
16. Russia in South Asia: a view from India

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I. Introduction

The end of the cold war and the disintegration of the USSR destroyed the whole fabric of post-war security arrangements on the periphery of the USSR in Europe as well as in Asia.

Russia, steeped in the legacy of the former Soviet Union, by inertia continued to regard itself as the post-cold war incarnation of the USSR, especially in repairing and re-forging its relations with the West and its immediate European neighbours, but in the initial period failed to identify its national interests in the vast Central and South Asian regions. The shrinking of the strategic space, the emergence of several fledgling buffer states incapable of reliably separating it from the frontiers of the Islamic world, and the withdrawal of Russian troops to several thousand kilometres north of the turbulent borders in Central Asia did not add to Russia's national security. On the contrary, they presented new challenges and triggered a realignment of forces, both local and foreign, in the region and in its immediate neighbourhood.

II. South Asia: Russia's strategic neighbour

Today South Asia is perhaps one of the most challenging regions for Russia from the point of view not only of security in its traditional meaning but also of Russia's prospects of emerging as an economic power able to act as a bridge between the developed 'North' and the developing 'South' in such a way as to assure its vital economic security interests in the emerging world order.

The most notable point about South Asia is that it has been free from inter-state wars for over a quarter of a century. Apocalyptic predictions of a fourth Indo-Pakistani war, over Kashmir, quickly escalating into a nuclear exchange, have been belied. The two countries have not taken their disputes and differences to the battlefield since December 1971. A proxy war in Kashmir has, of course, gone on for about 10 years because the insurgency there is backed by a constant supply of arms and infiltration of trained militants across the border, but the military stand-off is generally limited to sporadic exchanges of fire across the Line of Control.¹ A positive element of great importance is the readiness of India and Pakistan to continue their dialogue to patch up their relations, which have been strained ever since Partition in 1947, although with periodic interruptions resulting from domestic political developments.

¹ The ceasefire line delineated in the 1972 Simla Agreement.

Hurdles on the road to rapprochement must not be underestimated, as the two countries' rivalry has acquired a new, distinct nuclear dimension. However, after the bellicose rhetoric of the initial period after their respective nuclear tests of May 1998, India and Pakistan indicated their readiness to embrace the rules of the game evolved by the nuclear-weapon states during their decades-long rivalry in the course of the cold war. Meeting in New York at the UN General Assembly in September 1998, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif agreed to resume their bilateral political dialogue on all issues of concern, including Kashmir. The Islamabad round of talks at foreign secretary level in mid-October 1998 once again proved that this is an uphill task, but both neighbours are firm about continuing their dialogue. The resumption of a direct bus service between New Delhi and Lahore in February 1999, for the first time since Partition, was part of 'bus diplomacy'. Vajpayee travelled to Lahore in February 1999 to inaugurate the new service and constructive talks with Sharif resulted in the Lahore Declaration, signed by the two leaders. The two countries committed themselves to resolve all issues, including that of Jammu and Kashmir; refrain from intervention in each other's internal affairs; intensify their dialogue in the interests of an early agreement according to the agreed agenda; take steps to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons; and develop an extensive framework of confidence-building measures (CBMs) in the nuclear and conventional weapon fields.²

On no other issue has there been so much misinformation and biased propaganda as on the risk of South Asia being the flashpoint of a possible nuclear conflagration. The mutual deterrent nuclear capability of the two countries (acquired by India after its first test in 1974 and by Pakistan in 1987)³ was a factor for stability for over 10 years.

A major improvement in India's relations with its immediate neighbours other than Pakistan has been key water-sharing agreements with Bangladesh and Nepal. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)⁴ continues to be an instrument for establishing better relations in South Asia and, despite its relatively slow growth, has made progress in the late 1990s. There are moves away from the South Asia Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) of December 1995 towards a South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) to be concluded by 2001. Bearing in mind the geographic configuration of the SAARC area, arrangements for sectoral cooperation in different parts of the subcontinent are also being developed. For instance, in the east there can be economic cooperation between India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, and in the south between the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India.

Embracing the global trend, most countries of South Asia have embarked on economic liberalization. The stabilization of democracy in Bangladesh and Nepal has provided the impetus for economic and political cooperation. In Paki-

² Lahore Declaration, URL <<http://www.meadev.gov.in>>.

³ See also section V of this chapter.

⁴ For the membership of SAARC, see appendix 1 in this volume.

stan as well, in spite of ups and downs, there is a definite advance in the democratic process. Even today, however, Pakistani democracy remains circumscribed by the power and influence of the army. To the extent that democracy takes root in the region in general, and in Pakistan in particular, the trend is bound to be towards economic and political cooperation rather than warfare. Countries tied together in a fabric of economic cooperation and partnership are unlikely to declare war on one another even though tensions among them may persist.

In short, interstate wars can be virtually ruled out in South Asia. Even so, serious security problems exist in almost all the countries of the region. They arise from both domestic and external factors.

Religion, ethnicity and politics

The mixture of religion, ethnicity and politics can be highly explosive and pose a lethal threat to the stability and integrity of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multilingual and multicultural nation-states. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the conflicts in Trans-Dniester, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Chechnya speak for themselves. The developed countries of the West are not unaffected: Northern Ireland and the Basque region of Spain have become synonyms for separatism combined with bloodshed and terrorism.

While the rest of the world only faced the problems arising from religious extremism and ethno-nationalism relatively recently, the Indian subcontinent became their victim from the day colonial rule there ended in 1947. Partition at the time of Independence was an exercise in managing ethno-nationalist problems through territorial arrangements based on democratic principles. This was unfortunately complicated by the claim that religion was the main, if not the sole, determinant of national identity. The two-nation theory, advocated first by the Muslim League in pre-Partition India, was later adopted as a national ideology by Pakistan.

Inevitably, the doctrine that nationhood depended almost entirely on religion came into conflict with other criteria for defining ethnic and national identities. The contradiction finally led to the secession from Pakistan of its eastern wing, now Bangladesh. It has been at the root of the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, with Pakistan insisting that religion alone should determine Kashmir's future, and secular India, with a vast Muslim population of its own, opposing this.

Sectarian violence apart, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have all been victims of ethnic insurgencies. Of all the South Asian countries, Sri Lanka has suffered most: its ethnic insurgency, led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has gone on since 1973 and is remarkable for its virulence. There was a time when the Indian Tamils also had a secessionist movement. This was overcome by the Indian commitment to democracy, federalism and secularism. The Tamil leader C. N. Annadurai, who used to burn copies of the Indian Constitution in public, eventually became Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

and Tamils have held high office, including that of president, army chief and so on. A rash of other insurgencies, from the sensitive north-eastern region to Punjab, have been contained with a great measure of success, if not completely.

The installation of a coalition government led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance in India after the elections of April 1998 was a reaction to a spree of religious fundamentalism and extremism in India's neighbourhood and to the BJP's call for a universal civil code for all citizens which would have deprived the 180 million-strong Muslim minority of several 'privileges'. After assuming power the new government swore allegiance to the constitution of secular India and dropped many controversial items on its election agenda. However, the attacks on Christians in Gujarat and Orissa in January 1999 and disruption by Hindu fundamentalist groups of the cricket test match with Pakistan in February 1999 showed that the BJP was not in a position to restrain its allies.

