

Policy Forum 00-8A: India-East Asia Relations: India's Latest Asian Incarnation



The NAPSNet Policy Forum provides expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. As always, we invite your responses to this report and hope you will take the opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis.

Recommended Citation

"Policy Forum 00-8A: India-East Asia Relations: India's Latest Asian Incarnation", NAPSNet Policy Forum, November 30, 2000, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/nautilus-institute-policy-forum-online-india-east-asia-relations-indias-latest-asian-incarnation/>

Nautilus Institute Policy Forum Online: India-East Asia Relations: India's Latest Asian Incarnation

Nautilus Institute Policy Forum Online: India-East Asia Relations: India's Latest Asian Incarnation

PFO 00-08: November 30, 2000

India-East Asia Relations: India's Latest Asian Incarnation

By Satu P. Limaye

Contents:

[I. Introduction](#)

[II. Essay by Satu P. Limaye](#)

[III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses](#)

I. Introduction

This contribution is by Satu P. Limaye, Director of Research at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. This essay was originally published by [Pacific Forum CSIS's](#) e-journal [Comparative Connections](#) .

Limaye argues that this third incarnation of India as an Asian state began with the post-nuclear test damage control efforts and was sustained despite the 1999 undeclared Kargil war between Pakistan and India. Limaye reviews India's bilateral relations with the PRC, Japan, Southeast Asia, and Russia, as well as these countries' positions on India's nuclear tests and Pakistan. Limaye argues that India's sustained diplomatic pressures have moved beyond damage control and into the significant enhancement of ties with other Asian countries, an effort that has largely been reciprocated.

II. Essay by Satu P. Limaye

"India-East Asia Relations: India's Latest Asian Incarnation"

India is in its third incarnation as an Asian player. Whether the expanded India-Asia interaction in 2000 is sustainable or short-lived remains to be seen. One certainty, however, is that post-nuclear test ties between India and the region were nearly normalized during 2000. Strong economic growth in India (despite slowed reforms, economic sanctions, and Asia's incomplete recovery), as well as a stable Indian government, and focused diplomatic efforts buttressed this trend. It is against this background that India's relations with key Asian powers, China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and Russia in the year 2000 must be seen.

India's first incarnation as an Asian power stretched from the inaugural Afro-Asian conference that Delhi hosted just prior to independence in 1947 until the 1962 Sino-Indian Border War. This was the high period of India's efforts to engage (and, some suspected, lead) Asia through support for anti-colonial struggles, Asian solidarity, and a new international order based on nonalignment and panchshila (five principles of peaceful coexistence).

From 1962 until the early 1990s India went missing in Asia. The reasons were many. Defeat at the hands of China sapped India's confidence (it may have cut short Prime Minister Nehru's life) and soured Asian countries on India's prospects. Preoccupation with Pakistan, including wars in 1965 and 1971, diverted Indian energies. Indira Gandhi spent the 1960s and 1970s consolidating power. During the 1970s and 1980s, India's Moscow connection and estrangement from the U.S. alienated much of Asia. After the 1970s oil shocks, India was drawn closer to the Middle East, upon which it relied for energy, business, and remittances. New Delhi's bungled handling of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, the former Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, and its own application for ASEAN dialogue-partner status also angered key Asian states. Meanwhile, India's arms procurement and naval expansion, though exaggerated, fueled worry about New Delhi's intentions. Compounding the numerous diplomatic mistakes, India's stubborn insistence on an inward-looking economy made it increasingly irrelevant to a dynamic Asia. Mostly, India isolated itself.

