

India and the United States: Cooperation Imperatives, Stubborn Differences/Limits

Kanti Bajpai

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS

*Paper presented at the RSIS Workshop, "India-US Strategic Relations," RSIS, Singapore, 2
March 2018*

India and the United States have officially been “strategic partners” since 2004. They are not allies in the strict sense, nor, judging by its major foreign policy announcements, is India non-aligned any longer: India and the US occupy some middle ground.¹ It is a middle ground that is popular with New Delhi which has at least 29 strategic partnerships. Most assessments of the India-US strategic partnership rank it as number one or two in Indian calculations.² For some observers, strategic partnerships are a sensible option in a world that, after the Cold War, has moved into a post-alliance period. On the other hand, strategic partnerships could be seen as a strategic failure: unable to forge a true alliance, states agree to hedge instead. In this latter view, strategic partnerships signify the existence of both cooperation imperatives but also stubborn differences that prevent governments from promising to come to the other’s aid *in extremis*. This paper argues that India-US relations are marked by cooperation imperatives and also by stubborn differences and limits. These differences arise out of divergent strategic calculations, a history of mistrust, and domestic politics. India and the US can partner each other in three areas: building India into a great power by increasing its military and technological capabilities; soft balancing against China; and intelligence sharing.

¹ For example, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not used the word non-alignment in any of his foreign policy speeches.

² Satish Kumar, S.D. Pradhan, Kanwal Sibal, Rahul Bedi and Bidisha Ganguly, “India’s Strategic Partners: A Comparative Assessment,” *Foundation for National Security Research*, November 2011, http://www.fnsr.org/files/Indias_Strategic.pdf; Arvind Gupta, “Evaluating India’s Strategic Partnerships using Analytic Hierarchy Process,” *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, September 17, 2011, https://idsa.in/idsacomments/EvaluatingIndiasStrategicPartnershipsusingAnalyticHierarchyProcess_agupta_170911

Strategic Partnerships, Alliances, and Security Communities

Analysts accuse governments of not quite knowing how to define strategic partnerships, but there is a surprising degree of agreement amongst IR scholars on what the term signifies and what it does not signify.³ At least amongst scholars, it is not an essentially contested concept. Strategic partnerships are not alliances. Genealogically, the word can be traced back to Russian, American, and Chinese usage in the aftermath of the Cold War.⁴ Wilkins places it in a family of relationships which he classifies as being “alignment” relationships. Alignment relationships include strategic partnerships, alliances, and security communities. The word alliance has itself been used to cover a range of cooperative relationships between two or more states.⁵ However, with Realists and security specialists, we can agree that an alliance involves “outer-directed” behaviour that “seeks to deter, coerce, or defeat” a third party.⁶ Security communities in the Deutschian formulation are relations between states marked by the expectation of peaceful change.⁷ Strategic partnerships are neither alliances nor security communities. They do not clearly identify a third party that is sought to be deterred, coerced, or defeated; nor are the relationships necessarily based on expectations of peaceful change.

What are the key features of a strategic partnership, conceptually speaking? One way of answering that question is to say what strategic partnerships are not. Strategic partnerships, in contrast to alliances, are non-specific, non-binding, and non-exclusivistic associations

³ See Nirupama Subramanian, “In the promiscuous world of international relations, elements of a strategic partnership,” *The Hindu*, 17 January 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/In-the-promiscuous-world-of-international-relations-elements-of-a-strategic-partnership/article13368545.ece>; and Ankit Panda, “Why Does India Have So Many ‘Strategic Partners’ and No Allies?” *The Diplomat*, 23 November 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/why-does-india-have-so-many-strategic-partners-and-no-allies/>.

⁴ Vidya Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia and Eurasia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 46-47.

⁵ See Thomas S. Wilkins, “‘Alignment’, not ‘alliance’ – the shifting paradigm of international security cooperation: toward a conceptual taxonomy of alignment,” *Review of International Studies* 38, no.1, 2012, p.68.

⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, “A Realist Reply,” *International Security* 20, no.1, 1995, p. 83.

⁷ Karl W. Deutsch et al., *Political Community in the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

between two or more states. As noted earlier, they are non-specific in that they do not specify a third party that is the object of the partnership. A strategic partnership agreement may “in the background” recognize a common threat (or opportunity) and therefore be directed towards managing that threat (or opportunity), but it stops short of identifying the third party.⁸ Strategic partnerships are also non-binding. They do not commit the partners to a common course of action even if partnering does imply consultations towards collaboration. In particular, strategic partnerships do not contain promises to come to the aid of the partner in deterring, coercing, or defeating a third party.⁹ Strategic partnerships are also non-exclusivistic. A state may have several strategic partnerships at the same time.¹⁰

What more positively are strategic partnerships? A strategic partnership is a partnership in the sense that it features some mutual obligations and common activity. A key obligation for strategic partners is to not ally with a third party against its partner. At the very least, a strategic partnership involves regular, high-level consultations.¹¹ A strategic partnership is strategic in two senses: it has greater salience than run-of-the-mill, normal relationships; and it is regarded as being a long-term investment between two or more states and not subject to quick revision or short-term payoffs. Strategic partnerships are also multidimensional: they can cut across military, diplomatic, political, economic, and functional areas of collaboration.¹²

This paper argues that India and the US have a number of reasons for strategic cooperation – long term collaboration in the service of vital interests – but that a number of differences and

⁸ Wilkins, “‘Alignment’, not ‘alliance’,” p.68.

⁹ Rajesh Basrur, “Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals: A Trajectory Unchanged,” *International Affairs* 93, no.1 (2017), 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Nadkarni, *Strategic Partnerships in Asia and Eurasia*, p. 48-49.

¹² Subramanian, “In the promiscuous world of international relations”.

limits arising out of divergent strategic calculations, a history of mistrust, and domestic politics prevent them from being alliance partners.¹³ They can be and are strategic partners. They are in a non-specific, non-binding, and non-exclusivistic relationship. They recognize two common threats “in the background”, namely, rising Chinese power and the dangers and disruptions posed by Pakistan but are unwilling to publicly affirm this; they do not promise to come to each other’s aid in case of conflict; and they remain free to have other alliance and strategic partnerships. They are not allied with a third party against each other. They have committed to a long-term, high-level consultative relationship not susceptible to quick and easy exit. And the relationship is multidimensional across military, diplomatic, political, economic, and functional areas of cooperation.

India and the US: Cooperation Imperatives, Stubborn Differences/Limits

India and the US face two security challenges in common: a rising and more assertive China; and a disruptive and dangerous Pakistan. Both challenges could be the basis for an alliance between New Delhi and Washington. In fact, despite Atal Behari Vajpayee’s suggestion that India and the US are “natural allies”¹⁴, neither government ever utters the word alliance. Why are they reluctant to become allies and instead are content to be strategic partners?

Dealing with a Rising and Assertive China

China poses two threats for India and the US. The first is a territorial threat, namely, China’s threat to the status quo along the border with India and the South China Sea. The second is a

¹³ See Ashley Tellis, “Opportunities Unbound: Sustaining the Transformation in U.S.-Indian Relations,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 7, 2013 on the role of differing strategic calculations, a history of mistrust, and domestic politics.