Illegal arms, narcotics and terrorism

In the late 1950s and 1960s, Naga and Mizo insurgents in the Indian north-east were given arms by Pakistan (through its eastern wing, now Bangladesh) and by the China of Mao Zedong. This ended with the liberation of Bangladesh and with Deng Xiaoping's ascent to power in China. Soon afterwards, however, the Afghan War wrought havoc by flooding the region, principally Pakistan, with small arms in vast quantities. Of the nearly three million Kalashnikovs and other weapons supplied by the USA and Saudi Arabia, not many reached Afghanistan. Huge quantities were diverted to Punjab and Kashmir and other parts of the subcontinent.⁵

The spread of illegal arms and narcotics goes hand in hand terrorism, not only in South Asia. The Afghan War fuelled these vicious activities and narco-terrorism has become a harsh reality. Powerful drug syndicates use terrorists and insurgents as a convenient cover for their lucrative activities while to the terrorists the drug barons are a source of finance. Improved technology and facilities for specialized training, modern light arms and difficult-to-detect plastic explosives have greatly enhanced the terrorists' capacity to inflict damage. Training facilities have increased because of the demobilization of forces in many countries and because some intelligence agencies have found it expedient to set up training establishments on their own or through front organizations.

Russia in the region

Since Russia has traditionally good relations with the other states of South Asia and they do not pose any direct threat or challenge to Russia's national security or vital interests, at least for the foreseeable future, the analysis in this chapter is limited to the dominant players on the South Asian stage, India and Pakistan.

⁵ Malhotra, I., 'Security issues in Southern Asia', *Strategic Analysis* (Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), New Delhi), vol. 20, no. 2 (May 1997), pp. 223–32.

This must, however, also be seen in the context of the new regional equations emerging with the gradual formation of a multipolar world order, especially after the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998. The influence, role and interests of outside powers, especially China and the United States, in the region as reflected in their bilateral relations with the South Asian states also pose challenges, as well as opening new opportunities for Russia in playing its role of a great Euro-Asian power.

III. Indian–Russian relations after the end of the USSR

Moscow's South Asia policy has traditionally been essentially India-centric. It has been instrumental in maintaining regional peace and stability and an effective mechanism in ensuring the USSR/Russia's own vital strategic and security interests.

Indo-Soviet relations always played a key role in maintaining the security of and balance of forces in the region, especially after 1971 when thanks to Soviet political and military backing Bangladesh emerged on the map of the world.

Speaking at a round-table discussion on Indo-Soviet relations in July 1988, former Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev described the relations between the USSR and India as a forerunner of President Mikhail Gorbachev's 'new thinking' in international affairs.⁶ However, in the early post-Soviet period relations with India were seen in Russia as part and parcel of the Soviet-era communist ideology. In the 'three circles' foreign policy doctrine of Russia's first Foreign Minister, Andrey Kozyrev, India was placed in the third circle with the rest of the world, while relations with the West were placed in the first circle. In the second circle were the countries of the 'near abroad'—the former Soviet republics.

Unlike the Soviet Union, which needed a 'special relationship' with India in its political and strategic rivalry with both the West and China, Russia at that time did not seem to need India as a strategic ally. With the emergence of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia as independent states, the Russian and Indian borders moved further apart. India did not impinge on the immediate concerns of the new Russia.

The foreign policy concept made public by Kozyrev in January 1993 put Russia's priorities in this order: (a) the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); (b) arms control and international security; (c) economic reform; (d) the United States; (e) Europe; (f) the Asia–Pacific region; (g) West and South Asia; (h) the Near East; (i) Africa; and (j) Latin America.⁷ Thus, on the list of 10 priorities, India and South Asia ranked seventh.

On the other hand, Russia appeared to be improving ties with Pakistan. In November 1991, just before the Soviet collapse, Russia for the first time voted

⁶ Attended by the author. Part of the year-long Festival of India in the Soviet Union in 1987–88.

⁷ At the annual press conference of the Foreign Minister in Moscow attended by the author in Jan. 1993.

in the UN for a proposal sponsored by Pakistan for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia, much to the consternation of India.⁸

Two different schools of thought existed in Russia at this time regarding policy towards India. One favoured retaining the traditional special relationship: India should be given priority in Russia's policy in South Asia, while at the same time good relations were developed with other South Asian countries, including Pakistan. The other school favoured ending the special relationship. According to this approach, looking at developments in the region 'through Indian spectacles' affected Russia's relations with other regional actors, above all Pakistan. This second view was associated with the Foreign Ministry headed by Kozyrev. The first was prevalent in the academic community and parliamentary circles.⁹ In the last phase of the Soviet Union and the early period of the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, the advocates of the second approach had the upper hand. Nevertheless, in May 1992 the then Russian State Secretary, Gennady Burbulis, in an interview on the eve of a visit to India—the first by a new Russian leader—was forced to accept that Russia's relations with India have to be different from its relations with other countries of the region and preferred to describe them as relations of 'spiritual pragmatism'.¹⁰

Things started to change with the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as Foreign Minister in January 1996; India was the first country to which he paid an official visit in March, two months after his appointment. This was the time when Russia adopted the foreign policy which suited its geographical and geopolitical realities, reflected in its state symbol—the two-headed eagle looking in two opposite directions. Today in the Russian political establishment there is a growing realization of the importance of multi-faceted ties with India and a broader consensus has crystallized on the need to expand them.

The fragmentation of the Soviet empire ripped apart its tightly knit military-industrial complex, resulting in the breakdown of regular supplies of spares for the Indian Armed Forces and jeopardizing India's national security. This forced the Government of India to send its Defence Minister to Moscow in March 1992 to establish contact and resolve the issue of military supplies. However, his mission was a failure as he was able neither to arrange for spares nor to meet any senior Russian politician.

The continued relevance of a strong and healthy relationship between India and Russia in the changed global environment was a point of dispute among a section of influential public opinion in India also.¹¹

Against the backdrop of the grim state of bilateral relations came the controversy over the Indo-Russian 'cryogenic deal' in 1993. Russia was to supply

⁸ Thakur, R., 'South Asia', eds R. Thakur and C. A. Thayer, *Reshaping Regional Relations: Asia-Pacific and Former Soviet Union* (Westview Press: Boulder, Colo., 1993), p. 176.

⁹ Shaumian, T., 'Russia's eastern diplomacy and India', *International Affairs* (Moscow), Dec. 1993, p. 55.

¹⁰ 'Burbulis arrives for crucial talks', *National Herald* (New Delhi), 6 May 1992.

¹¹ Sharma, R. R., 'Indo-Russian relations in the emerging context', eds M. Rasgotra and V. D. Chopra, *India's Relations with Russia and China: A New Phase* (International Institute for Asian-Pacific Studies: New Delhi, 1997), pp. 65–73.

India with technology for the production of cryogenic booster engines for the Indian geo-stationary space launch vehicle (GSLV). This was considered by the USA to be a violation of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). The manner in which the deal was scuttled made it glaringly apparent to the whole world that the USA was calling the shots and Russia, the successor state of the once mighty superpower, was meekly obeying. In spite of assurances by President Yeltsin, on 14 July 1993 the Indian Ambassador in Moscow was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry to be informed of Russia's decision not to supply India with the technology. This shocked a sizeable section of vocal opinion in India as well as Russia and generated fresh doubts in India about Russia's reliability as a partner and its capability to withstand outside pressure in defence cooperation, at a time, moreover, when voices were getting stronger urging the Government of India to review its ties with Russia. In fact the low priority accorded to India in Russian policy was reciprocated by India.