The rebirth of India's Asia role derived from the twin shocks of Soviet collapse and near financial default in the early 1990s. The importance of being Asian became stark. Enhanced ties with Asia were seen as a step to possible inclusion in the broader Asia Pacific community, including regional economic and political organizations. This web of inclusion was deemed vital if India was to avoid over-dependence upon any one power; compensate for the loss of political, economic, and military support from the ex-Soviet Union and East Bloc countries; and escape isolation and marginalization

in a new world order. For Asia, better ties with India were an element of hedging; increasing economic and political flexibility among various Asian powers, forging a broader front against Western pressures on human rights, democracy, and trade issues; and creating constructive bilateral partnerships in trade, joint ventures, and technology (especially software and information technology). Individual Asian countries also sought specific benefits from improved links with India such as military training and military spare parts. These mutual efforts bore some fruit, including exchanges of high-level visits across the region, patched-up Sino-Indian ties, confidence-building and transparency measures, military exchanges, and India's inclusion in regional groupings such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

The factors facilitating this trend included mutual concerns about China (in hand with a rapprochement between India and China), a significant weakening of the Indo-Soviet/Russian relationship with a parallel improvement in U.S.-India relations, declining Indian military spending, and the end to specific disputes such as Cambodia and Afghanistan. Moreover, political stability for the first half of the 1990s under the Congress-led government of Narasimha Rao and a round of economic reform created the impression that the Indian elephant was awakening.

But, this second incarnation of India being Asian lasted only from the early 1990s until the mid-1990s. Progress was hampered by government turnovers in India, frustration in Asia with the slow pace of India's economic reforms, a lack of Indian diplomatic follow-through, as well as Asia's own financial crisis and political pre-occupations (e.g., Indonesia).

A new round of Asian activism by India followed its nuclear blasts in May 1998. India launched efforts at damage control and re-engagement with Asian countries, and they responded. Surprisingly, this process was sustained despite an undeclared India-Pakistan war in Kargil in the summer of 1999.

India and China in 2000: "Knot" Not Undone

India's naming of China as the threat that prompted its 1998 nuclear tests led to a folksy exchange between the two civilizations. China's ambassador to Delhi, Zhou Gang, advised India "it is up to the doer to undo the knot." India's foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, retorted with a Rajasthani proverb that "it takes two to undo a knot." The "knot," of course, was India's "China threat" claim. China sought a retraction as a precondition for normalizing ties. India wanted a reciprocal statement from China. The countries compromised on each other's request, but with clever qualifications. During Foreign Minister Singh's June 1999 visit to Beijing, the first in eight years by an Indian foreign minister, he stated that India does not view China as a threat. China's Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan grudgingly accepted Mr. Singh's statement. In March 2000, Tang went on to say that "generally speaking China and India do not pose a threat to each other..." And in July 2000 President Narayanan noted that India and China were "not necessarily rivals."

Notwithstanding this knot's successful untying, the exchange symbolizes a fundamental reality about contemporary Sino-Indian ties: there are a number of undone, more difficult knots. In 2000, despite the reinvigoration and surface friendliness of bilateral ties, these knots were as resistant to untying as ever.

The Border Dispute: PRC's Broader vs. India's Border Emphasis

An early casualty of India's nuclear tests was the Joint Working Group on the Boundary Question (JWG) meeting scheduled for October 1998. This was the first lapse of the JWG in a decade. Following preliminary consultations in February 1999, the 11th JWG meeting was finally held in April 1999 and the 12th JWG meeting was held in April 2000. No progress was made in either round.

During President Narayanan's May-June 2000 visit to China to mark the fiftieth anniversary of bilateral relations, he pressed for speedier progress on resolution of the border dispute. His counterpart, Jiang Zemin, counseled patience, saying that the problem was "left over by history." Mr. Narayanan responded that it must not be "left over for history." However, during PRC Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's trip to Delhi in July 2000 there was agreement to accelerate the process of demarcating the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the middle sector, including the possibility of additional meetings of the JWG. Although this is incremental movement at best, 2000 did witness the continuation of the restarted JWG process, and at least raised the prospect of faster progress.