¹⁴ Malini Parthasarathy, “India, U.S. natural allies: Vajpayee,” *The Hindu*, September 9, 2000, <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/09/09/stories/01090005.htm>

structural threat, namely, its rising power and assertiveness all over the world but especially in Asia.

A powerful China threatens to become more assertive on territorial conflicts. India has recorded a rise in intrusions across the border or Line of Actual Control – what is generally called “transgressions” – from 273 incidents in 2016 to 426 in 2017.¹⁵ Serious confrontations occurred in 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2017. In each case, Indian and Chinese troops were in a standoff for extended periods of time. The Doklam standoff in June-August 2017 lasted 73 days. In December 2017, it was reported that Chinese troops and logistics in even larger numbers were amassed at Doklam several months after the conclusion of the crisis.¹⁶

Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea since 2008 has involved not just harder statements on the dispute with the Philippines and Vietnam principally. It has been accompanied by land reclamation on islands in the sea and the building of supposedly civilian and then military infrastructure including runways.¹⁷ In 2012, China moved its forces into the Scarborough Shoal and stopped Philippines’ commercial fishing in the area.¹⁸ In 2016, it categorically rejected the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) on the Philippines’ request to that body on China’s claims.¹⁹ In 2014, China confronted Vietnamese

¹⁵ *The Times of India*, “Chinese incursions into India rose in 2017: Government data,” February 5, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/chinese-incursions-into-india-rose-in-2017-govt-data/articleshow/62793362.cms>.

¹⁶ Kristin Huang, “China builds up troop numbers close to Indian border flashpoint as soldiers prepare for first winter near Doklam,” *South China Morning Post*, December 14, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2124375/china-building-troop-numbers-near-doklam-after-summer>.

¹⁷ Charles Clover, “China launches ‘magical’ island-building ship on eve of Trump visit,” *Financial Times*, November 5, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/ecec30e6-c204-11e7-a1d2-6786f39ef675>.

¹⁸ Manuel Mogato and Julian Elona, “Philippines says fishermen still blocked from Scarborough Shoal,” July 15, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-ruling-philippines/philippines-says-fishermen-still-blocked-from-scarborough-shoal-idUSKCN0ZV183>

¹⁹ Sutirtho Patranobis, “Chinese President Xi leads Beijing’s charge against ruling on South China Sea,” *Hindustan Times*, July 13, 2016, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/chinese-president-xi-leads-beijing-s-offence-against-ruling-on-south-china-sea/story-wsrlj8zFnrl34XXlG8KYiK.html>.

vessels in the South China Sea.²⁰ It has repeatedly warned countries such as India exploring for oil and gas in the area that these are Chinese waters.²¹

Clearly, Chinese assertiveness on territorial conflicts could lead to hostilities with India along its border and with the US in the South China Sea. India has said publicly it is prepared for a two-front war with China and Pakistan²²; and the US continues to patrol aggressively in the South China Sea in what it considers to be international waters.²³

Both India and the US fear China's rising power and assertiveness. India is China's neighbour and its proximity to China means it is directly "in the line of fire" of the Chinese giant which boasts of a GDP that is roughly five times that of India and a conventional military force that is the second largest in the world. On the back of its growing power, Chinese influence is growing in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood in South Asia, in the rest of Asia, and the Indian Ocean region. China's growing power is also a global challenge to the US which, as the erstwhile leading power, now confronts a rival power that has surpassed its GDP in purchasing power parity terms and is projected to pass its GDP in nominal terms by 2030.²⁴ China's military power is another concern for the US. On February

²⁰ Nguyen Phuong Linh and Michael Martina, "South China Sea tensions rise as Vietnam says China rammed ships," *Reuters*, May 7, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-seas-fishermen/south-china-sea-tensions-rise-as-vietnam-says-china-rammed-ships-idUSBREA4603C20140507>

²¹ Saibal Dasguptal, "China warns India about taking up Vietnam's offer for oil exploration in disputed South China Sea," *The Times of India*, October 28, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/China-warns-India-about-taking-up-Vietnams-offer-for-oil-exploration-in-disputed-South-China-Sea/articleshow/44960780.cms>.

²² Shurya Karanbir Gurung, "India must be prepared for two-front war: Army chief General Bipin Rawat," *The Economic Times*, September 6, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-must-be-prepared-for-two-front-war-army-chief-bipin-rawat/articleshow/60396549.cms>.

²³ "China's South China Sea islands won't stop lawful patrols, US Navy says," *South China Morning Post*, February 17, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2133671/chinas-south-china-sea-islands-wont-stop-lawful-patrols>.

²⁴ Estimates range between 2024 and 2026. See "China to Become World's Largest Economy in 2024 Reports IHS Economics," *IHS Markit*, September 7, 2014, <http://news.ihsmarkit.com/press-release/economics-country-risk/china-become-worlds-largest-economy-2024-reports-ihs-economics>; and "Long-term macroeconomic forecasts: Key Trends to 2050," *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2015, p.3,

14, 2018, Admiral Harry Harris, who heads the US Pacific Command (PACOM) told the House Armed Forces Committee that “China's impressive military buildup could soon challenge the United States across almost every domain”.²⁵ The US’s formal alliance commitments in Asia, principally with Japan and South Korea, and its more informal commitments to Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries, mean that China’s growing power must be a long-term concern.

India and the US have an interest in checking Chinese power for territorial defence and structural reasons. They could well choose to be allies. However, they have chosen to be strategic partners instead. While there are cooperation imperatives for an alliance against China – for territorial defence and structural reasons – there are also vital differences between the two putative allies.

Territorial defence. China’s massive investments in Tibet’s infrastructure, the deployment of additional forces in Tibet, and the modernization of the PLA have put enormous pressure on India’s border defence. Except at one or two points along the border/LAC, China has military superiority.²⁶ It could certainly push back Indian forces along a broad front and perhaps permanently occupy areas to which it lays claim. The exception may be the state of Arunachal Pradesh: while China could occupy key points such as Tawang, deep incursions into India and any attempt at permanent occupation risk stretching supply and communication lines and making the PLA vulnerable to Indian counterattacks. Nevertheless, the fundamental

http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Long-term_macro-economic_Forecasting-upto-2050.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=ForecastingTo2050.

²⁵ “Top US admiral warns of China's growing military might,” *Channel NewsAsia*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/top-us-admiral-warns-of-china-s-growing-military-might-9961800>.

²⁶ “India: A Military Buildup on the Border With China,” *Stratfor*, July 22, 2013, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/india-military-buildup-border-china>.

military asymmetry between India and China suggests that India could bolster its defence by a military alliance with the US. US ground forces and air power could help turn back a Chinese offensive.

For several reasons, an India-US military alliance for Indian border defence against China is highly unlikely. On the Indian side, for domestic political reasons, the idea of an alliance is almost impossible. Any Indian government wishing to enter into an alliance with a Western power will be accused of weakness and will attract charges of capitulation to neo-colonialism.²⁷ The presence of US ground forces will raise questions about extra-territorial rights, land acquisitions (difficult enough to do for the Indian government for national projects including defence), and the social impact of Americans on local society.²⁸ Finally, as the US usually insists on leading alliance forces in the field in the case of actual war, an alliance with the US would be extremely problematic for New Delhi. No Indian government will relinquish control of a military campaign to a US commander, nor is it likely that the Indian armed forces would accept such an arrangement.

