

UNITED STATES' ATTEMPT TO BALANCE THE RISE OF CHINA IN ASIA

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Abstract

U.S. policymakers are closely assessing the rise of China at all levels. Both popular and academic discourse in the United States is increasingly focused on the future of U.S.-China relations, with the latter's emergence as a world power threatening the former's hegemony. Since 2001 American foreign policy objectives have included an overt balancing strategy against China. As revealed in the 2002 National Security Strategy, the U.S. saw India as a global partner which could "help maintain a stable balance in Asia." The following paper assesses the rise of China. It then reviews the Bush administration's early response to the "threat" of rising Chinese power. Further, the paper discusses how Washington has consolidated its friendship with India through the Missile Defence Initiative and the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal. Finally the paper analyses the possible effects of the Bush administration's "realist" policies in shaping the emerging global power system.

Introduction

In 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Charles Krauthammer wrote that the United States had been ushered into its unipolar moment. It has enjoyed this unipolar world order for almost a decade in which it has shaped the international order in its favour. However, as most scholars have argued, the United States' unipolar moment is now over. Many political scientists, such as Robert Pape and John McCormick, explain that countries have started balancing U.S. pre-

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eminence by using their soft-power. In a report published in 2008 American intelligence officials have also forecast the descent of U.S. hegemony within the next two decades.¹ Furthermore, the vibrancy of the European Union and the rise of China now point to the relative decline of American dominance. While the U.S. is still no doubt a hyper-power, often shy to declare itself an imperial power, the world is witnessing the beginning of a power transition, one in which the relative power of the U.S. is declining and that of China is increasing.

Power-transitions are a messy business and have historically caused intense upheavals; thus, it should not be surprising if the current power transition also brings some turbulence in its wake. This could be avoided if the U.S. was to accept a diminished global status, but it seems unlikely given the imperial posture it has got used to. The current U.S. policy clearly indicates that like all hegemonic states of the past it has no intention of sitting back while its standing suffers a decline. As expected, the U.S. has actually adopted an aggressive policy against China. Informed by the “Realist” political framework and the European model of balance of power politics, the U.S. has embarked on a balancing strategy vis-a-vis China. In the past the U.S. had decided to counter the growing Chinese influence in Asia by helping Asia-Pacific countries such as Japan, Vietnam, and Indonesia become bulwarks through strong economic aid. However, since the late 1990s and more remarkably since the formation of the 2002 National Security Strategy, the U.S. has forged a closer relationship with India. Seeing India’s economic potential and military strength, the U.S. has decided to balance China’s growing influence by propelling the growth of India. The “Bush Doctrine” advocates closer bilateral relations with India in the economic, military and energy spheres with the objective of raising it as a balancing power in Asia. Though the Obama administration’s policies toward India are so far unclear, it would be reasonable to expect U.S.-Indian ties strengthening given the Democrats’ historic alignment with India, as well as the latter’s rising global prestige.

¹ See Robert Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (2005):38; John McCormick, *The European Superpower* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); National Intelligence Council, “Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World” (November 2008), http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_2025/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf.

China's Rise and the Power Transition

The real growth rate of China's current Gross Domestic Product is 11.4 per cent.² Since 1978 China's Gross National Product has grown four times and may double by the middle of the 21st century. China's total trade with America was U.S. \$386.7 billion in 2007.³ In 2007 its trade with Asia was U.S. \$310 billion.⁴ In his article discussing China's rise, Aaron Friedberg notes that in terms of GDP, China's economy may surpass that of the U.S. by 2015.⁵ China's expanding energy needs are further a clear sign of a growing economy. It has embarked on a search for oil resources in Africa and the Middle East. A recent report states that after 2003 China became the second largest consumer of oil in the world and is the fastest growing consumer of oil at 410,000 barrels per day.⁶ Hence, it has also entered into competition with the U.S. over oil resources in the Niger Delta.

Dependence on foreign oil for economic expansion has necessitated the creation of a strong Chinese naval power. China needs to ensure that the transport of oil from Africa and Latin America across the oceans is smooth and uninterrupted. Thus, China has been expanding its naval power to better control the sea lanes which bring such basic resources to the country.⁷ Furthermore, economic growth has also helped

² *World Fact Book* (Washington: Central Investigation Authority, 2007), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html#Econ>.

³ "Foreign Trade Statistics," U.S. Census Bureau, (2007), <http://www.census.gov/foreigntrade/statistics/highlights/top/top0712.html#total>.

⁴ Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, *Trade with Countries and Regions in Asia (1-4)*, (Beijing: Department of Asian Affairs 2008) <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/statistic/AsiaAfrica/200807/20080705642656.html>.