Fundamentally, however, India still regards the border as a central, high-priority issue and China does not. President Jiang Zemin's Four-Point Proposal on Bilateral Relations to President Narayanan and Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's Five-Point Proposal for Relations with India during his July 2000 visit to India make clear Beijing's effort to place the border dispute in the broader context of bilateral relations. Though Rajiv Gandhi in 1988 accepted, in principle, this shift in emphasis, India remains frustrated that little has been achieved, especially given the progress in resolving China's borders with other neighbors. For its part, as Assistant Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated in mid-September 2000, China remains convinced that India seeks a one-sided solution to the border.

Pakistan in Sino-Indian Relations

Since 1990, the PRC has adopted a more equidistant stance on Kashmir. After India's nuclear tests, in an apparent effort to exert pressure on India, the PRC briefly floated the idea of a multilateral meeting to help resolve the Kashmir dispute. A month later, however, China reverted to the PRC's post-1990 position emphasizing bilateral, peaceful negotiation. During the May-June 1999 Kargil conflict, the PRC appeared to have counseled restraint to Pakistan and privately urged it to withdraw backing for the insurgents. During Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's July 2000 visit to the subcontinent, he continued to support dialogue between India and Pakistan as the "right path" for resolution of India-Pakistan differences. This equidistancing may have gone so far that Tang also went out of his way to assure Pakistan that Sino-Indian ties would not affect Sino-Pakistani ones. For this reason, Indians were a bit unnerved in September when Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Wang Yi reportedly stated that "the only way out is the peaceful settlement [of Kashmir] with help from the international community." He also advised India to include Pakistan in any talks with insurgent groups. It is unclear whether this statement marks any lasting shift in the overall trend towards a more equidistant position between Pakistan and India by China. China has also not budged from its description of Sino-Pakistan relations as an "all-weather friendship" and a "comprehensive, constructive partnership."

The PRC's military, nuclear, and missile relationship with Pakistan, however, remains profoundly problematic for Sino-Indian relations. In July 2000, President Narayanan again requested clarification that China's Pakistan relationship is not aimed at India. Foreign Minister Tang duly obliged during his visit to the subcontinent. Indians are unconvinced. Throughout mid-2000 there were numerous reports of missile transfers by the PRC to Pakistan. Indians are convinced that China uses Pakistan to "contain" India in South Asia, preventing India's emergence as a possible challenge to China. Combined with the rapid growth of China's economic and military strength and its revived relations with Russia, Indians have become extremely anxious about the Sino-Pakistan relationship. India regards Pakistan as China's most important link in a chain of strategic encirclement. China, on the other hand, regards Pakistan as a major partner (even reportedly suggesting that it is on par with the U.S. relationship with Israel) with which it has a normal, legitimate "state-to-state" relationship. Untying this complicated knot will be extremely difficult.

India's Nuclear Weapons Program: The New Knot.

China does not have a record of unduly pressing India on nuclear nonproliferation. China itself

joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) only in 1992 and once opposed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). India's nuclear tests have brought a different stance. China has justified its opposition to India's nuclear weapons program on the basis of United Nations Security Resolution (UNSCR) 1172, rather than unilateral reasons. But China also did not impose sanctions on India. It is unclear just how committed the PRC is to UNSCR 1172. As recently as March 2000, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Zhu Bangzao, stated that resolution 1172 should "be sincerely and fully implemented by India." UN Security Council Resolution 1172 calls on India to not only sign and ratify the CTBT, but also to sign the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state (NNWS). India has stated that it will not accept the resolution. At least two Indian newspapers reported that President Jiang Zemin made no mention of UNSCR 1172 during President Narayanan's visit. Nevertheless, China's reference to 1172 is stronger than all other major powers including the United States and even Japan (see section on India-Japan relations). At the first-ever March 2000 security dialogue between India and China, little progress was reportedly made on the nuclear issue, but it is noteworthy that this has become a subject of bilateral dialogue. The Chinese publicly profess little concern about India's nuclear weapons capability, though this may be posturing.