The objections on the US side would be even more vocal. American domestic politics would pose a formidable obstacle. Memories of Indian non-alignment during the Cold War, New Delhi's siding with Moscow on many occasions during that period, and Indian criticism of US actions in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam war and in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion have not altogether disappeared, and the idea of an alliance with India is not

²⁷ See Kanwal Sibal, "'Strategic' relations suit India," *India Today*, 26 December 2012, <https://www.indiatoday.in/opinion/kanwal-sibal/story/strategic-relations-suit-india-india-today-125309-2012-12-26>; and Ankit Panda, "Why Does India Have So Many 'Strategic Partners' and No Allies?" *The Diplomat*, 23 November 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/11/why-does-india-have-so-many-strategic-partners-and-no-allies/>.

²⁸ US forces in Japan and South Korea have caused problems for host governments. US personnel involved in criminal acts against locals have led to resentment and protests. The funding of the bases has led to intra-alliance difficulties as well.

“natural” for many. Even as these memories fade, Americans would ask “What will India give us in return?” This is a fair question. As Ashley Tellis has noted, New Delhi assumes it does not have to give Washington anything much in return for American concessions or largesse.²⁹ If so, selling an alliance with India will not be easy. More importantly, US reluctance to put “boots on the ground” in distant parts continues to be strong.³⁰ While the US public continues to support American troops in Japan and South Korea, it shows reluctance to increase its “tripwire” arrangements. Public opinion is probably softer on the use of US air power in far-off theatres, but in the case of China, combat losses in an air campaign are likely. Moreover, US forces and air power would be stretched thin by deployments in India. Redeploying to India would cause enormous upheavals in traditional alliances in Europe and East Asia. For US decision-makers, alliance commitments risk moral hazard, with the danger that the protected state acts provocatively when it is backed by US military power: thus, the US may be led into war with China by risky Indian behaviour, with all the attendant risks of escalation with a formidable conventional and nuclear adversary. Finally, just as it is implausible that Indian civilian and military leaders will accept US control of a military campaign on Indian soil, the obverse is equally true: it is implausible that the US military will agree to operate under Indian leadership in an actual campaign.

If an India-US alliance on Indian border defence is unlikely, it is even more unlikely in the case of a South China Sea conflict between the US and China. Chinese infrastructural and military investments in the South China Sea islands and its growing naval power could challenge US deployments in the region. In 2015, India and the US signed the “US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” in which they “affirm

²⁹ Ashley J. Tellis, “Utility in Difference: Overcoming the U.S.-India Divide,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 21, 2015, pp. 36-37.

³⁰ See Justin McCarthy, “In U.S., 53% Oppose Sending Ground Troops to Fight Militants,” *Gallup*, November 12, 2015, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/186590/oppose-sending-ground-troops-fight-militants.aspx>.

the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea”.³¹ This could be the basis for Indian cooperation in the event of hostilities in the sea.

However, this is a theoretic possibility at best. New Delhi would have to weigh up China’s reactions on the border/LAC which could feature PLA attacks along a broad front as a riposte. Indian calculations must also include how many boats it can spare given that the navy must always worry about Pakistan and a possible terrorist strike from the sea. The most serious constraint though is that Indian power projection into the South China Sea is very modest. The Indian Navy’s most likely role therefore would not be to join hostilities directly: it is hard to imagine that it could add much to US firepower. Its role would be to help block energy and other supplies bound for China from the Indian Ocean (though this would have little impact on operations in the South China Sea). India’s blocking role would assume particular importance if the US 5th Fleet, which operates in the Gulf and Indian Ocean, had to divert firepower to the South China Sea to aid in operations there.

Even in this indirect and complementary role (since the US will be the major force in bottling up the PLAN), Indian capabilities are questionable. As things stand, India has only one aircraft carrier. A second, built domestically, could be ready in 2018. However, this still only allows India to sail one aircraft carrier. Both carriers are small and might have no more than about 20 aircraft on board. A third carrier with a complement of up to about 50 aircraft will probably not be available till the late 2020s.³² The other key part of the Indian fleet would be

³¹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region,” January 25, 2015, http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24728/USIndia_Joint_Strategic_Vision_for_the_AsiaPacific_and_Indian_Ocean_Region.

³² Robert Beckhusen, “India’s Aircraft Carriers Might Just Be the Ultimate Paper Tiger,” *The National Interest*, January 19, 2018, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/indias-aircraft-carriers-might-just-be-the-ultimate-paper-24138>.

its submarine force. At present, it is seriously depleted and is an ageing force. In addition, the navy has been beset by accidents arising out of human error and poor repair and maintenance. Its nuclear-powered SSBN *Arihant* – which is a technology demonstrator – has already been damaged by human error and is inoperative.³³ Looking ahead, the key to the Indian Navy playing a blocking role will be in its attack submarine capability. The most important system is the *Scorpena*-class of which India has 3 at present out of a force of 6.³⁴ However, without the heavyweight torpedoes they were supposed to carry, the *Scorpenes* are of little use.³⁵ The navy is looking at six nuclear submarines as well, and the acquisition of a total of 24 new submarines.³⁶ It is estimated that the navy's projected submarine fleet strength is unlikely to be met until 2030. Even this is ambitious given the clumsiness of Indian defence procurement and manufacturing.³⁷ In sum, the US cannot look to India to play any kind of a role in the South China Sea.

Structural balancing. By 2030, China will likely have the largest economy in the world in nominal terms. The US will have fallen to second place and India will have risen to third. The power transition will have been completed by then. By the strict logic of structural theory and balance of power logic, India should ally with China while the US is the biggest power. After China becomes the bigger power, India should choose to ally with the US. On the other hand, by the logic of balance of threat theory, India should ally with the US even when America is

³³ Ankit Panda, "India's Lone Arihant-class SSBN Has Been Out of Service for Months," *The Diplomat*, January 9, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/indias-lone-arihant-class-ssbn-has-been-out-of-service-for-months/>

³⁴ Shaurya Karanjur, "Indian Navy launches third Scorpene class submarine in Mumbai," *The Economic Times*, January 31, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/third-scorpene-class-submarine-karanj-to-be-launched-today/articleshow/62715404.cms>.

³⁵ Franz-Stefan Gady, "Is India's Submarine Fleet Defenseless?" *The Diplomat*, June 12, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/is-indias-submarine-fleet-defenseless/>.

³⁶ "Indian Navy aiming at 200-ship fleet by 2027," *The Economic Times*, 14 July 2015, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indian-navy-aiming-at-200-ship-fleet-by-2027/articleshow/48072917.cms>.

³⁷ Rahul Singh, "INS Kalvari submarine commissioned but Indian Navy's sub-sea power is below par," *Hindustan Times*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ins-kalvari-to-be-commissioned-today-but-indian-navy-s-sub-sea-power-is-below-par/story-p9Hglur02kqhYr5IBteL.html>.

the biggest power since China's proximity makes it a more worrying threat for New Delhi.³⁸ In short, when China becomes the biggest power, India will have two reasons to ally with the US. Going by structural theory, the US has an interest in postponing the day of transition even if it cannot prevent the transition of power forever. When it is number one, it has an incentive to ally with India to prevent China catching up. When it is number two, it has an interest in allying with India to balance against the biggest power in the world. India and the US should be natural allies against China as far as one can see into the future.