⁵ Aaron L Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relation: Is Conflict Inevitable?," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005): 17; This observation is also made by G. John Ikenberry who argues that China's economy will potentially overtake that of the U.S. within the next decade, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2008): 23-37.

⁶ International Crises Group, "China's Thirst for Oil," *Asia Report* (Beijing: International Crisis Group, 2008): 1. http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/153_china_s_thirst_for_oil.pdf.

⁷ See International Crises Group Asia Report.

the expansion of China's military strength. Since 2006 its military spending has increased by over 18 per cent a year.⁸ China has spent large sums on acquiring advanced weaponry and is producing sophisticated weapons indigenously.⁹ There is little doubt within academic circles that China is indeed a rising superpower. According to the Realist school of thought and the Power Transition theory then, the rise of China forebodes trouble for the U.S.

The Realist theory explains that as a country expands, it defines its interests more broadly and seeks a "greater degree of influence over what goes on around it." Aaron Friedberg writes that as powers rise they often "challenge territorial boundaries, international institutional arrangements, and hierarchies of prestige." This makes rising powers troublesome for established powers that are already "beneficiaries of the existing international system."¹⁰ Realists like John Mearsheimer see China's power as rising and its aims as expanding.¹¹ They simultaneously discuss the changes that will be brought to the international order once China is established as a superpower. According to the Realists, because China's power is rising, it will seek to mould the international order to better suit its interests and dominate the international system. Many Realists note that:

As China gets more powerful and the United States' position erodes...the declining hegemon will start to see China as a growing security threat. The result of [this] development, they predict, will be tension, distrust, and conflict, the typical features of a power transition. In this view, the drama of China's rise will feature an increasingly powerful China and a declining United States locked in an epic battle over the rules and leadership of the international system.¹²

The view of many scholars is that this power transition, which will not be smooth though relatively peaceful, when compared to Europe's power transitions, will end with China's victory over the United States. These observers then suggest that with the establishment of China's ascendancy the world will witness the birth of an "Asian-

⁸ Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," 2.

⁹ Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relation: Is Conflict Inevitable," 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹² Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," 1.

centered” global order.¹³ This view has become further plausible when seen against the backdrop of U.S. failure in Iraq and Afghanistan, the heavy economic toll the war has taken, and the wearing down of U.S. and NATO forces in each country. In its final months, the Bush administration shifted its focus in the War on Terror, focusing largely on the Afghan insurgency. This shift is largely motivated by the desire to consolidate support in the neighborhood of China and Russia, two rising powers perceived as hostile in Washington. The Obama administration seeks to continue this policy, sending 17,000 additional U.S. troops into Afghanistan in early 2009. Of course, it remains to be seen whether such a policy would strengthen American influence in the region or only hasten its demise.

It must be noted, however, that there are scholars and diplomats who believe that China’s rise does not have to cause disruption in the international order. John Ikenberry argues that China faces a Western-centered international order built on principles of liberalism and since this system is “hard to overturn and easy to join” China need not be a revisionist power.¹⁴ Colin Powell, envisioning a peaceful power transition, also argues that there is no reason for China’s rise to prompt conflict between it and the U.S. He argues that America should keep its markets open to Chinese products, and incorporate China into the Western order rather than opposing and/or secluding it. The former policy “would force China to play by Western rules” and lessen its ability to threaten American dominance.¹⁵

The reality, however, may not be as simple as “keeping China in.” China has previously been an Asian hegemon and it could once again desire to become a preponderant power in Asia and the world.¹⁶ “Rising powers seek to reach out...taking steps to ensure access to markets, resources, and transportation routes” and increase overall global influence. In order to secure such interests, all rising powers seek to expand their spheres of influence. A prominent example of this is China’s ties with oil-producing countries in Africa and Latin America. Beijing’s increasing need for energy resources is causing it to “look outward to

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Collin Powell, “Diplomacy: Persuasion, Trust and Values,” Speech at Butler University, 18 February 2008.

¹⁶ David C. Kang, “Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations,” *International Security* 28, no. 3 (2003/2004): 21.

ensure growth and stability.” With oil fields in Sudan and oil investments in Chad, China has extended its sphere of influence into these regions. China’s primary interest is to maintain stability in these countries and to ensure that its energy security is not under threat through interruptions in oil supply by other oil producing organizations or countries.¹⁷ China has also increased its naval presence in the sea lanes to ensure that oil supplies are not interrupted.