The bottom line is that pressing for adoption of UNSCR 1172 helps portray China as a responsible player on arms control and non-proliferation and indirectly criticizes the U.S. for its purported lack of commitment to the resolution that was explicitly stated in the June 1998 Joint U.S.-China statement on South Asia. China does not unduly complicate relations with Pakistan by highlighting 1172 because Pakistan has long-held that it would sign and ratify both the NPT and CTBT if India were to do so. China's non-proliferation policy toward India has a lot to do with Sino-U.S. relations, and comparatively little with India itself.

India-China Relations in 2000: Not Undone.

For all the India-China talk in 2000 about common interests (e.g., a bilateral World Trade Organization agreement), more areas of agreement than difference, shared commitment to a multipolar world, resumption of military and naval visits, and even appeals to third world solidarity, bilateral relations remain mired in the past. On concrete issues big and small--such as India-Pakistan relations, nuclear weapons, or the border dispute as well as India's bid for a UN Security Council seat or sponsorship of the Convention on International Terrorism--India and China disagree. India, for its part, remains confused about what kind of relationship it wants with China, and how to achieve it. It is not an environment conducive to untying knots.

India and Japan in 2000: Samurai Meets Swami

India-Japan relations plummeted after India's 1998 nuclear tests. Japan's "adverse" actions, which the Indian external affairs ministry lists on its website, ranged from initiatives to condemn India's tests, raise the Kashmir issue at the UN, and induct Pakistan into the ARF, to having Empress Michiko's keynote address at the 26th Congress of International Board of Books for Young People canceled and substituted with an audio-visual message. In return, India refused to accept assistance for a cyclone disaster and slapped access restrictions on Tokyo's ambassador, among other steps.

Near normal ties were restored by early 2000 following visits by Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh in November 1999 and by Defense Minister Georges Fernandes in mid-January 2000. The centerpiece of Japan-India relations in 2000, however, was the visit of Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro in August, the first by a Japanese Prime Minister to South Asia in a decade. Four issues were at the heart of the visit: India's signature of the CTBT, the status of sanctions, economic cooperation, and Japan's attitude towards India-Pakistan relations.

The Nuclear Issue

Considering Japan's earlier energetic and wide-ranging responses to India's tests, Prime Minister

Mori came to India with a sharply limited brief on India's nuclear policy: CTBT signature. He offered a number of carrots, including the further promotion of "amicable relations, respect, and praise from the international community as a responsible nation, and initiatives together for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation." All Mori got from the Indians was Prime Minister Vajpayee and External Affairs Minister Singh's promise to abide by India's voluntary, self-imposed moratorium on conducting further nuclear tests. Prime Minister Mori also expressed a "wish to cooperate with India in order to start negotiations immediately and settle the FMCT [fissile material cut-off treaty] within five years." PM Vajpayee "agreed." Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement that Prime Minister Mori was "impressed by [the Indian Prime Minister's] very constructive comments." More than pressing India, Japan appeared bent on seeking a "fig leaf" that would allow it to restart its Overseas Development Agency (ODA) to India. It was also clear from Mori's visit that, in the words of Japanese Ambassador Hirabayashi Hiroshi, "the Japanese government has come to the conclusion to build multifaceted relations with India while working on non-proliferation issues together." In other words, Japan is moving off the non-proliferation dime.

Economic Sanctions and Economic Cooperation

India's Foreign Secretary Lalit Mansingh made clear prior to Prime Minister Mori's visit that India would not appeal for a lifting of sanctions, and publicly it did not. He further pointed out that India had "coped with the sanctions very well and...established the point that sanctions are counter-productive and we won't be intimidated by them. We believe sanctions are an irritant in bilateral relations." (This contrasted starkly with General Pervez Musharraf's complaint to Mori that Japan's sanctions are "unfair and unjustified.") Indeed, before Mori's India trip, commentary in the Japanese press complained that the sanctions were harming Japan's businesses and bilateral relations with India while having no effect on India's signature of the CTBT. That Japan was searching for almost any justification to resume some aid to India was evident from Mori's conclusion that India's position on the CTBT and FMCT was such a "progressive stance" that additional loans ought to be made to two large, ongoing development projects.

