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SPECIAL REPORT: THE CLINTON SOUTH ASIA TRIP
Part I: News Reports
March 28, 2000

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Verbatim Texts

A "vision statement," signed by U.S. President Clinton and Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, commits India and the U.S. to a continuing and regularized broad dialogue as well as a number of specific cooperative ventures in technology and trade. President Clinton, both in his "address to the people of Pakistan" and in his "op ed" published in "The News" on March 20, clarified the U.S. position regarding Kashmir, nuclear proliferation, and democracy. In his opening statement at a post-summit press conference, Pakistani Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf expressed his confidence "that my talks with President Clinton will serve to rejuvenate our fifty-year-old friendship for mutual benefit and a better world."

India

1. Nuclear Issues
In his speech to Parliament, which covered the whole range of U.S.-India issues, President Clinton urged Indian "restraint" as the U.S. and India engaged in a continuing dialogue that would help to resolve differences between the U.S. and Indian nuclear positions.

President Clinton lifted a minor (US$25 million) sanction, thereby enabling new regional technological cooperation. U.S. Commerce Secretary William Daley, however, sought to link further reduction of sanctions to India's signing the CTBT.

Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee repeated India's position that India's "decision to maintain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent is prompted by a realistic assessment of its security compulsions." According to most analyses (represented below by Dawn) basic differences in nuclear perspective between the U.S. and India did not change as a result of President Clinton's trip. However, some analyses (represented here by The News) suggested that, although U.S. rhetoric has not changed, U.S. policymakers privately are coming to terms with the notion of a "credible minimum nuclear deterrent" in South Asia.

2. Security Issues
Indian President K.R. Narayanan told U.S. President Clinton that India would continue to follow an independent foreign policy. He also sought U.S. support for India's claim to a permanent U.N. Security Council seat and said that Clinton's comment about Kashmir being "the most dangerous place in the world" was misplaced. Rather, Narayanan said, "these alarmist descriptions will only encourage those who indulge in terrorism and violence." Narayanan's remarks were initially interpreted by the Indian press as "unnecessarily harsh" (The Hindu) and by the U.S. press as a "sharp rebuke" (New York Times). By week's end, however, the Vajpayee administration supported President Narayanan's comments.

On March 24, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet testified that both the CIA and the Clinton administration have known for years that Pakistan had received M-11 short-range ballistic missiles from China in the early 1990s.

3. Economic and Development Issues
India and the United States signed two billion dollars worth of business agreements and the U.S. made possible an additional one billion dollars' worth of U.S. EximBank financing. The largest single deal is for joint development of a "technology city" in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha assured the U.S. that India's import tariffs would be reduced gradually "to levels prevailing in the neighborhood." In addition to direct business links, India-U.S. working groups were established in the areas of technology, alternative energy, and commerce.

In his speech to India's Parliament, President Clinton clarified the U.S. position on the relationship between trade and labor: "Trade should not be a race to the bottom in environmental and labor standards, but neither should fears about trade keep part of our global community forever at the bottom."

Analysis: Chandrika Mago (in Times of India) argues that India committed itself to producing an unrealistically high proportion of energy from renewable resources. Mago says that the U.S., by contrast, has made no additional commitments in exchange. C. Raja Mohan (The Hindu) argues that President Clinton's longest private meeting, with Indian businessman Dhirubhai Ambani, had security as well as economic implications. Ambani's corporation is expected to construct an Iran-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline.

4. Foreign Responses
The Indian press considered the impact of the Clinton trip on China's policy regarding South Asian security issues. Both the "Times of India" and "The Hindu" pointed to a story in the Chinese "Liberation Army Daily" which reported that China would be "attentive" to the impact arising out of U.S. efforts to broaden its strategic influence in South Asia. The Indian weekly "Outlook" argued that the new U.S. initiatives in India might lead China to support Pakistan more aggressively.

Moscow's pro-government newspaper "Segodnya" commented that "Moscow could feel uncomfortable over a possible U.S.-India partnership at a time when the long-standing Russia-India relations are overshadowed by India's US$6 billion debt to Moscow."

Pakistan

5. Nuclear Issues
Pakistan's Ambassador to the U.S., Maleeha Lodhi, said that Pakistan would not roll back its nuclear capability, "but it is ready to act responsibly as a nuclear weapon state." Former U.S. Senator Larry Pressler, author of the sanctions placed by the U.S. on Pakistan in response to Pakistani nuclear development in 1991, argued that President Clinton's "softness" to the Pakistani regime of Benazir Bhutto (1993-96) encouraged Pakistan to go forward with its nuclear program.