Neither India nor the US can stop China's rise or even slow it down – short of destroying it or damaging it extensively in war (with enormous consequences to India and the US). China's rise is in China's hands. Does China's rise warrant an India-US alliance though? What would an alliance mean or achieve? If an alliance is coming together militarily against a third party to deter, coerce, or defeat it, it is hard to see how India and the US would do this and in what circumstances.

It is hard if not impossible to imagine a situation in which the combined military power of India and the US could compel China into doing something that it does not want to do. As for deterring or defeating China, it depends on what India and the US seek to deter or defend. It is unlikely that either power can help the other against the threat of conventional attack on territory. India and the US, as argued earlier, are not going to be involved in each other's territorial defence challenges. How about deterring a nuclear attack from China? Both India and the US possess nuclear weapons. India may even now be able to deter a nuclear attack

³⁸ See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.22-26 on "balance of threat".

from China even though its nuclear programme is relatively small. The US obviously has more than enough power to deter Chinese nuclear aggression.

As for defence, India should be able to repel a Chinese invasion by conventional means if the PLA tries anything more than a shallow penetration along the border/LAC. This is because the deeper the Chinese enter into Indian territory the greater will be their military vulnerability: Chinese forces will have the disadvantage of exterior lines and the Indian forces will have the advantage of interior lines – a state of affairs that is compounded not just by distance but also by passage through the high Himalayas. As for the US, it is unclear in what circumstance it would have to repel a Chinese attack on its vital interests. It may have to do so to help its allies in East Asia who might be under attack, but, as suggested earlier, India is not much of an asset in this case. As for an attack against the US homeland, this is improbable: America is simply too far, and an attack against it by conventional forces is well-nigh impossible given the logistics. Nor is it thinkable that China would attempt a Pearl Harbour type, “bolt out of the blue”, decapitating strike on the US given the state of advance warning technology.

If India and the US do not need to deter, coerce, or defeat China together, what would they do together? China’s becoming the leading power in the world might pose a set of challenges that would bring them together. What kind of challenges? As the leading power, China would pose a threat to India and the US’s status and sense of self. India regards itself as being a civilizational equal of China at the very least and will resent China’s elevation above itself.³⁹ The US will resent losing its preeminent status and being consigned to second place. China

³⁹ See Mohan Malik, “China and India: The Roots of Hostility,” *The Diplomat*, September 12, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/china-and-india-the-roots-of-hostility/>.

might, like the US in its primacy, seek to intervene in the domestic orders of other states, even of India and the US. China could also potentially threaten to overturn the current “rules of the game” of international society: as the leading power, it could choose to change the rules in ways that would be unpalatable to India and the US.

India and the US coming together might help them balance Chinese power and make them feel better about their place in the world, prevent China from trying to interfere in their own and other countries’ domestic politics, and resist China’s attempt at changing the rules of the game. What kind of balancing would this be? Two kinds of balancing are already visible and are likely to be sustained. The first is general balancing at the level of comprehensive national power. The second is soft balancing.

First of all, since the time of President George W. Bush, the US has been committed “to help India become a major world power in the twenty-first century.”⁴⁰ While US aid to India and investment in Indian capabilities – economic, technical, bureaucratic, and military – go back to the 1950s, Bush and his successors, at least up to Obama, have calculated that the US should bend its efforts to making India a great power, one that would take its place in the front ranks and constitute a player in the global balance of power.⁴¹ Given India’s population, economic potential, and military capabilities including nuclear weapons and its differences with China, this is a logical step for India and the US to take together. The US’s most important decision here has been to open up arms and technology sales and transfers to India

⁴⁰ See Ashley Tellis, *India as a New Global Power: An Action Agenda for the United States*, a report of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, 2005, p. 9.

⁴¹ See Tellis, *India as a New Global Power*, which was influential in US thinking. On the role of the US in investing in India’s development and wellbeing, see Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States since 1947* (London: Hurst and Company, 2014).

on more or less the same basis as its allies.⁴² The US is also engaged in sharing soft capabilities – military and intelligence best practices, strategic concepts, and personnel training.⁴³ While hurdles remain, India is enjoying unprecedented access to US military power.

In effect, India and the US would attempt to embarrass, resist, and oppose China diplomatically and politically, in international and regional institutions and settings. This is what has been called “soft balancing”.⁴⁴ The clearest expression of soft balancing can be seen in the emerging India-US partnering in the so-called Indo-Pacific. The term itself signals a strategic legitimization of India’s role in the Asia-Pacific in two ways: first, the suffix “Indo” not only refers to the Indian Ocean but also gestures at India; and second, by joining the Indian Ocean to the Asia Pacific it seeks to make the two separate regional spaces into one interconnected strategic space in which India is a “legitimate” player. The Indo-Pacific strategic shift was accompanied by the resurrection of the “Quad”, the loose aligning of Australia, India, Japan, and the US.⁴⁵ While there is a military component to the Quad – presumably the four militaries might conduct naval exercises and drills together, for instance – it is more probably a mechanism for consultations and a diplomatic common front in various regional institutions designed to complicate China’s strategic calculations and reassure smaller states in the Indo-Pacific super-region that Chinese power will not go

⁴² Sushant Singh, “India, US finalise Major Defence Partner agreement,” *The Indian Express*, 9 December 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-us-major-defence-partner-agreement-manohar-parrikar-ashton-carter-4418019/>

⁴³ See “Fact Sheet: The United States and India – Prosperity Through Partnership,” *U.S. Embassy & Consulates in India*, June 26, 2017, <https://in.usembassy.gov/fact-sheet-united-states-india-prosperity-partnership/>.

⁴⁴ See T.V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy,” *International Security* 30, no.1, 2005. pp. 46-71.

⁴⁵ Cary Huang, “US, Japan, India, Australia ... Is Quad the First Step to an Asian NATO?” *South China Morning Post*, November 25, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/2121474/us-japan-india-australia-quad-first-step-asian-nato>.

unchecked. The Quad, as it is being suggested, could also launch its own connectivity projects to offer an alternative to China's BRI.⁴⁶

Dealing with a Disruptive and Dangerous Pakistan

Pakistan poses three threats for India and the US: terrorism/extremism, nuclear command and control, and its deepening relationship with China. India and the US must both worry about terrorism and extremism emanating from Pakistan and the tacit or explicit support of Islamabad to terror and extremist groups. They could both be targets of nuclear weapons that have been transferred to militant groups (in Pakistan or elsewhere). Finally, Pakistan's growing integration with China, militarily and economically, could disrupt India and US strategic influence in the Gulf and Central Asia.