Furthermore, in addition to increasing its influence in continents abroad, China has also sought to increase its sphere within South and Central Asia through increased investments and access to new markets. The Chinese government is one of the main investors in the development of Gwadar, a port-city located on the Southwestern coast of Pakistan, as a Tax-Free Port. The total cost of the development is estimated at U.S. \$1.16 billion, out of which China has invested \$198 million in the first phase alone.¹⁸ Based on the agreements between the governments of Pakistan and China, much to the chagrin of the U.S., the latter will have complete access to Gwadar’s markets. It is because of China’s growing economy and increasing influence over different parts of the world that Samuel Huntington and John Mearsheimer argue that China would become assertive and even risk conflict in a power competition to achieve its goals and establish domination.¹⁹

However, access to Gwadar’s markets is one of the secondary goals in this policy. The more important benefit is China’s access to warm waters and ability to protect the sea lanes from which its imported energy supplies pass and establish listening posts. The port of Hormuz is a key strategic point through which most of the world’s oil passes. China’s presence in the port assures that its oil supply from the Middle East and Africa can reach its shores safely. Furthermore, China also seeks to maintain naval presence at the mouth of the Persian Gulf.²⁰ This helps it extend and maintain its influence in the region, while countering that of the U.S. The port also enables China to monitor U.S. and Indian naval activity and maritime trade cooperation in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. The naval base at Gwadar is one more “pearl” in China’s “string of pearls strategy” through which it has built strategic relationships with sea

¹⁷ International Crises Group Asia Report, ii.

¹⁸ Ramachandran Sadhu, “China’s Pearl in Pakistan’s Waters,” *Asia Times*, 4 March 2005, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/south_asia/gc04df06.html.

¹⁹ Friedberg, “The Future of U.S.-China Relation: Is Conflict Inevitable,” 20.

²⁰ Jamsheed Marker, Personal correspondence, 2 October 2008.

ports from the Middle East to the South China Sea. These relationships help protect the energy supply routes and serve security objectives.²¹

Reacting to China's Ascent

The United States' attitude towards China's rise has been based on the Realist principles. Prior to 11 September 2001, the Bush administration saw China as the United States' primary opponent.²² In a *Foreign Affairs* article Condoleezza Rice wrote that China was not a status-quo power and that as it rose it would look to "alter Asia's strategic balance in its own favor." Bush administration officials have since looked upon China as being a revisionist state and have approached its rise with apprehension and venerated hostility.²³ Much of this apprehension was displayed in the aggressive policy of strengthening bilateral ties with China's neighbours while expressing disapproval and anxiety over its military build-up. In East Asia, the U.S. strived to increase its influence over Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Malaysia to counter increasing Chinese dominance in the region.²⁴ A similar policy is also being followed in Central Asia, where the U.S. wishes to have continued access to markets and natural resources. While implementing policy and strategizing, Bush administration officials like Condoleezza Rice have periodically expressed their desire to "manage the rise of China" while simultaneously expressing concerns over China's military expansion and stating that the U.S. wants to be certain that "China's military build-up does not 'outsize' its regional ambitions and interests."²⁵

²¹ Ramachandran, "China's Pearl in Pakistan's Waters,"

²² C. R. Mohan, "A Paradigm Shift Toward South Asia?" *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2002): 144.

²³ David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order" *International Security* 29, no. 3 (2004/2005):91.

²⁴ See Daniel Twining "America's Grand Design in Asia," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 79-94; "Military build-up of China worries U.S.," *Dawn*, 17 March 2006,

<http://www.dawn.com/2006/03/17/top15.htm>; J. Yardley; T. Shanker, "Chinese Navy Buildup Gives Pentagon New Worries," *New York Times*, 8 April 2005,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/08/international/asia/08china.html>.

²⁵ Alex Perry, "Why Bush Is Courting India," *Time*, 28 February 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1168486-1,00.html> (accessed 30 February 2006)

Thus, relying on the classic Realist theory, the Bush administration decided to meet China's rise by embarking on a plan to balance its power in Asia.²⁶ Friedberg writes that "U.S. government officials see regional alliances as defensive bulwarks of stability." After 11 September 2001, when the administration wanted to create an alliance of the world's great powers, it decided to welcome "the emergence of a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China." However, within the same National Security Strategy the Bush administration stated its "strong conviction that U.S. interests required a strong relationship with India" because India could aid the U.S. in creating a "strategically stable Asia."²⁷ Thus, the U.S. would help India become one of the great democratic powers of the 21st century.²⁸ In other words, India was going to be a bulwark against a rising China and balance its influence to provide stability to Asia.

That the U.S. has China in the back of its mind when it seeks to develop strong bilateral relations with India is no secret. The comments of a senior U.S. official stand out in this regard. While speaking on the renewed energy of U.S.-India relations he said, "China is a central element in our effort to encourage India's emergence as a world power...But we don't need to talk about the containment of China. It will take care of itself as India rises."²⁹ Whether the U.S. ultimately aims at containing China is debatable; the idea of containment, as understood in Cold War terms, has almost never surfaced in academic debate. While the new U.S.-India relationship remains in its formative years, one can safely argue that the short-term U.S. goals are pivoted around the idea of balancing Chinese influence. Washington may have envisioned a "balance now, contain later" strategy for China.