India was trying to adjust to the post-Soviet reality. In mid-1991, the Narasimha Rao Government accelerated the process of liberalizing the economy by removing controls. It sought International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank loans, accepted some of the IMF–World Bank conditionalities and opened up the economy to foreign investment. India and the USA made conciliatory gestures to each other and sought new areas of cooperation, although the divergence of interests in important areas continued. Greater attention was also given to mending fences with China.¹²

During this period of uncertainty in Indo-Russian relations, Russia was seeking some compromise and synthesis between the two divergent schools of thought regarding the approach to India. The basic geopolitical factors that lay at the root of the decades-long, uninterrupted Indo-Soviet friendship could not be ignored altogether. The Russian defence industry was very keen to restore defence ties with such a large and lucrative market and was the only field in which Russia could compete with the West. India was equally keen on the restoration of the supply of spare parts and military goods from Russia, as 60–70 per cent of its defence imports had been from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was India's second-largest trading partner. A very large part of its export of consumer goods was to the former Soviet Union. India and the new Russia urgently needed to settle certain important issues left over from the Soviet era and put their relations back on the rails. These issues were bilateral trade, the supply of defence equipment and spare parts to India, the rupee : rouble exchange rate, India's nearly 10 billion rouble debt to the former Soviet Union, and the legacy of multifaceted cooperation which the two countries had inherited.¹³

In October 1992 a summary of the long-awaited foreign policy concept prepared by the Russian Foreign Ministry was made public.¹⁴ As regards India, it

¹² Bakshi, J., 'India in Russian strategic thinking', *Strategic Analysis* (IDSA, New Delhi), vol. 11, no. 10 (Jan. 1998).

¹³ Bakshi (note 12), pp. 721–36.

¹⁴ Shaumian (note 9).

reflected an attempt to paper over the two divergent approaches. A certain ambiguity in Russia's stand on India, however, continued. Russia did not want its policy to be 'deliberately pro-India'. Nor did it want policy towards India to be artificially restrained in the name of striking an abstract balance and 'equi-distance' between India and Pakistan. Russia wanted its policy towards India to be pragmatic and flexible.

President Yeltsin's visit to India in January 1993 was a recognition of India's role in contemporary international life and an attempt to search for a formula of interaction in the changed, post-Soviet scenario. During the visit the two countries signed a new 20-year Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.¹⁵ The word 'peace', which had been used in the 1971 Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship between India and the USSR, was not retained in the new treaty, signifying that it did not have any strategic dimension, nor was the security clause (Article 9), which had stipulated immediate 'mutual consultations' and 'appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and security of their countries'. In the new treaty, India and Russia chose to commit themselves to a negatively worded clause only, whereby each side would refrain from taking any action that might affect the security interests of the other.

The subsequent development of the relationship is discussed in section VIII below.

IV. Russia and Pakistan

In South Asia Moscow traditionally had good or warm relations with all the regional countries except Pakistan, which had joined the pro-Western military alliances the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)¹⁶ and South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO)¹⁷ along the Soviet frontiers in the south. Pakistan's good relations with China, the Soviet Union's ideological rival, were another irritant in the way of closer relations.

There was a period of thaw in their relations after the Soviet Union's successful mediation to end the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War: the thaw continued until 1971 when the Soviet Union and India signed the Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship, which provided for military assistance in the event of aggression. The Soviet backing for India's war effort in Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) in 1971 finally chilled relations between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. In the late 1970s the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan transformed Pakistan into a front-line state in the last lap of the cold war. It still clouds Russian-Pakistani relations and the mind of the common man in both countries.

Pakistan is the only country of South Asia with which Russia needs to improve and normalize its relations.

¹⁵ 'India-Russia relations', 10 Aug. 1998, URL <<http://www.indianembassy.ru>>.

¹⁶ CENTO was founded in 1955 and originally consisted of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the UK. It is currently inactive.

¹⁷ SEATO was founded in 1954 and originally consisted of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the UK and the USA. It is currently inactive.

In the changed geopolitical scene following the break-up of the Soviet Union, Pakistan began to seem more important from Russia's point of view. Situated close to the newly independent Central Asian republics and adjacent to Afghanistan, Pakistan seemed to be in a position to influence developments there. Some held the view that during this period the 'key Islamic actors' in the region (Iran, Pakistan and Turkey) assumed priority over India.

In December 1991, Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoy, an Afghan War veteran, visited Pakistan. As a pointer to growing warmth in Russian–Pakistani relations, an international conference was held in Moscow in April 1992 on relations between Pakistan and the CIS. Moreover, the supply of US arms to Pakistan having stopped in 1990, Pakistan was in search of new allies and sources of military hardware. It tried to move closer to Russia. To the chagrin of India, reports started building up that Pakistan was exploring the possibility of buying arms from Russia. India was apprehensive that the 'garage sale' of Russian arms in a desperate bid to earn hard currency would only fill the armouries in its neighbourhood, more particularly in Pakistan and China, posing a threat to its own security.¹⁸ In 1992 Russia was very close to signing a deal with Pakistan for the supply of Su-27 fighter jets, Kozyrev having cleared the proposal. However, the leaders of the powerful military–industrial complex succeeded in convincing President Yeltsin that by a one-off sale of arms to Pakistan Russia would ultimately lose the vast Indian market. During his 1993 visit to New Delhi, speaking at a news conference, Yeltsin declared that Russia 'will not provide any military aid to Pakistan'.¹⁹

The cash-starved Russian defence industry continued to explore the possibility of selling arms to Pakistan and clandestine negotiations were held through small firms acting as middlemen. However, in spite of Russia's repeated declarations of readiness 'in principle' to sell arms to Pakistan, all Pakistan could get from Russia was some dual-purpose Mi-17 helicopters in 1996.²⁰

Russia's policy of 'equidistancing' India and Pakistan continued until July 1994, when, the day after a visit by Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, the Pakistani Foreign Minister came to Moscow at the invitation of Kozyrev. The two foreign ministers finalized the draft of a bilateral treaty which was to lay the foundation of their relations in the post-cold war era. It was to be signed by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto during her Moscow visit in December 1994. However, because of Yeltsin's health problems, the visit was cancelled, although officially his and Bhutto's tight schedules were given as the reasons for postponement. This was perhaps the most unfortunate development in the relations between the two countries, especially when they were very close to holding a summit meeting.

The next high-level contact between Russia and Pakistan took place only in the summer of 1997 when the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Gauhar Ayub Khan,

¹⁸ Subrahmanyam, K., 'Russia in changed scenario', *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), 26 June 1992.

¹⁹ The author attended the conference in Jan. 1993.