India is more or less constantly under threat from groups operating from Pakistani soil. The number of terrorism-related deaths in India has been gradually increasing since the late 1980s and peaked in 2001, when it hit an all-time high of 4,507 fatalities. Thereafter, the number of yearly casualties has dipped significantly, though it has started picking up again in the last two years.⁴⁷ The US has not been untouched by Pakistan-based militant groups. The Afghan Taliban and its Haqqani branch in Pakistan have both received intelligence and military aid from Pakistan, resulting in the deaths of US soldiers in Afghanistan.⁴⁸ On January 4, 2018,

⁴⁶ "Australia, U.S., India and Japan in talks to establish Belt and Road alternative: report," *Reuters*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-beltandroad-quad/australia-u-s-india-and-japan-in-talks-to-establish-belt-and-road-alternative-report-idUSKCN1G20WG?il=0>; see also Johnathan Landay and David Brunstrom, "U.S. wants stronger India economic, defense ties given China's rise: Tillerson," *Reuters*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-india-tillerson/u-s-wants-stronger-india-economic-defense-ties-given-chinas-rise-tillerson-idUSKBN1CN31Z>

⁴⁷ "Fatalities in Terrorist Violence 1988-2018," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, last modified February 11, 2018, www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data_sheets/annual_casualties.htm

⁴⁸ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why Pakistan supports terrorist groups, and why the US finds it so hard to induce change," *Brookings*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/05/why-pakistan-supports-terrorist-groups-and-why-the-us-finds-it-so-hard-to-induce-change/>.

the US announced that it was suspending at least \$900 million in security aid to Pakistan until it took tougher action against these militant groups.⁴⁹

A second problem is the possibility of “loose nukes” situations in which the Pakistani military loses control of one or more nuclear weapons, possibly to an extremist group. While judgments about nuclear command and control in Pakistan vary, the possibility of a nuclear weapon being stolen cannot be ruled out in a country where there have been militant attacks against the Pakistani military. In August 2012, Tehreeq-i-Taliban fighters attacked the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex at Karma which reportedly houses nuclear warheads and damaged a transport plane. This was the third attack on the base since 2007 and took five hours to quell.⁵⁰ In 2011, militants attacked a naval base for 17 hours. The base is only a few miles from a nuclear weapons storage site as Masroor.⁵¹ Pakistan’s development of tactical nuclear weapons will only sharpen the worry over nuclear command and control. Tactical weapons are smaller and easier to move and to hide. Their utility arises from being dispersed to local commanders in the field for use in battle. As a result, they are thought to pose special problems for command and control and could be easier to obtain by extremists who need only persuade a local commander to hand them over or, if not, take them by force.

The third worry for India and the US is Pakistan’s deepening relationship with China.

Pakistan’s close relationship with China goes back to the early 1960s when the two countries

⁴⁹ Arshad Mohammed and Jonathan Landay, “U.S. suspends at least \$900 million in security aid to Pakistan,” *Reuters*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-pakistan-aid/u-s-suspends-at-least-900-million-in-security-aid-to-pakistan-idUSKBN1ET2DX>.

⁵⁰ Dean Nelson and Tom Hussain, “Militants attack Pakistan nuclear air base,” *The Telegraph*, August 16, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/9479041/Militants-attack-Pakistan-nuclear-air-base.html>

⁵¹ Alistair Scrutton, “Analysis: Is Pakistan attack a blueprint for nuclear base raid?” *Reuters*, May 24, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-nuclear-safety/analysis-is-pakistan-attack-a-blueprint-for-nuclear-base-raid-idUSTRE74N3L520110524>.

concluded a border deal. Since then, Pakistan has received development assistance and has bought conventional weapons from China. China helped Pakistan develop nuclear weapons and its missile technology. In 2013, China took over the running of the civilian port at Gwadar from Singapore.⁵² Looking ahead, Gwadar will be connected to Kashgar in Xinjiang province by a combination of rail and road connectivity which will be the backbone of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement signed in 2015.⁵³ China has committed \$62 billion to building the corridor.⁵⁴ Pakistan and the CPEC are crucial parts of China's Belt and Route Initiative (BRI). In addition to Gwadar, China is poised to open a military naval base in Pakistan, at Jiwani near Gwadar. This would give China two naval bases near the Gulf and the Indian west coast, the other being in Djibouti .⁵⁵

Terrorism and extremism. India and the US, on the face of it, have parallel interests in controlling and rolling back terrorism and extremism from Pakistan. However, over time, they have differed on priorities and tactics. At the heart of the disagreement is the Indian view, particularly since 2001, that Islamic terrorism against it is part of the larger “global war on terrorism”, and India and the US, indeed the international community as a whole, should cooperate in dealing with it. New Delhi rejects the partitioning of the problem between global and local and is also opposed to the notion of “good terrorists” and “bad terrorists” which is the basis for negotiating and cutting deals with the former and isolating and destroying the

⁵² *The Straits Times*, “China takes control of Pakistan port from Singapore,” February 18, 2013, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/china-takes-control-of-pakistan-port-from-singapore>

⁵³ Andrew Stevens, “Pakistan lands \$46 billion investment from China,” *CNN*, April 20, 2015, <http://money.cnn.com/2015/04/20/news/economy/pakistan-china-aid-infrastructure/>.

⁵⁴ Sajjad Hussain, “China's CPEC investment in Pakistan reaches \$62 billion,” *Livemint*, April 12, 2017, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/dB5tQKISoKNrvl7EwDPFbP/Chinas-CPEC-investment-in-Pakistan-reaches-62-billion.html>.

⁵⁵ Minnie Chan, “First Djibouti ... now Pakistan port earmarked for a Chinese overseas naval base, sources say,” *South China Morning Post*, January 5, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2127040/first-djibouti-now-pakistan-port-earmarked-chinese>

latter.⁵⁶ The US view for the most part has been that India's terrorism problem is largely of its own making and therefore its own to manage.⁵⁷ US concerns over terrorist strikes in India only arise if, as in Mumbai in 2008, foreigners and especially Americans become targets⁵⁸, and if India threatens to retaliate, leading to a military confrontation with the danger of escalation to war and perhaps even a nuclearization of the conflict.⁵⁹ Whereas the US thinks that New Delhi's mishandling of its Kashmir problem furnished Pakistan with opportunities for meddling in the state and continues to be a cause for Islamic radicalization in Pakistan, India regards the US's fostering of Afghan and other mujahideen against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as being an original cause of Islamic extremism and terrorism in the region.⁶⁰

Afghanistan exemplifies the differences, even though for nearly two decades India and the US have fundamentally been on the same side. New Delhi regards Islamabad as the cause of the festering conflict between Kabul and Afghan extremists, primarily the Taliban which Pakistan created back in the mid-1990s.⁶¹ It wants the US to twist Pakistan's arm to help control extremist groups and to rein in the India-haters in the Pakistan Army who are in league with various extremists including the Taliban. Washington knows that Islamabad is

⁵⁶ Sanjeeb Kumar Mohanty, "Negotiating with the Taliban: an Indian perspective," *IIAS: The Newsletter* 55, Autumn/Winter 2010, https://iias.asia/sites/default/files/IIAS_NL55_09.pdf.

⁵⁷ Polly Nayak, "Prospects for US-India Counterterrorism Cooperation: An American View," in *US-Indian Strategic Cooperation into the 21st Century*, eds. Brian Shoup, Sumit Ganguly and Andrew Scobell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp.136-137.

