-improved US-India relationship has come questions about the underlying motivations for this new direction in American foreign policy, specifically whether it represents a hedge by Washington against a rising China, India's most consequential neighbour. These manipulative temptations should be resisted. Strengthened US ties with India have their own strategic logic and imperatives and should not be part of a China containment strategy, something Indian officials would strongly oppose.

Need for co-operative triangle: Instead, the task for all three is to manage ties as a co-operative — not a competitive — triangle. One way to further a closer, co-operative relationship between the United States (and the leading industrialised nations) and India and China would be to make these two global powers formal members of an expanded Group of Eight. Another would be to pursue initiatives in three critical areas that the three countries must all address and play a major role: energy, the environment and international health.

It is clear that a new era has begun for US-India relations. The last two American presidents recognised that fundamental change was under way with India as an emerging global power and acted accordingly. Their desire to enhance our relations was reciprocated by India's national leadership. A strong foundation for a vibrant US-India relationship has been established, upon which the next US administration, under either President Obama or McCain, can engage and expand. **COURTESY THE HINDU**

The writer is a professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. He served as US assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs from 1997-2001