²⁰ Statement of Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Grigory Karasin, 6 July 1994, at a press briefing attended by the author.

visited Moscow for talks with Foreign Minister Primakov. By this time Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan through the Taleban had widened the differences between it and Russia. At the press conference after the talks Primakov cautioned Pakistan that by backing the Taleban and involving itself more deeply in Afghanistan it was committing the same blunder as the Soviet Union, while Ayub Khan insisted that its recognition of the Taleban regime was legitimate as it controlled the capital and most of the territory of the country. He also denied Pakistani interference in Afghanistan.²¹

In March 1998, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin visited Islamabad for foreign ministry-level consultations on bilateral and regional issues, including the Afghan settlement. In a move to introduce some dynamism in its relations with Pakistan, Russia appointed an old India hand, Andrey Gulyayev, as its Ambassador to Pakistan in mid-1998. Continued efforts to patch up bilateral relations precipitated a visit to Russia by Nawaz Sharif in April 1999—the first by a Pakistani head of government in 25 years.

No doubt good relations between Russia and Pakistan have great importance and independent value. They could become a factor for stability, especially now that the nuclear factor has been added to the regional equation. However, this should not be at the expense of ties with India—an impression given to India after the break-up of the USSR.

Learning the lessons from the recent past, Primakov, then Russian Prime Minister, confirmed to Prime Minister Vajpayee in December 1998 that Russia had no plans to sell arms to Pakistan which could be used against India.²²

V. The nuclear dimension in the South Asian security calculus

With the series of nuclear tests by India at Pokharan in May 1998, reciprocated by Pakistan, the security calculus in South Asia acquired a qualitatively new aspect. What had hitherto been covert or a matter of speculation and guesswork for political and defence analysts and the intelligence community became evident for the public at large.

India exploded its first nuclear device in 1974 and Pakistan is believed to have acquired a nuclear capability in 1987.²³ The exchange of 'nuclear salutes' in May 1998 merely created a need to evolve a *modus vivendi* for the now overt nuclear rivals—the tests in their essence did not change the security balance in South Asia, although they had global political implications.

India has the minimal capability to protect itself against any political 'use' of nuclear weapons against it and the capability to retaliate against their actual use against it. Rash judgements have already been passed that its nuclearization will start an arms race, intensify Indo-Pakistani rivalry at the very least, and possibly lead to a nuclear holocaust. Curiously, the same arguments were heard after

²¹ The author attended the press conference.

²² 'India, Russia for strategic tie-up', *The Hindu*, 23 Dec. 1998.

²³ Singh, J., *India Perspective* (New Delhi), special issue, Aug./Sep. 1998.

Pakistan acquired a nuclear capability in 1987, and crisis scenarios were built up in 1990 although India had not weaponized.

Three neighbouring states—China, India and Pakistan—now ‘officially’ or ‘unofficially’ have nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapons of two of them—China and Pakistan—are directed against India, with whom they have long-standing territorial disputes. This calculus did not exist even during the worst days of the cold war between the former Soviet Union and the United States and the military blocs led by them.

At the same time the argument that nuclear weapons in South Asia could actually support stability cannot be ignored. If it was possible to have a stable nuclear relationship between the United States, the Soviet Union and China during the cold war, then why not a stable relationship between China, India and Pakistan?

Rationality under stress would be difficult for either power to maintain, some may argue. However, this is not the reality. Indian and Pakistani decision makers have always been quite rational when on the brink of war or during the conduct of war. As a former Indian Army Chief, General K. Sundarji, noted, ‘India and Pakistan are not crazy states. They share a civilization going back 5000 years. During the three wars fought against each other, they have displayed enormous restraint in targeting civilian industry or infrastructure’.²⁴ The presence of weapons of mass destruction in each other’s backyards could lead to paranoia and invite pre-emptive nuclear strikes—after all, there would be no warning time—but nuclear attacks could produce fall-out in the territory of the attacker, since India and Pakistan are contiguous. There is therefore a mutual built-in deterrent system between India and Pakistan.

India and Pakistan already understand the logic of nuclear strategy as played out by the nuclear powers during the cold war. They understand the conditions of nuclear stability and instability.

The ‘frequent wars in South Asia’ argument suggests that the nuclearization of South Asia would increase the chances of nuclear war. However, the situation has actually proved to be the opposite. A nuclear India or Pakistan would not even dare to engage in conventional war for fear of escalation to the nuclear level. The latent nuclear weapon capabilities in India and Pakistan may have paralysed military action at the conventional and nuclear levels.

Policy statements by the leaders of India and Pakistan reflect the sense of responsibility among the political elites in both countries resulting from their nuclear status. In a statement to both chambers of the Indian Parliament on 3 August 1998, Prime Minister Vajpayee declared that the Indian nuclear weapons were not directed against any country and that the Indian Government was firm on the policy of seeking a peaceful solution of all outstanding issues with Pakistan.²⁵ At the foreign secretary-level talks in Islamabad in October 1998, India and Pakistan broadly agreed on CBMs to avoid unauthorized and acciden-

²⁴ Sundarji, K., ‘Indian nuclear doctrine: notions of deterrence’, *Indian Express*, 25 Nov. 1994.

²⁵ Indian Ministry of External Affairs, ‘Indian nuclear policy’, URL <<http://www.meadev.gov.in>>.

tal use of nuclear weapons. India also proposed that the two countries should refrain from attacking each other's nuclear as well as civilian installations.²⁶ The Pakistani Army chief, General Pervez Musharraf, also ruled out war with India, saying that because it had nuclear weapons his country had an 'impregnable' defence.²⁷ Nawaz Sharif in an interview to a leading Indian newspaper in February 1999 proposed direct talks between India and Pakistan on nuclear and missile issues as well as on the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and a possible future Fissile Material Treaty (FMT).²⁸ The memorandum of understanding signed by Sharif and Vajpayee in Lahore in February 1999 provides for CBMs, including advance notification of missile tests, and interaction in international disarmament forums.²⁹ In April 1999, before testing their long-range, nuclear-capable, Agni II and Ghauri/Hatf-II missiles, India and Pakistan, respectively, notified each other in advance in the spirit of the Lahore Declaration. Although Pakistan tested its Ghauri-II and Shaheen missiles within days of the Indian test of the Agni II, Sharif declared that Pakistan does not want to involve itself in an arms race with India.³⁰

The reality is that there has been no such 'race' between India and Pakistan even in the conventional arena. India has cut back its defence spending from 3.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1987 to around 2.4 per cent in 1999. Pakistan's defence spending has also been coming down as a share of GDP since 1993, although more gradually. Pakistan does not have the economic and technological base to build a large nuclear arsenal.³¹ Output of military goods from the Indian defence industry fell by 57 per cent between financial years 1990/91 and 1996/97, while Pakistani funding for military production between 1993/94 and 1996/97 fell by 33 per cent.³²

VI. Russia's dilemma

The different views emanating from Russia following the Indian nuclear tests and Pakistan's response are symptomatic of the dilemma of the Russian state and strategic community. Official spokesmen and commentators have all emphasized that the tests placed Russia in a difficult situation. At the same time, Russia also values its tested and traditional friendship with India.

²⁶ 'India, Pak. broadly agree on CBM to avoid N-conflict', *Deccan Herald*, 21 Oct. 1998.

²⁷ 'Sharif confirms development of Shaheen missile', *The Hindu*, 30 Jan. 1999.

²⁸ 'Let's discuss the N-issue, the missile issue . . .', *Indian Express*, 3 Feb. 1999.

²⁹ See note 2.