⁵⁸ Ashok Sharma, "Counterterrorism Cooperation in the Context of the Indo-US Strategic Partnership," *India Quarterly* 68, no.4 (2012), pp.322-323.

⁵⁹ "Major terror attack against India could trigger nuclear war: Experts," *The Economic Times*, February 26, 2015, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/major-terror-attack-against-india-could-trigger-nuclear-war-experts/articleshow/46382374.cms>.

⁶⁰ See Nayak, "Prospects for US-India Counterterrorism Cooperation" p.137; see also Alicia P.Q. Wittmeyer, "What went Wrong in Afghanistan," *Foreign Policy*, March 4, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/04/what-went-wrong-in-afghanistan/>

⁶¹ Ahmad Bilal Khalil, "The Tangled History of the Afghanistan-India-Pakistan Triangle," *The Diplomat*, December 16, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/the-tangled-history-of-the-afghanistan-india-pakistan-triangle/>

more or less behind the Taliban – of various stripes – but it is so dependent on the Pakistan Army for supply routes into Afghanistan that it cannot afford to take overly strong action against Islamabad.⁶² Moreover, it sees the Pakistan Army as the bulwark against state collapse and a militant takeover of the country.⁶³ The US cites Pakistani complaints about India’s presence and role in Afghanistan as a key reason for Islamabad’s intervention in its northern neighbour. Washington periodically attempts to negotiate with the more “moderate” Taliban and Pashtun militants as a way of preparing the ground for a permanent exit from Afghanistan – or at least to buy time.⁶⁴ New Delhi regards virtually all Afghan militants as being extremists. At heart, India wants the US to stay long enough in Afghanistan to discipline the Pakistanis and defeat the militancy. The US wants to leave Afghanistan as soon as possible to focus on what it regards as more central theatres and as a way of drawing down its military involvements worldwide. To do so, it needs a deal between the Afghan government, the Taliban, and Pakistan, which is anathema to India. New Delhi’s view is that this would amount to appeasing Pakistan and further emboldening Islamabad in support of extremism and terrorism.

Even more divisive than Afghanistan policy is the issue of Pakistan itself as the headquarters for Islamic militancy in the region if not farther afield. New Delhi has publicly branded Pakistan a terrorist state. In 2016, after a militant attack on an Indian military base and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s UN speech criticizing India over its handling of Kashmir, the Indian representative at the UN stated: “What we see in Pakistan...is a terrorist state, which

⁶² Shannon Tiezzi, “C. Christine Fair on US-Pakistan Relations,” *The Diplomat*, 28 December 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/c-christine-fair-on-us-pakistan-relations/>.

⁶³ Ashley J. Tellis, “Pakistan’s Terror Problem and the Demise of Hope,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 11, 2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/10/11/pakistan-s-terror-problem-and-demise-of-hope-pub-64819>.

⁶⁴ See Robbie Gramer, “Tillerson Open to Peace Talks With ‘Moderate’ Taliban,” *Foreign Policy*, October 23, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/23/tillerson-open-to-peace-talks-with-taliban-afghanistan-pakistan-south-asia-diplomacy/>.

channelizes billions of dollars, much of it diverted from international aid, to training, financing and supporting terrorist groups as militant proxies against its neighbours."⁶⁵ The US acknowledges Pakistan's role but is unwilling to implicate the Pakistani state beyond a point. Fundamentally, Pakistan is too important in US strategy for it to be abandoned or declared a rogue state. US interests are varied. First, Pakistan's location makes a vital geostrategic site. It sits between Afghanistan, China, and the Gulf including Iran, and is a staging and listening post for the US. Second, its military is the sixth largest in the world and has nuclear weapons. It is a potential ally in the region. Third, Pakistan is politically and diplomatically useful. It has the largest number of Muslims in the world after Indonesia and is therefore influential in the Islamic world. Finally, Pakistan is too big and too dangerous to alienate or be allowed to fail. The US is therefore forced to tread a fine line between castigating and threatening Pakistan and supporting and cooperating with it.

India-US cooperation on extremism and terrorism is therefore restricted largely to counterterrorism intelligence sharing and capacity building. An India-US joint working group on counterterrorism was formed in 2001 to focus on terror financing. An initial defence intelligence pact was signed in 2003. The pact focused on terrorism including countries supporting terrorism. The agreement expired in 2008 and was not extended by the Congress-led Indian government.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, India-US intelligence cooperation increased after the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008. In 2010, the two countries launched a Counterterrorism Initiative which included information sharing and capacity building.⁶⁷ In

⁶⁵ Chidananda Rajghatta, "India calls Pakistan a terrorist state in furious response at UN," *The Times of India*, September 26, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-calls-Pakistan-a-terrorist-state-in-furious-response-at-UN/articleshow/54460414.cms>.

⁶⁶ Sushant Singh, "As US pushes defence intelligence sharing pact, India says 'not ready yet'," *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/as-us-pushes-defence-intelligence-sharing-pact-india-says-not-ready-yet-2772014/>.

⁶⁷ "India, U.S. sign counter-terrorism initiative," *The Hindu*, July 23, 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/India-U.S.-sign-counter-terrorism-initiative/article16207465.ece>.

2013, the first India-US policing conference was held in New Delhi. In 2015, Indian police officials visited the US to learn counterterrorism techniques. In 2014, a Homeland Security Working Group was created.⁶⁸ US intelligence forewarned the Indian diplomats in Afghanistan of at least two impending attacks. In 2015, the two sides signed a counterterrorism partnership and began discussions to enable India to access real-time encrypted intelligence.⁶⁹ The following year India's Multi-Agency Centre and the FBI's Terrorist Screening Centre signed an agreement.⁷⁰

Since Donald Trump became President, India-US diplomatic coordination on counterterrorism and US acceptance of Pakistan's role in shielding terrorists has been more public. In a press conference with President Donald Trump in 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that intelligence sharing on terrorism would deepen: "Today during our meeting we discussed the serious challenges of terrorism, extremism and radicalization which are the major challenges facing the world today.... We have agreed to enhance our cooperation in fighting against these scourges."⁷¹ Amongst the items on which there was agreement was stronger cooperation on Al Qaeda, ISIS, Jaish e Mohammed, Laskhar e Toiba, and D Company. Hours before Modi arrived, the US named Syed Salahuddin, head of the Hizbul Mujahideen, a global terrorist. Subsequently, the US State Department described

⁶⁸ R.K. Arora and Vinay Kaura, "India-US homeland security cooperation in the times of Modi and Trump," *ORF Issue Brief* 194, August 2017, http://cf.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ORF_Issue_Brief_India-US_Homeland.pdf

⁶⁹ Praveen Swami, "Talks on, US, India seek close ties in intelligence-sharing," *Indian Express*, January 25, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/talks-on-us-india-seek-close-ties-in-intelligence-sharing/>.

⁷⁰ See Sushant Singh, "As US pushes defence intelligence sharing pact, India says 'not ready yet'," *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/as-us-pushes-defence-intelligence-sharing-pact-india-says-not-ready-yet-2772014/>; Swami, "Talks on, US, India"; and R.K. Arora and Vinay Kaura, "India-US homeland security cooperation in the time of Modi and Trump," *ORF Issue Brief*, 29 August 2017, <http://www.orfonline.org/research/india-us-homeland-security-cooperation-in-the-time-of-modi-and-trump/>.