6. Security Issues
Pakistani Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf said that Osama Bin Laden should be arrested and tried, if there are charges against him. Rahimulla Yusufzai (in The News) explains why the U.S. believes Pakistan can assist in achieving the extradition of bin Laden. However, he continues to suggest that "solving" the bin Laden problem would have a limited effect on terrorism either in South Asia or globally.

Pakistan paraded its 2500-km Shaheen-II ballistic missile during National Day celebrations.

7. Domestic Governance Issues
Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf announced a process for district government elections. The election process would begin on December 15, 2000 and would continue until July 2001. U.S. President Clinton said that local elections were "a positive step" but insisted on a timetable for the restoration of "full democracy." An Indian Foreign Office spokesperson made a comment similar to Clinton's. An official spokesperson for the Paksitan government said that "Indian calls for an immediate return to democracy in Pakistan ... are an unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan." The governor of Sindh province, Azim Daudpota, stressed the need for the restoration of "good governance" prior to restoration of democracy.

Kashmir

8. U.S. Policy on the Line of Control

At a press conference on March 21, President Clinton said, "You cannot expect a dialogue to go forward unless there is an absence of violence and a respect for the Line of Control." The idea that violence in Kashmir should be ended prior to India-Pakistan negotiations was one of four principles suggested by Clinton: "restraint" by both sides, "respect" for the LoC, "renewal" of the India-Pakistan dialogue, and "rejection" of violence.

White House officials quickly clarified that, as the U.S. is not a party to any talks between India and Pakistan, it cannot set preconditions for those talks. Nonetheless, C. Raja Mohan (The Hindu) argued that the Clinton statement represented a historic shift and the "Deccan Herald" quoted Pakistani Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf as saying, "I do not think that President Clinton will go away from the region having endorsed India's point of view in the dispute. I am confident we will moderate his viewpoint."

9. South Asian Responses

Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee said that India has "the means and the will to eliminate this menace." Former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral said that "resumption of Indo-Pakistan talks is possible only if Islamabad stops abetment to terrorism and militancy." Pakistan's permanent representative to the United Nations, Munir Akram, responded by saying that, regardless of Indian threats or provocations, the final disposition of Jammu & Kashmir will be made in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

Following the U.S.-Pakistan talks, a "senior U.S. official" said that Musharraf offered "no new assurances" that Pakistani policy toward terrorism in the region would change. This outcome is consistent with pre-summit statements from the Musharraf regime. Pakistani President Rafiq Tarar described Kashmir as crucial to Pakistan's survival.

10. Kashmiri Independence Issues

President Clinton did not meet with any Kashmiri leaders. The Indian government, to ensure that Clinton did not meet with the chairman of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference, placed Mirwaiz Farooq under house arrest. A Pakistani Foreign Office spokesperson said that India's "arrest of Mirwaiz demonstrates India's contemptuous disregard of fundamental human rights in occupied Kashmir." Fazalur Rehman Kahlil, leader of another Kashmiri group, the Harakat-ul Mujahdeen, said, "Now America is openly siding with India, which shows that all anti-Islam forces are uniting against us."

11. Border Violence; Sikh Massacre

On March 21, "unidentified militants" massacred 35 Sikhs in one of the single worst terrorist incidents in Kashmir since the current round of violence began in 1990. Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee described the incident as "a premeditated act of barbarism." Pakistan demanded an investigation into the incident and alleged that the massacre was "perpetrated by Indian security forces." Clinton said that the U.S. "shares the outrage and heartbreak over last night's brutal attack" and that he believes "elements within the Pakistani Government have supported those who engage in violence in Kashmir." [This comment was made in a context that included, but was not limited to, the Sikh massacre incident.]

Throughout the Clinton visit, the Indian and Pakistani press each reported mortar fire by the other country's army.

Bangladesh

12. Democracy, Schedule Changes, Economic Assistance
Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that "the U.S., as the champion of democracy and human rights, should continue to send strong messages to the world in support of democratic governments and strongly discourage unconstitutional and illegal changes of government."

Last minute fears regarding President Clinton's security led to schedule changes that embarrassed the Bangladesh government.

Clinton announced US$ 97 million in food assistance, $84 million in clean energy incentives, and $6 million in incentives to protect biodiversity.

"The Hindu" offers a fairly comprehensive summing up of the U.S. visit to Bangladesh.

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