³⁰ 'Pakistan not for arms race with India: Nawaz', *Times of India*, 18 Apr. 1999. Unfortunately in the summer of 1999 the positive trend which the Lahore Declaration had strengthened was destroyed by the Pakistani incursion across the Kargil sector of the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. The outbreak of hostilities between the 2 unrecognized nuclear powers caused grave concern internationally, since such hostilities had led to full-scale war between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971. Leading nations, including Pakistan's long-time ally, China, Russia and the USA, demanded the restoration of the status quo ante on the Line of Control and urged Pakistan to withdraw its armed men from the Indian sector, plunging the Pakistani Government into global diplomatic isolation over the issue.

³¹ Singh, J., *India Perspective* (New Delhi), Special issue Aug./Sep. 1998.

³² Arnett, E., 'Nuclear deterrence, nuclear tests and science in South Asia: selected statistics and quotes' [no date], URL <<http://www.sipri.se/projects/technology/Stats.html>>.

During the Soviet era, Moscow tried to reconcile apparently contradictory aspects of its policy by making a general appeal in favour of universal adherence to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) but refraining from overtly criticizing India for not signing it. The Soviet leadership did take note of India's compulsions, refrained from criticizing India for its peaceful nuclear test in 1974 and consistently showed understanding for India's nuclear stance. Itself locked in a ideological stand-off with China, which had not signed the NPT at that time and with which it had an unresolved border dispute, the Soviet Union repeatedly expressed its serious concern at the reports of secret Chinese assistance, tolerated and connived at by the West, to Pakistan's nuclear programme.

The Delhi Declaration on a Non-Violent and Nuclear-Free World, signed in 1986 by then Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi,³³ could be seen as an embodiment of this understanding as well as clear support for the Indian stand of seeking global, non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament within a given time-frame.

Persistent economic woes, political uncertainties and the disarray in its armed forces coupled with the slow pace of military reforms as a result of economic constraints have forced Russia to rely more and more on its nuclear strategic forces for ensuring its security and territorial integrity. Former Secretary of the Russian Security Council, General (retired) Alexander Lebed, in an interview to the Russian NTV television channel on 15 November 1998 declared that the Russian Armed Forces were not in a position to fight a conventional war because of the rash cuts made under the so-called reforms and stressed the need to pay more attention to the strategic nuclear forces.

While the Soviet Union was committed to no-first-use of nuclear weapons, present-day Russia no longer is. Russian nuclear doctrine has moved closer to that of the other Western countries—the USA, the UK and France—that rely on nuclear deterrence, albeit at lower levels of arsenals, and without the promise of no-first-use. On the nuclear strategic issue, Russia stands firmly with the West. On 14 November 1998, along with the USA, the UK and France, Russia voted against a UN General Assembly resolution tabled by India calling for a review of the nuclear doctrines of the nuclear-weapon states and a ban on the use and threats of the use of nuclear weapons in order to move towards global disarmament.

Post-Soviet Russia's official line vis-à-vis India is that the differences over the NPT and the CTBT would not be allowed to come in the way of their multi-faceted cooperation. The task of putting pressure on India on the nuclear issue is largely left to the USA.

For historical reasons the present system of international relations is mainly dominated by the Western powers led by the USA. Russia has been accepted in most forums as a part of the system. However, the fact remains that, although Russia has no overwhelming impulse and no need to question or oppose the

³³ Kaushik, D., 'India's relations with Russia and China: an overview', eds Rasgotra and Chopra (note 11).

basic parameters of the present world order, it is still not a very satisfied member of the system. The eastward expansion of NATO raises the serious spectre of a security threat for Russia. It is piqued by the US policy of cultivating the former Soviet republics and giving a prop to their independence so that a resurgent and cohesive Eurasia does not once again pose a challenge to the West as the Soviet Union did earlier. The declaration by the USA that oil- and gas-rich Central Asia and the Caucasus are a sphere of US interests particularly irked Russia, as did the overtures of NATO to Ukraine, the Baltic states and other former Soviet republics.³⁴

As regards India, there is clear consensus in Russia regarding the need to cement their ties.

India's nuclear tests therefore put Russian policy makers in a dilemma. In its official response Russia was unequivocally critical. President Yeltsin complained that 'India has let us down'.³⁵ The official statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry on 12 May 1998 expressed 'alarm and concern' and 'very deep regret in Russia' over the Indian action and urged India to reverse its nuclear policy and sign the NPT and CTBT. Apprehension was expressed that India's policy could lead to a chain reaction in South Asia and beyond. This, in fact, became the main theme of all Russian pronouncements on the subject. Then Foreign Minister Primakov remarked that India's decision to carry out the tests was 'short-sighted' and 'unacceptable' to Russia. He felt that there was a serious risk of conflict between India and Pakistan and added, 'We especially would not want Pakistan to follow in India's footsteps'. Russia is at one with the other P5 countries (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council) in their desire to keep the nuclear 'club' small and exclusive, and not allow new entrants. It is not prepared to recognize India and Pakistan as nuclear-weapon states since according to the NPT only those states which had nuclear weapons or had exploded a nuclear device before 1 January 1967 can be regarded as nuclear-weapon states. At the same time, Russia made it clear from the very outset—in contrast to the USA—that it opposed sanctions on India on the grounds that they would only prove counter-productive. Russia would rely on diplomacy to try to bring about a change in India's nuclear policy.

It soon became evident that the nuclear tests would not come in the way of Indo-Russian cooperation. It was announced that Russia's cooperation with India in the civil nuclear sector would continue. On 14 May, just a day after the second Indian test, the annual conference of the Joint Indo-Russian Council, which oversees the integrated long-term programme of technical and scientific collaboration between the two countries, opened in Moscow in an atmosphere of goodwill and friendship. The Russian Co-chairman of the Council, Academician Yury Marchuk, in conversation with this author called for an intensi-

³⁴ 'Geopoliticheskaya situatsiya v post-Sovetskom prostranstve i problemy voyennoy bezopasnosti Rossii' [The geopolitical situation in the post-Soviet space and problems of Russia's military security], in *Evolution of Military Security Structures: Russia's Role and Place: Geopolitical Aspect* (Institute of National Security and Strategic Studies: Moscow, 1997), Natsionalnaya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, URL <<http://www.nns.ru>>.

³⁵ 'Indiya podvela nas' [India has let us down], *Kommersant Daily*, 13 May 1998.

fication of high-level contacts and cooperation. In June 1998 Russia's Atomic Energy Minister, Yevgeny Adamov, visited India to sign a supplement to the agreement of 1988 on the construction of an atomic power plant in Kudankulam in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Russia gave a clear signal that despite differences on the nuclear issue it would be 'business as usual' with India. It also made it clear that India's nuclear strategic programme was purely indigenous and that there was no question of Russian military nuclear technology being transferred to India.