⁷¹ *Sputnik International*, "US, India to Enhance Intelligence Sharing, Policy Cooperation," June 27, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201706271054993430-usa-india-share-intelligence/>.

Pakistan as a “safe haven” for terror and the Hizbul Mujahideen was designated a global terror network.⁷²

Even though India-US counterterrorism intelligence cooperation has improved, it has been beset by suspicions and resentment, particularly on the Indian side. New Delhi fears US penetration of its intelligence agencies after Rabinder Singh, a RAW operative, defected to the US. The National Security Council Secretariat also leaked material to US intelligence. More importantly, Indian intelligence have worried about the quality of American intelligence being passed on to them and have obtained better information from the UK, Israel, Germany, and Canada. On specific episodes, including the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC-814 in 1999 and the Mumbai terror strikes, India has come away disappointed. Particularly damaging to the intelligence relationship was the US’s inability to extradite and share information on David Headley who helped plan and execute the Mumbai attacks. Headley ended up in a US jail in 2009 and was eventually interviewed by Indian intelligence. Nor has the US provided much information on Kashmiri terrorists.⁷³

Loose nukes. The possibility that Pakistani nuclear weapons may fall into the hands of other countries but more importantly into the hands of extremists haunts both Indian and US intelligence. Indian contingency planning is unknown. The US is thought to have contingency plans to intervene either pre-emptively if the situation in Pakistan seems to be heading for state collapse or to recover the lost weapon and secure the rest of the arsenal.⁷⁴ Nor is it known if India and the US would partner each other or any other countries, such as Israel.

⁷² See Arora and Kaura, “India-US homeland security cooperation.”

⁷³ These issues are reported in an insightful piece by Saikat Datta, “Secrets Choked,” *Outlook*, 3 March 2008, pp.26-33.

⁷⁴ “US has 'snatch-and-grab' plan for Pak's nuclear weapons,” *The Economic Times*, August 6, 2011, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/us-has-snatch-and-grab-plan-for-paks-nuclear-weapons/articleshow/9505567.cms>.

India and the US could mount a joint India-US operation or at the very least share intelligence leading up to an intervention by one or the other.

How plausible is an India-US joint operation to recover a nuclear weapon or to secure the arsenal? The answer is: not very. Quite apart from the enormous complexity and great danger of any operation – joint or otherwise – inside Pakistan, there are reasons to be extremely sceptical of an India-US coordinated operation. First, the incentives to pass the buck will be quite high. Each may well count on the other to act for its own reasons. India will have much greater reason to act in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear weapons being transferred to an extremist group as it is next door to Pakistan and use of the weapon against it could occur quickly. The US might well want to wait till the situation clarifies so that when it acts it is better placed to be effective. India may not have that luxury. This asymmetry does not augur well for cooperation.

A second problem is that military planning and execution would be more complex and more susceptible to mistakes in a joint operation, especially between two militaries that do not know each other well. Their military cultures also are quite different in an important respect, namely, jointness of action. Any operation to recover a loose nuke or obtain control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons would require enormous coordination between intelligence and the various service arms – the army and air force, in particular. The Indian system is still rather siloed. The US system is much better coordinated. It is hard to imagine an Indian-US operation in these circumstances. Far more plausible is a strict division of labour, with one side providing intelligence and other support including a diversionary attack elsewhere to confuse the Pakistani military and militant organizations.

Thirdly, since surprise must be a key element of a successful intervention, a joint operation would require the utmost secrecy, particularly as the targets would be up and waiting. A joint operation would be even more susceptible to leaks – or at least both sides would fear that this is so and would therefore prefer to go it along.

Fourth, it is quite likely that despite the extreme danger of the evolving situation, India and the US will likely be caught in mutual recriminations over responsibility for Pakistan's nuclear programme and for the disorder in Pakistan. India will blame the US for having overlooked the development of Pakistan's nuclear weapons back during the Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations. The US will blame India for having started the nuclear arms race in South Asia and for not settling Kashmir and other issues with Pakistan. Mutual resentment also does not bode well for cooperation.

Finally, ironically, the US is more likely to partner Pakistan in regaining control over Pakistani nuclear weapons – indeed, it is difficult to imagine how else a loose nuke can be retrieved and control over a crumbling nuclear weapons infrastructure can be re-established. Given the numbers of nuclear weapons and their dispersal within the country, American forces will have to team up with Pakistani forces that want to get back control of their own nuclear arsenal. Cooperation with India will only make a partnership with moderate or friendly Pakistani forces more difficult if not impossible.

Pakistan-China relations. The latest phase of Pakistan-China cooperation has caused India and the US some strategic worry. The most worrying aspect of the relationship is the CPEC. India has opposed the CPEC publicly, arguing that the project entails Chinese construction and the presence of its personnel in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir which it claims as part of

India. The CPEC therefore violates Indian sovereignty de jure. The presence of Chinese personnel including military personnel in Kashmir and other parts of the economic corridor will pull Pakistan into China's security net even further and could embolden Islamabad in dealing with India. In the case of hostilities with a more aggressive Pakistan, New Delhi would have to consider the possibility that Chinese personnel would be injured or killed, with the risk that China would be brought into the conflict. India's threats to retaliate against Pakistan for terrorist attacks on Indian soil, already questionable due to potential Pakistani conventional responses and possible nuclear escalation, would become even more questionable.

For the US, the primary concern is that Pakistan will be drawn deeper into the Chinese orbit and will become more obstreperous with Washington as a result. Islamabad could well be more difficult on Afghanistan, extremism, and terrorism. In addition, by providing naval basing facilities to China, it could boost PLAN's power in the Gulf which the US has traditionally regarded as an area that it must dominate for reasons of energy access, military operations against extremism and terrorism, and interventions against Gulf states.

The CPEC is part of China's larger Belt and Route Initiative, which New Delhi regards with suspicion. In the Indian view, the CPEC and BRI are part of a grand design by China to control the Eurasian heartland and Asian maritime routes to assert its hegemony in the continent. The servicing of Beijing's loans for the infrastructure and connectivity projects could well cause massive indebtedness among Asian countries who will then succumb gradually to Chinese political control. In the end, Chinese control of Asia will mean an

encirclement of India. India therefore has opposed not just the CPEC but also the BRI, and it boycotted the BRI Forum held in Beijing in May 2017.⁷⁵

The US by comparison has been more circumspect about the CPEC and BRI. It has largely refrained from commenting on the CPEC, but in July 2017, its ambassador in Islamabad commended the initiative, saying “The United States welcomes the project and is supportive of any effort that brings about economic growth and development in Pakistan.”⁷⁶ Unlike India, the US sent a delegation to the BRI Forum, led by Mark Pottinger, special assistant to the president and the National Security Council’s senior director for East Asia in the Trump administration.⁷⁷ However, by October of 2017, Secretary of Defence Mattis had summarized the US’ negative attitude to the BRI/CPEC in the following terms:

In a globalised world, there are many belts and many roads, and no one nation should put itself into a position of dictating ‘one belt, one road’.... That said, the One Belt One Road also goes through disputed territory, and I think, that in itself shows the vulnerability of trying to establish that sort of a dictate.⁷⁸

Clearly, US views are evolving, from a relatively anodyne, cool view of the CPEC to a more negative view of the BRI, one that is closer to the Indian perspective.