Mori also sought to re-engage India's private sector. He rather exaggeratedly offered that "we cannot talk about the international economy without referring to India." He also launched an Indo-Japanese Information Technology (IT) Promotion and Cooperative Initiative that included a training program for Indian engineers, multiple entry visas for Indian businessmen, and IT business missions from Japan to India. This is a tiny effort in India's IT sector compared with India's cooperation with Germany and the U.S. For example, Japan gets only 4% of some \$5.7 billion in Indian software exports while the U.S. gets 60%. Germany offers some 10,000 visas for Indian computer engineers and the U.S. nearly 60,000. Japan and India also agreed to set up a high-powered panel to promote private sector cooperation.

The Pakistan Factor

In 1998 and 1999, Indians were incensed by Japan's efforts to internationalize the Kashmir issue and bring Pakistan into the ARF and Tokyo's muted reactions to Kargil. During his 2000 visit to the region, Mori seemed to go out of his way to soothe Japan-India relations. Aside from the fact that he spent four days in India and only one in Pakistan, Mori indirectly put the onus on Pakistan for the breakdown in dialogue by saying "I emphasized to General Pervez Musharraf, Chief Executive, the need to take steps for any early return to democracy, to control terrorism and to create an environment conducive to the resumption of dialogue with India." Prime Minister Mori also subtly blamed Pakistan for Kargil by recounting that "in February last year, Prime Minister Vajpayee made a historic visit to Lahore...However, the fighting that broke out in Kargil after the visit betrayed Vajpayee's good intentions, and we also deeply regretted it." Mori also praised Vajpayee for his early August efforts at talks.

Despite Mori's focus on the actions that Pakistan needs to take, such as "effective measures against terrorism" and the need for a bilateral dialogue, he stated that Japan "will support as much as possible confidence building measures between the two countries," implying that Japan would remain engaged in the dispute. And he strongly insisted that India should not resist dialogue, as it has been doing.

India-Japan in 2000: Who's the Samurai, Who's the Swami

The changing dynamics of India-Japan relations suggest India is playing the "tougher" role in the relationship. India has not compromised on the CTBT, not asked for any relief on sanctions, and pushed for a security dialogue. Japan has pleaded for a CTBT compromise that would allow it to restart aid, offered India a number of high-level panels and economic visits, and named the relationship "Global Partnership between Japan and India in the 21st Century." The irony is that Japan-India relations have never been so multifaceted, active, and future-oriented as they have since India conducted nuclear tests.

India and ASEAN/Southeast Asia: "We Hindustani, You Aseani"

With all of Southeast Asia, India has gone from defending its nuclear blasts to making a case for its positive role in the region and exchanging numerous high-profile visits with key countries. At the 1998 ARF meeting's traditional skits, India's foreign minister Jaswant Singh sang "why such a fuss over a few crackers in the Thar. They weren't as loud as Nevada or Lop Nor/Sherrif [Nawaz Sharif, former Prime Minister of Pakistan] took his ones and joined the fun/Evita [U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright] lost some sleep, Juan [China's President Jiang Zemin] proliferated in the sun...We Hindustani, you Aseani."

In a June 2000 speech in Singapore, Singh was less defensive and more proactive saying that "the engagement of a militarily stronger, economically prosperous, democratic, and secular India imparts greater stability to the region." India's circulation of a concept paper on anti-piracy and offer to host a workshop on the subject in October 2000 also indicates a desire to play a more active role in regional affairs. Such initiatives have been combined with new overtures as well as enhanced ties with old friends across the region, including naval visits and even exercises.

India in ASEAN and ARF

By the seventh ARF meeting in July 2000, criticism of India's nuclear tests had all but ceased. Unlike in the UN Security Council, G-8, or P5, ASEAN and the ARF have taken a relatively mild stance on India's tests though individual member's reactions have varied. The entire reference to South Asia in the seventh ARF meeting consisted of two sentences noting that views were exchanged on South Asia, some countries expressed continuing concern, and hopes were expressed for efforts to bring about positive developments in the region. If anything, the nuclear blasts in the subcontinent have pushed ASEAN and ARF to make stronger statements about disarmament.