The leaders of some opposition parties in Russia took a pro-India stand. The General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Gennady Zyuganov, welcomed the Indian tests. Gennady Seleznev, Speaker of the State Duma (the lower house of the parliament) and a prominent communist, lauded India's determination in continuing its nuclear weapon programme despite US pressure.³⁶

Following the Indian nuclear tests a barely concealed and widespread Russian grudge against the West at the treatment meted out to Russia after the break-up of the Soviet Union came to the fore in media comments. India's carrying out of the tests was seen as questioning the essentially unfair and iniquitous world order that the West was seeking to impose. An understanding and sympathetic approach was adopted towards India's position and the reasons that had led it to conduct the tests. A headline in *Izvestiya*, for instance, read: 'Moscow will not quarrel with its ally: Indian nuclear tests do not threaten Russia'.³⁷

It was clear from the very beginning that Russia's main worry, rather than the Indian tests themselves, was the threat of other threshold countries, above all Pakistan, also overtly 'going nuclear'. Russia urged Pakistan to show maximum restraint in connection with India's tests and adhere to all non-proliferation norms. It was concerned that the Indian tests could disturb the current fragile balance among the nuclear-weapon powers and open the floodgates of nuclear proliferation. The emergence of new nuclear powers would destabilize the situation and lead to a new arms race in Asia. A number of 'threshold' states, notably Iran, Iraq and Israel, are situated in close proximity to the southern 'underbelly' of the former Soviet space and thus have a direct impact on Russian security.

However, Russia had little leverage with Pakistan. On the bilateral level, Russian diplomats made a point of assuring the Indian side that Russia's policy would remain as before and that India would remain Russia's 'strategic partner'. Perhaps this was a factor in India's adopting the tactics of negotiating the post-nuclear scenario with the USA only. After negotiations between the Indian Prime Minister's special envoy, Brajesh Mishra, and Primakov in June 1998, Russia did not make any active attempt at a political dialogue with India

³⁶ Interfax, *St Petersburg Dateline*, 22 May 1998.

³⁷ Yurkin, M., 'Moskva ne budyet ssoritsya so svoym soyuznikom: indiskiye yadernye ispytaniya ne ugrazhayut Rossii' [Moscow will not quarrel with its ally: Indian nuclear tests do not threaten Russia], *Izvestiya*, 14 May 1998.

on the nuclear issue except for a blanket criticism of India and Pakistan in various international forums and urging them to join the NPT and the CTBT.

India did not at first find it necessary to continue the dialogue with Russia, particularly after the Russian financial and government crisis of August and September 1998, but there were increasingly calls in India for closer cooperation with Russia. In November 1998 an Indian parliamentary delegation visited Russia for talks with Prime Minister Primakov and the leaders of the Duma, the Federation Council (the upper house of the Russian Parliament) and the whole spectrum of the Russian political elite.

After the US-led missile strikes on Iraq in December 1998, which sidelined the UN Security Council of which Russia is a permanent member, the Chairman of the Federation Council, Yegor Stroyev, who ranked third in the Russian hierarchy, declared on the record that Russia was not opposed to India 'going nuclear' since India as a 'great power' and 'a nation of continuously developing culture' has the right to possess nuclear weapons for 'self-defence'.³⁸

The differences between India and Russia over the present nuclear non-proliferation regime, which divides the nations into nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots' in perpetuity, are not new. From India's point of view it was selfish of Russia in the name of global non-proliferation not to be prepared to allow India to have nuclear weapons when Russia itself has adopted a stance on retaining its own nuclear weapons because of the poor state of its conventional forces.

During Prime Minister Primakov's talks with Vajpayee in New Delhi in December 1998 the nuclear issue was discussed in the same terms, Primakov repeating the Russian position that India should sign the NPT and accede to the CTBT. Vajpayee, in turn, pointed out that after India's nuclear tests the suggestion that it accept the NPT had become superfluous. As for the CTBT, India had declared a unilateral moratorium and was engaged in negotiations with the USA on the test-ban issue.

Russia, it was known, had urged India before its May 1998 tests to accept the NPT. It continued with this plea now, although on the basis of different reasoning. Primakov put it as follows: 'You have conducted the tests now. Tomorrow, you may become a permanent member of the Security Council. This may serve as a campaign for proliferation'. Unlike the other members of the P5, however, Russia stopped short of making an issue of it. The joint press statement mentioned the nuclear issue briefly: 'During the talks, views were also exchanged on a wide range of important international issues of mutual interest. In these discussions, both sides supported the process of nuclear non-proliferation'. Official sources said that India had supported non-proliferation in its capacity as a nuclear-weapon power. There was nothing to suggest that Russia disputed that interpretation.³⁹

³⁸ 'Yegor Stroyev defends India's nuclear tests', *Hindustan Times*, 7 Feb. 1999.

³⁹ 'India, Russia for strategic tie-up' (note 22).

VII. Outside players in South Asia

In the post-World War II era South Asia has been a playground for outside forces, including China, the United States and the former Soviet Union, which tried to fill the vacuum created by the departure of the British rulers.

Kashmir, strategically located and with a predominantly Muslim population, was an asset that Pakistan was determined to gain. With this strategic view, the war of 1947 was fought and Pakistan occupied parts of Kashmir. The 1965 Indo-Pakistani War opened with an attempt by Pakistan to gain Kashmir and the Rann of Kutch. Pakistani diplomacy and military strategy were harnessed to seek active Western assistance, notably US aid, by projecting the border dispute as an Indian plan for hegemony, abetted by the forces of communism. After the USA embargoed arms supplies during the war, Pakistan aligned itself with China in order to build up its military strength and counter India.

The 1971 Indo-Pakistani War saw direct intervention by the two superpowers when the US naval presence in the Indian Ocean brought in the Soviet Navy. At one stage it looked as if there would be direct confrontation. For the first time the USA and the USSR were directly involved in the Indian Ocean. The USA agreed to the Pakistani demand (supported by a UN ruling of 1949) for a plebiscite in Kashmir. The Soviet Union accepted the partition of India and Pakistan as legitimate. The superpowers gave the adversaries the assistance needed to go to war with the intention of transforming this regional war into a proxy war.

South Asia experienced a rise in defence expenditure soon after the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. Both India and Pakistan opted for self-reliance in defence. Simultaneously Pakistan tried to accumulate weapons from all available sources. US fears became more intense when India exploded a nuclear bomb in May 1974. This enabled Pakistan to persuade the USA in 1975 to lift the arms embargo under the pretext that the USSR had dumped excess arms in India. The USA had in fact been supplying weapons to Pakistan throughout in pursuance of its policy of containment of communism, which was later reinforced by the presence of the USSR in Afghanistan and the revolution in Iran.

While the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan did not reduce the interests shared by Pakistan and the USA, it changed their tenor. Instead of containing Soviet influence in the subcontinent, the USA was now more anxious about containing the growing influence of China, both economically and militarily, in East Asia. The significance of Pakistan in helping to stabilize Afghanistan cannot be ignored: it is essential not only for the peace of the region but also for the vast resources of oil and natural gas in Central Asia, which can cross to Pakistan through Afghanistan.⁴⁰

China is another major player in South Asia. After the end of its honeymoon with India in the 1950s and the 1962 Sino-Indian War, China was in search of new allies in South Asia antagonistic to India. Pakistan was a suitable candidate, bordering India as it did both to its east (until the liberation of Bangladesh

⁴⁰ Muni, S. D., 'The emerging cold war in Asia: India's options', *Strategic Analysis* (IDSA, New Delhi) vol. 19, no. 12 (Mar. 1997).

in 1971) and to its west. The problem was that Pakistan was a US ally and a forward post of anti-communism, 'containing' China and the Soviet Union. However, in order to avoid dependence on one armaments supplier, Pakistan gradually moved towards China. In March 1965 President Muhammad Ayub Khan visited China and secured not only Chou En-Lai's assurances of support to Pakistan in the event of an Indian aggression but also military supplies.