⁷⁵ On these various Indian views, see C. Rajah Mohan, “Raja Mandala: The politics of territory,” *The Indian Express*, May 16, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/raja-mandala-the-politics-of-territory-4657396/>; Harsh V. Pant, “India Challenges China’s Intentions on One Belt, One Road Initiative,” *YaleGlobal Online*, June 22, 2017, <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/india-challenges-chinas-intentions-one-belt-one-road-initiative>; and Brahma Chellaney, “China’s creditor imperialism,” *Livemint*, December 26, 2017, <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/RAIWUqXb2ueWAJVinxmDrK/Chinas-creditor-imperialism.html>.

⁷⁶ On Ambassador Hale’s remarks, see Haider Ali Sindhu, “US Comes Out Publicly Against CPEC for the First Time, Says it Passes Through ‘Disputed Territory’,” *Daily Pakistan Global*, 7 October 2017, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/headline/us-backs-india-says-cpec-passes-through-disputed-territory/>.

⁷⁷ “U.S. to send delegation to China’s Belt and Road summit,” *Reuters*, 12 May 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-silkroad-usa/u-s-to-send-delegation-to-chinas-belt-and-road-summit-idUSKBN18816Q>.

⁷⁸ “US backs India’s stand in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,” *The Hindu*, 4 October 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-backs-indias-stand-in-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/article19795047.ece>.

If India and the US are both increasingly negative about the CPEC and the tighter embrace of Pakistan and China, what can they do about it? One way is to outbid China for Pakistan's favour by promising aid, infrastructure, and connectivity. This is impossible for India economically: it does not have the funds. But in any case, Indian investment in Pakistan is impossible politically: it will never sell in India or in Pakistan. The US could attempt to mount a massive Marshall-plan like intervention to beat the Chinese, but Washington simply does not have the finances. Nor will domestic opinion tolerate such largesse for a country that is associated with extremism and terrorism: indeed, the US aid package to Pakistan, amounting to several hundred million dollars in 2018 ran into trouble with both President Trump and the US Congress.⁷⁹ In any case, a huge aid and loan package for Pakistan will risk alienating India completely which will find it hard to understand why the US does not simply invest in India as a bulwark against China.

A second way is to persuade China that the CPEC is a bad investment. India has tried to do this by its objections to infrastructure building and a Chinese presence in Kashmir, arguing that Beijing is taking sides in a bilateral quarrel between the two South Asian neighbours. It has also stepped up its criticism of Pakistani counterinsurgency actions in separatist-minded Baluchistan in which a number of CPEC projects will be built. New Delhi could in addition promote instability in Baluchistan. Islamabad has accused India of doing just this. The US also could raise the ante in Baluchistan. US military actions in Afghanistan and Pakistan's frontier areas against militants could raise the costs of Chinese-backed infrastructure projects. Intentionally or not, US drone and other strikes against, for instance, the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar

⁷⁹ Arshad Mohammed and Jonathan Landay, "U.S. suspends at least \$900 million in security aid to Pakistan," *Reuters*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-pakistan-aid/u-s-suspends-at-least-900-million-in-security-aid-to-pakistan-idUSKBN1ET2DX>.

(TTP-JA), as well as Afghan and Pakistani military operations against other militants, have pushed the TTP-JA into Pakistan's Baluchistan province where they have intensified their attacks. The worsening security situation has put Chinese personnel at risk and delayed the implementation of projects.⁸⁰ Finally, the US could more deliberately promote instability in Baluchistan. It showed in Afghanistan in the 1980s that it can be very effective in backing and sustaining an insurgency.

The problem for India and the US is that the consequences of stirring trouble within Pakistan and raising the costs of Chinese investments may backfire. Promoting instability in Pakistan could well increase extremism and terrorism and enlarge the role of the military. It may also cause the Chinese to increase their role in Pakistan. Islamabad and Beijing could be pushed into posting Chinese security forces in Pakistan to safeguard their investments. Pakistan and China could also target India's fragile border states, fanning separatism. Even if India and the US raise the cost to China by fomenting trouble within Pakistan, it is unlikely they would do so in a concerted way. The US in particular has too many interests at stake in maintaining a working relationship with Pakistan as long as Washington is active in Afghanistan. To be seen to be working with India to derail Pakistan's internal politics would jeopardize its Afghan policies.

The third and most feasible way to check not so much the deepening of the Pakistan-China relationship but rather its influence is to build a containment structure. India and the US could increase their diplomatic outreach to the Gulf, Middle East, and Central Asia in particular, places where Pakistan and China have diplomatic, political, and economic stakes and

⁸⁰ Ian Price, "Is the US Trying to Sabotage the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor?" *The Diplomat*, 29 September 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/is-the-us-trying-to-sabotage-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>.

strengths. New Delhi under Modi has been active in all these areas, particularly the Gulf. India has cultivated Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf emirates for a variety of reasons including balancing Pakistani and Chinese influence and combating extremism and terrorism.⁸¹ In February 2018, India announced that it would get access to naval facilities in Duqm, Oman.⁸² The US has longstanding relationships in the Gulf, but President Trump has gone out of his way to build stronger ties with Saudi Arabia and to make the kingdom the linchpin of its regional strategy.⁸³ American bases are spread through the region, in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Its Central Command (CENTCOM) has responsibility for the region from Yemen in the south to Kazakhstan in the north and from Pakistan in the east to Jordan and Syria in the west.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had mused about India and the US being allies. Allies they are not, nor are they likely to be, at least in dealing with China and Pakistan: there is virtually no contingency in which they would together seek to deter, coerce, or try to defeat either China or Pakistan. They are strategic partners, with China and Pakistan in the background as common threats. They have built a long-term relationship and continue to invest in it for the purposes of high-level consultation and trust. But they are unwilling to name either China or Pakistan as a common enemy; nor is there any circumstance in which they would do carry out military actions against China or Pakistan. They cannot be allies because they still have different strategic calculations on various challenges in respect of

⁸¹ Harsh V. Pant, "Why India and Saudi Arabia Continue to Grow Closer," *The Diplomat*, April 13, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/04/why-india-and-saudi-arabia-continue-to-grow-closer/>

⁸² Shubhajit Roy, "India gets access to strategic Oman port Duqm for military use, Chabahar-Gwadar in sight" *The Indian Express*, February 13, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-gets-access-to-strategic-oman-port-for-military-use-chabahar-gwadar-in-sight-5061573/>

⁸³ "US-Saudi Arabia seal weapons deal worth nearly \$110 billion immediately, \$350 billion over 10 years", *CNBC*, May 20, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/20/us-saudi-arabia-seal-weapons-deal-worth-nearly-110-billion-as-trump-begins-visit.html>.

China and Pakistan, a history of mistrust going back to the Cold War has not been altogether overcome, and domestic politics rules out strong commitments to each other. India and the US can partner on making India into a great power by augmenting its military and technological capabilities, on soft balancing against China in the Indo-Pacific, and on intelligence sharing on extremism and terrorism in Pakistan.