Also on the nuclear issue, India has offered to "fully respect" and make legally-binding the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ). Of course, non-ASEAN accession to the SEANWFZ is open only to nuclear weapons states (NWS). Therefore, as Singapore Foreign Minister Jayakumar stated, the matter of India acceding to the SEANWFZ "does not arise," but "the spirit of it will not be lost on the ASEAN countries." Clearly, India's offer was an attempt to get de jure recognition for its nuclear weapons status.

ARF's decision not to include Pakistan was also announced at the seventh ARF meeting. India had opposed Pakistan's membership. Just before the fifth ARF meeting in July 1998, two months after the nuclear tests, Japan had pushed for Pakistan's inclusion. Then as this year, there was no consensus on including Pakistan. However, the decision not to include Pakistan likely has less to do with India's

objections than ASEAN's determination that India-Pakistan tensions fall outside the "geographical footprint" of key ARF activities, and a desire not to complicate and detract attention from ARF's other country challenges.

India and Southeast Asia

Singapore has been the key country for India's engagement with Southeast Asia; it is the country coordinator for the ASEAN-India dialogue. This is hardly surprising, given Singapore's sizable, and politically well-organized, ethnic Indian population. In mid-January 2000, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong paid his first visit in five years to India, during which two task forces were established for finance and information technology cooperation. Prime Minister Goh, however, chided India for paying less attention to the region than it should, saying "I want India to look towards Southeast Asia, ASEAN, and Singapore. I know India places importance to relations with the U.S. and Europe." In June 2000, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh went to Singapore and made a major policy speech addressing India's role in Asia, perhaps in response to this urging.

Another old friend of India's in the region, Vietnam, was also the focus of India's diplomacy in 2000. Returning the President of Vietnam's December 1999 visit, India's defense minister Georges Fernandes paid a visit in late March 2000. This was the first visit by an Indian defense minister to Vietnam. Agreements were reached on joint naval training to combat piracy, jungle warfare and counter-insurgency training, repair of MiG aircraft, pilot training, and assistance on small and medium arms production. Mr. Fernandes hailed Vietnam as India's "most trusted friend and ally" and noted that Hanoi "stood by us" after the nuclear tests because "they understand that if [India] went nuclear there were good security reasons for it." The implied shared China threat is unmistakable. Vietnam reportedly confirmed its support for India's standing membership in an expanded UN Security Council.

2000 was also a year of renewal in India's other Southeast Asian ties. Indonesia headed this list with the visit of the newly elected President Abdurrahman Wahid in February, Wahid's first foreign visit. Friendly post-colonial ties between India and Indonesia had soured after the fall of Sukarno. Indonesia's president acknowledged the past but sought a future-oriented relationship by saying, "there was a time when we were so close. We have to restore the relationship. India could assist us in overcoming our economic difficulties." To this end, President Wahid brought 70 businessmen with him to Delhi. For India, Indonesia offers both concrete and symbolic benefits. Apart from a large potential market for Indian goods, Indonesia offers much needed natural gas and petroleum products and reconstruction opportunities for Indian labor and companies. Indonesia's transition to democracy, largely secular Muslim outlook, and multi-ethnic, linguistic, and religious challenges mirror those of India. Both countries, in launching an Indian-Indonesia Joint Consultative Forum, emphasized the need to work together "as part of efforts to strengthen cooperation among Asian countries."

In 2000, India also improved ties with both Myanmar and Thailand, two countries with whom Delhi has had lukewarm relationships in the recent past. Thailand's Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan visited India in mid-July 2000 and stated that "[Bangkok] regards India as a pillar of stability and prosperity of the entire region." This was a markedly effusive utterance by a Thai official given Bangkok's sharp criticism of India's nuclear tests and general wariness about India's regional intentions. Foreign Minister Surin also termed India's bid for a UN Security Council seat "legitimate." Thailand, Myanmar, and India also continue to interact through BIMSTEC, the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation grouping. The third ministerial meeting was held in New Delhi in July 2000.