China is still a key player in providing arms to Pakistan. As Pakistani dependence on US arms diminished after the 1971 war, China became a willing participant in military collaboration and technology transfers, not only in order to establish military links with Pakistan but also because it helped to subsidize its own research and development (R&D) programme.

China's technical assistance to Pakistan in its nuclear programme is of special concern to India. Reiterating Indian security concerns, the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Vasundhara Raje, said in Parliament on 17 July 1998 that the government had communicated to various countries, including China, its apprehensions about the defence cooperation between China and Pakistan, including the supply of materials and technology. Starting with the transfer of technology for building a reprocessing plant at Nilore in 1965 and the May 1976 agreement to supply heavy water, the nuclear cooperation between the two countries has evolved considerably. Chinese scientists have visited Kahuta and China has provided a design of one of its own atomic bombs and enough highly enriched uranium for two bombs.⁴¹

China's technical assistance to Pakistan's nuclear programme is intended to balance India's dominance in the region. Much to the liking of China, Pakistan's role in engaging India on its western border is not diminishing.⁴²

In the post-cold war era the process of formation of a new democratic world order based on the principle of multipolarity has taken on exceptional intensity in South Asia since the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests. Russia is the only member of the P5 which has yet to adopt a well-thought-out, long-term strategy in South Asia, not only to safeguard its own interests and the security of its allies in former Soviet Central Asia but also to make the Indian subcontinent a bridgehead for its economic expansion in the Third World. The return of Russia to South Asia would be a welcome development, since it would create a new balance based on a multiplicity of outside forces.

The change of government in Moscow following the economic meltdown of late 1998 heralded the beginning of a new era of national awareness in post-communist Russia. Although three-quarters of Russian territory is in Asia, the Russian political elite has been mainly Europe- or Western-oriented: Russia has always exhibited the 'white man' syndrome. History, however, demonstrates that Russia has been strong only when it has had a sound political, military and economic position in Asia. India is the pivotal centre of power in South Asia and Russia's traditional ally.

⁴¹ *Daily Review*, URL <<http://www.meadev.gov.in>>.

⁴² Wirsing, R. G., *India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute: On Regional Conflict and its Resolution* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1994), p. 107.

VIII. From special relationship to strategic partnership in the next millennium

After the collapse of the cold-war era special relationship and with uncertainty looming on the horizon, a breakthrough in Russian–Indian relations was achieved in the summer of 1994 when then Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited Moscow and the two countries signed the Moscow Declaration on the Protection of the Interests of Pluralistic States.⁴³

Time has shown that the statements at the highest political level about the concurrence of the long-term vital interests of the two countries are not mere rhetoric but are based on shared concerns. Realizing this, the two political leaders declared the huge land mass between them to be a zone of their vital national interests.⁴⁴

India and Russia are two powerful poles at two opposite ends of the vast Central Asian region, which has become the arena for the rivalry of outside forces which are attempting to export militant fundamentalism to the newly independent states or stoking the fire of the 20-year civil war in Afghanistan— with which both India and Russia have traditional friendly ties. In view of these realities the leaders of the two countries made the commitment in December 1998 to upgrade their relations to the level of ‘strategic partnership’, replacing the ‘special relationship’ of the Soviet era. However, the process of transformation of their relations into a strategic partnership is far from complete and at times, for various subjective and objective reasons, including the changed economic and political scenarios in both countries, has proved quite painful.

During Primakov’s visit to New Delhi in December 1998, which took place against the background of the US-led missile strikes against Iraq, India and Russia agreed to formalize their strategic partnership by signing a pact at their next summit meeting at some time in the summer of 1999. A joint statement, issued after the conclusion of Primakov’s talks with the Indian leaders, said that the new arrangement ‘will set new parameters and guide the further development of the close partnership between India and Russia’.⁴⁵

Strategic partnership has several aspects, including a high level of mutual trust, shared interests and concerns, and respect for each other’s territorial integrity. Defence cooperation is a key aspect of strategic partnership between any two nations, and Indo-Russian relations are no exception. The restoration of regular defence supplies to India from Russia in the mid-1990s played a key role in stabilizing the situation on the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁶

In the post-Soviet era Indo-Russian defence cooperation itself has undergone radical changes. The two countries are not only involved in joint defence research, but are also moving towards technology transfer and joint production

⁴³ ‘Moscow Declaration on the protection of the interests of pluralistic states’, 30 June 1994. ‘Indo-Russian relations’, URL <<http://www.indianembassy.ru/indrus1.htm>>.

⁴⁴ Personal communication from diplomatic sources, Mar. 1997.

⁴⁵ See note 22. At the time of writing, no other summit meeting had been held.

⁴⁶ For details of major conventional arms transferred from Russia to India since 1992, see appendix 3 in this volume.

of military hardware. The \$1.8 billion Su-30MKI deal is only one example. When Russia offered this aircraft to India in 1994, it was still on the drawing-board because of lack of finance for the Russian defence industries. However, in exchange for financing for R&D, Russia offered India the spin-off from the research. Talking to the author in February 1997, General Oleg Sidorenko, Deputy Director General of Rosvooruzheniye, the Russian arms exporting agency, underlined the unique nature of the deal: at the turn of the century the Russian and Indian air forces would be inducting this state-of-the-art multi-role fighter simultaneously, only under different names. He claimed that it was unprecedented (it is indeed unusual) for an exporting country to supply the latest technology to another power even before it is adopted by its own armed forces, and that this indicated the level of trust between India and Russia. Russia is also helping India develop ships and submarines and upgrade its 125 MiG-21bis fighter aircraft, produced indigenously under Soviet licence, to a fourth-generation aircraft.

India was the only country in the world with which Russia signed, in 1994, a long-term military–technical cooperation programme until the year 2000 worth \$7–8 billion.⁴⁷ During Primakov's New Delhi visit in December 1998 the two countries signed a new arrangement until 2010, of which the value is estimated at around \$15–17 billion.⁴⁸ It puts greater emphasis on joint R&D work. India will be able to conduct user trials in Russia while Russia will send experts to India to help with the integration and upgrading of Russian weaponry according to India's needs. The scheme has already been tried out in the ongoing modernization of India's MiG-21s and the upgrading of the Su-30s into Su-30MKIs to improve their manoeuvrability and firepower.⁴⁹

A new dimension to their defence cooperation was added in 1996 when for the first time India and Russia signed an agreement on inter-services exchange. This unique agreement also provides for exchange of sensitive operational information.

Common security concerns

Extremist and fundamentalist forces were those best prepared to fill the vacuum created in the immediate proximity of South Asia by the disorganized retreat of Russia from Central Asia after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Their immediate goals in no way serve the national and security interests of Russia and its allies in Central Asia, or of its friends in South Asia, such as India, or of China. Russia's hasty retreat led to the fall of the regime of President Mohammad Najibullah in Afghanistan and sparked off a bloody civil war in Tajikistan.