India, after sharp criticisms of the Burmese military government's suppression of democracy in 1988, has recently pursued a "constructive engagement" approach mirroring that of ASEAN. In 2000

alone, Indian Chief of Army Staff General V.P. Malik visited Myanmar twice within six months. The second ranking leader of Myanmar, General Maung Aye, reciprocated by visiting Delhi. India's most senior bureaucrat in the Home Affairs Ministry, Kamal Pandey, also visited Rangoon in August. Myanmar apparently wishes to have more equidistance between China and India, and India would like to wean Myanmar away from over-reliance on China, especially militarily. India also wants Myanmar's assistance in curbing insurgency, drug trafficking, and smuggling.

India also hosted Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sun in February. This was the first visit by a Cambodian Prime Minister in 20 years. The two countries signed agreements to promote cooperation on economics, science and technology, tourism, and agriculture.

All in all, the year 2000 was a dynamic and constructive year in India's relations across Southeast Asia. Later this fall, India is expected to conduct joint training and exercises with Vietnam and Japan. Also, according to press reports, Indian navy ships are scheduled to visit ports in Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, China, South Korea, and Japan.

India-Russia Relations in 2000: Da, Nyet, Mozhet Byt

After two decades of a quasi-alliance relationship (between 1971-1991), "yes", "no", and "maybe" characterize the contemporary state of India-Russia relations. It is a mixed picture. There is a firm "da" to enhanced military and political cooperation, a "nyet" to any alliance relationship, and a "mozhet byt" regarding the role of China and Pakistan in Russia-India relations.

The Sino-Russian-India Triangle

For India, the renewed Sino-Russian relationship, especially advanced weapons sales from Moscow to Beijing, has been a matter of serious concern. Russia's attempts to placate India, in part through a mooted of a Russia-India-China axis, has elicited little enthusiasm from either India or China. Russia appears to be serious in building ties with China, but not ones that are inimical to India. For example, in November 1998, some months after India's nuclear tests, the PRC-Russia joint statement on the issue did not mention India or Pakistan by name or refer to UNSCR 1172. Russia claimed that it had worked hard to achieve these results, as it had in keeping a critical reference to the tests out of the July 1998 meeting of leaders of Central Asian republics, China, and Russia.

In 2000, the importance of India to Russia was made clear in several ways, as was a dramatic verbal deference to Indian sensitivities about China. In January, for example, the final draft of Russia's military doctrine included India among various countries (including China) targeted for Russian military and defense cooperation. In July, the new Russian foreign policy doctrine cited China and India as Russia's two priority countries in Asia. After Boris Yeltsin left the scene and Vladimir Putin arrived in March 2000, Russian statements favorable to India further increased. In July, Russia's head of the international cooperation department at the Defense Ministry, General Leonid Ivashov, suggested that it would be no problem for India to join the Shanghai Five grouping that brings together Russia, China, and three Central Asia republics. Even more dramatic was Ivashov's statement at the end of the previous month that in transferring "Russian-made weapons and military hardware to other countries, including China, Russia is above all guided by the principle of doing no harm to the existing Russian-Indian relations and maintaining stability in the region." Will Russian actions match these warm words? Mozhet byt.

Pakistan in Russia-India Relations

The close Indo-Soviet/Russia relationship has made Pakistan a minor factor in bilateral relations. Russia has reiterated its support for a bilateral settlement of India-Pakistan disputes on the basis of the Simla Agreement. During the Kargil episode in the summer of 1999 and the hijacking of an Indian airlines plane in late 1999, Russia was solidly supportive of the Indian government. Mutual

India-Russia concern about what they deem international terrorism led the two countries, in April 2000, to sign a protocol to enhance cooperation to fight international terrorism and religious extremism.