The 1994 Moscow Declaration is a charter for Russian–Indian cooperation in their national and international security. It is a document of key practical value to many countries of the contemporary world with multi-ethnic, multilingual

⁴⁷ Personal communications from diplomatic sources.

⁴⁸ Personal communications from diplomatic sources.

⁴⁹ 'India, Russia to expand defence cooperation', *The Hindu*, 14 Nov. 1998.

and multi-religious societies, but unfortunately has failed to attract due attention from the international community. Article 6 of the Declaration says:

India and Russia, being among the largest multiethnic, multilingual and multireligious States, recognize their responsibility for opposing the threats to democracy and peace together with other members of the world community. They believe that the experience accumulated by them in governing their societies on the basis of their commitment to unity in diversity can make a valuable contribution in this respect. They are convinced that the guiding principles of every democratic society, such as equality, rule of law, observance of human rights, freedom of choice and tolerance should be equally applicable to international relations. These must be based on respect for sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity of States, non-interference in their internal affairs and peaceful coexistence.⁵⁰

Article 5 defines the challenges to the security and national interests of the two countries: ‘Tension and violence still persist in the world. As ideological and other barriers to mutually beneficial cooperation are being overcome, new challenges to security and stability are emerging. In particular, there is a growing threat from the forces of aggressive nationalism, religious and political extremism, terrorism and separatism, which strike at the unity of pluralistic States’.⁵¹

It is also appropriate to quote again from another document released almost three years after the Moscow Declaration—Russia’s national security concept, published by the Security Council of the Russian Federation in 1997:

Threats to the national security of the Russian Federation in the international sphere take the form of attempts by other states to oppose the strengthening of Russia as an influential centre in the emerging multipolar world. This is reflected in actions aimed against the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, sometimes through the use of inter-ethnic, religious and other internal contradictions, as well as territorial claims which are sometimes based on the lack of a clear-cut legal state border.⁵²

India’s security concerns could be expressed in exactly in the same words.

Untapped economic potential

Economic interaction and trade are key, if not the most important, elements of a full-blooded strategic partnership.

As the world approaches the new millennium, economic issues and interests are beginning to dominate ideology and political differences. The globalization of national economies has become the ideology and driving force of international life. Unfortunately, the formerly centralized Russian economy with its immense scientific and technological potential failed to adapt to the elemental forces of the market, as a result of policies uncritically adopted at the beginning

⁵⁰ See note 43.

⁵¹ See note 43.

⁵² RIIA Novosti, Mar. 1997 (unofficial translation).

of the reforms. This had a negative effect on Russia's trade and economic interaction with India. India was the former Soviet Union's biggest trade partner among the developing nations with an annual trade turnover of \$5–7 billion. In 1998 trade between India and Russia was less than \$1 billion.⁵³

Over the past decade Russian industry has lost many opportunities to win orders for the modernization of Soviet-built installations in India simply because it was used to working under intergovernmental agreements and had not evolved mechanisms for competing in the market. The Primakov Government finally restored the allocation of up to 50 per cent of annual debt repayments by India in rupees, equivalent to \$1 billion, for the import of services and commodities including tea and pharmaceuticals from India, instead of auctioning them at a heavy discount to commercial banks and companies.⁵⁴ Part of this money was to be allotted to Russian industry for investing in joint projects in India.

Russian know-how and technology in tandem with India's rich human resources and marketing skills could work wonders. Russia can become a major player in the development and modernization of the infrastructure and core industries in India such as power generation, coal-mining and exploration for hydrocarbons. In October 1998, for the first time in 15 years the Indian Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas visited Moscow to explore opportunities for investment in the Russian oil and gas sector on a production-sharing basis in order to ensure a reliable supply for the Indian market at the beginning of the next century. India already consumes 100 million tonnes of crude oil per year, and this figure is increasing by 5 million tonnes per year. India is ready to invest up to \$1 billion initially, especially in onshore and offshore exploration in the Sakhalin and Astrakhan oil and gas fields.⁵⁵ This could be the beginning of the Russian–Indian 'strategic energy partnership'.

The agreement on trade and economic and scientific–technological cooperation until 2010 signed in New Delhi in December 1998 seeks to boost bilateral trade and economic interaction in a qualitative sense. Although neither side has so far made public the details of the agreement, it is believed that Russia will provide dual-purpose technology to India, which so far it has been unsuccessfully seeking from the West. According to Russian and Indian diplomats the agreement does not violate any international obligations undertaken by the contracting parties. However, the statement of the Russian Ambassador in New Delhi, Albert Chernyshev, about Russia's efforts to seek a lifting of restrictions on the transfer of sensitive technology to India indicates that this could become a major component of their trade and economic interaction.⁵⁶

Full-blooded strategic partnership with India based on sound political, economic and military cooperation and interaction would have several positive

⁵³ Statistics supplied by the Indian Embassy, Moscow.

⁵⁴ Indian Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's speech at the Indian Business Association, Moscow, Nov. 1998, attended by the author.

⁵⁵ 'India to invest \$1 billion in Russian oil', *Financial Express* (Mumbai), 20 Oct. 1998.

⁵⁶ ITAR-TASS, 30 Dec. 1998.

aspects for Russia in South Asia. First of all it would revive trust in Russia as a reliable partner, which has been squandered over the last decade; and, second, it would recover the enormous South Asian market for Russia's once well-known heavy machinery and equipment.

At one juncture it seemed that Russia was seeking strategic partnership with India to offset the growing Chinese influence and ambitions in South and Central Asia, just as it is forging a partnership with China to challenge the 'US global hegemony'. However, Russia wishes to forge a broader alliance of the three giants to lay the foundation of the Asian security system. The idea of a Russia-India-China 'strategic triangle' mooted by Prime Minister Primakov in New Delhi indicates this; and in his annual year-end address to the nation on ORT TV on 28 December 1998 President Yeltsin named China and India along with Russia as the poles of a multipolar world order. Other countries should 'draw their strength from these poles', he explained. In this calculus even Pakistan can find its place by drawing strength from China and Russia, while India, itself one of the poles, could also rest on Russia's strength. The only drawback is that India is not a veto-holding member of the UN Security Council and its nuclear status is not recognized by the 'nuclear club'.

Perhaps this explains the greater tilt towards China in Russia's foreign policy and the intensive political dialogue with China and exchange of high-level visits. Since becoming Russian President, Yeltsin has had six summit meetings with the President of China, Jiang Zemin, but only three with the Indian prime ministers. This China 'tilt' causes some concern about Russia's ability to stand by India in the event of a conflict, as it may adopt a policy of neutrality just as the Soviet Union did during the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

India needs a clear signal from Russia about its vision of India's role in the multipolar world, since China does not see any global role for India, nor does it want India to dominate South Asia.

IX. Conclusions

Developments from now on depend on how and when Russia manages to overcome the systemic crisis of transition. Today it is not in a position even to recapture and retain its markets in Central Asia—a bridge to South Asia and beyond. However, this could be achieved in close cooperation and partnership with India, which is poised to become a major player in the Central Asian states with which it has ancient cultural and civilizational bonds.

Russia still enjoys the respect and affection of millions of Indians and by actively cooperating with India the Russian economy could rebound.

In the foreseeable future Russia's South Asia policy will essentially remain India-centric because even within a reduced global role it assures Russia's geopolitical interests in one of the most challenging and promising regions.