While close Russia-India ties are unlikely to be complicated by Pakistan (unlike India's relationships with the U.S. and China) Russia has worked cooperatively with Pakistan too. For example, in January 2000, Russia announced that it would write-off close to \$60 million of Pakistan's debt, or about a third of the total. The total Pakistan owes to Russia is about \$175 million. Russia thus became the 12th member of the Paris Club to restructure or re-negotiate its debts with Pakistan.

India-Russia Military and Strategic Cooperation

India, possessing almost 70% of its military hardware from the old Soviet Union, continues to rely on Russia for spare parts and equipment. Two of Russia's major arms export organizations assured Delhi during 2000 of "timely deliveries" of spare parts and equipment. At the same time, a representative of one organization expressed concern about India putting out tenders for the overhaul of Russian-made weapons. He feared that Eastern European companies would bid low, get contracts with India, and then provide shoddy goods. A subsequent breakdown in Russian platforms would lead to blaming Moscow. Russia therefore prefers that India not go straight to certain arms factories but seek assistance through organizations such as Promexport. Whether such complaints are targeted at turf protection or are sincere efforts to service India well is unclear. But it is clear that both countries have decided to better their close military cooperation that was frayed by the collapse of the Soviet Union. For example, to further promote "military cooperation and enhanced decision-making," India and Russia agreed to establish a Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation during Minister of Defense Georges Fernandes' June 2000 visit to Moscow. The Commission is to have two working groups: one will focus on defense policy issues, the other on defense production.

Throughout 2000, the two countries continued to discuss major Indian military purchases including T-90 tanks and India's acquisition of a Kiev-class aircraft carrier (the former "Admiral Gorshkov"). Reportedly, Russia has agreed to transfer the de-commissioned aircraft carrier to India, but India is supposed to finance its modernization and acquisition of weapons systems, including two squadron of the naval version of the MiG-29 fighter. The cost is expected to be \$2 billion for the deal and three or more years are likely to be required for the modernization. The T-90 deal is supposed to be signed before President Putin's visit to India in early October.

Aside from military hardware cooperation, Russia and India have stressed their defense-political commonalities. For example, India has mouthed its objection to a unipolar world, stated that while it does not seek a "bloc" with Russia and China, "a coordinated action plan can be devised," and publicly spoke out against U.S. deployment of ballistic missile defenses (Defense Minister Fernandes did so a day after returning from Moscow). Both countries have time and again reiterated their concerns about terrorism and religious extremism. All this bonhomie aside, Russia and India are not likely to have the kind of quasi-alliance relationship of the Cold War era, although during President Putin's planned visit to India in October, it is expected that the two countries will sign a Declaration on a Strategic Partnership.

Looking Ahead

India's latest Asian incarnation is lively. Though begun in 1998 as largely a damage limitation exercise in the wake of its nuclear tests, by 2000 India's engagement with Asia was not only sustained, but considerably expanded. Moving from damage limitation and defensiveness to enhancing existing and initiating new ties, India has once again become more Asian in political, economic, and possibly security terms. Asian countries, for the most part, have reciprocated India's

interest in improving ties. And yet, on both India's and Asia's side, it is not clear that the current activism can be maintained. On India's part, a sustainable Asian engagement will depend upon governmental continuity, political stability, enhanced economic attractiveness, and a focused diplomacy. On Asia's part, similar factors as well as a stronger perception of India's usefulness will have to develop. In this context, India's bilateral relationships with key Asian countries/areas will be individually important, but less than a whole India-Asia relationship.

****The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, USCINCPAC, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.**

Copyright (c) 2001 Nautilus of America/The Nautilus Institute

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

Produced by The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project (napsnet-reply@nautilus.org)

[Return to top](#)
[back to top](#)

View this online at: <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/nautilus-institute-policy-forum-online-india-east-asia-relations-indias-latest-asian-incarnation/>

Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:
nautilus@nautilus.org