²⁶ Aaron L Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relation: Is Conflict Inevitable?" *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005): 23.

²⁷ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington D.C.: The White House, September 2002), 27, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁹ Daniel Twining, "America's Grand Strategy in Asia," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2007): 83.

The Elephant and the Eagle – From Missile Defence to Civil Nuclear Cooperation

Since the beginning of his term in 2001, President Bush and members of his administration consistently affirmed that they would help India become a major world power.³⁰ U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, said “Washington’s broad aim was to help India become a major world power in the 21st Century.”³¹ In January 2004, the United States and India began the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) initiative; the programme was intended to enhance cooperation between the two countries in matters of civil space technology, civil nuclear technology, trade in other high technology and missile defense.³² To ensure that its plan to help India’s rise as a global power went into effect, the U.S. administration took two concrete steps soon after taking office and issuing the National Security Strategy of 2002. It offered India a National Missile Defense system in a behind-the-scenes bilateral dialogue in 2004 and two years later it also signed a Civil Nuclear Cooperation deal with the South Asian giant.

As early as 2001, U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who at the time was President Bush’s National Security Adviser, and Indian officials, including Minister for External Affairs, Natwar Singh, began discussing a broad partnership between the U.S. and India, which was to include new strategic parameters for stability and security.³³ In March 2004 under a joint statement issued by the U.S. State Department, the United States and India announced an agreement to expand dialogue on cooperation over missile defence.³⁴ Later in 2005, during a background briefing at the U.S. State Department, a senior official reiterated America’s desire to help India become a major world power in the 21st century and said that future US-India “strategic

³⁰ Ashley J. Tellis, “Indo-U.S. Relations Headed for a Grand Transformation?” YaleGlobal, July 2005, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=5999>

³¹ Alex Perry, “Why Bush Is Courting India,” *Time* (February 2006), <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1168486-1,00.html> (accessed 30 February 2006)

³² “President’s Statement on Strategic Partnership with India,” (January 2004), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040112-1.html>

³³ Ashley J. Tellis, “The Evolution of U.S.-Indian Ties,” *International Security* 30, no. 4 (2006): 128.

³⁴ U.S. Department of State, “United States-India Joint Statement on Next Steps in Strategic Partnership,” (Washington D.C.: Department of State, September 2004), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/36290.htm>.

dialogue will include global issues, the kinds of issues you would discuss with a world power.”³⁵ The official added that the strategic dialogue would discuss ways of transforming India’s security capabilities, including a missile defence system.³⁶

In June 2005 the U.S. and India signed a decade long agreement on defence cooperation called the “New Framework for U.S.-India Defense Relationship.”³⁷ In addition to high technology transfers, increase in two-way defence trade and U.S. arms sales to India to “strengthen India’s security,” the new framework would “expand collaboration on missile defense.”³⁸ The new “strategic parameter” that was referred in 2001 would finally be unveiled four years later as a National Missile Defence (NMD) programme that the Bush administration had offered to India. The NMD programme was the new administration’s attempt to rewrite the rules of nuclear-proliferation and transfer nuclear technology to India. The programme would help India become part of a “new international nuclear order.”³⁹

Living in a region where two of its neighbours, with both of which it has historically had tense relations, and both happen to be nuclear powers, a missile defence system is perceived by many in India as a strategic necessity for national security. A national missile defence system gives India the capability to detect, track, intercept and destroy short and medium-ranged nuclear and non-nuclear missiles. Under the new US-India framework for security cooperation India will procure several highly technologically advanced and expensive anti-missile systems. The State Department authorized Israel to sell India the U.S.-Israeli developed early warning system called the Phalcon airborne. Furthermore, under approval of the U.S. Defence Department, India has also procured from Israel a “sophisticated anti-missile platform” called the Arrow Weapon System. The Congressional Report on U.S.-India relations goes on to note that reportedly, the Indian government has

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, “Background Briefing by Administration Officials on U.S.-South Asia Relations,” (Washington D.C.: Department of State, March 2005), <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/43853.htm>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Embassy of India, “New Framework for U.S.-India Defense Relationship,” (Washington, DC: Embassy of India June 2005), http://www.indianembassy.org/press_release/2005/June/31.htm.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Tellis, “The Evolution of U.S.-Indian Ties,” 132.

created a list of U.S.-made weapons that it desires which includes PAC-3 anti-missile systems, as part of its National Missile Defence programme.⁴⁰

Stepped-up U.S.-India security ties in many ways have at their center the goal of countering growing Chinese power and the desire to control the emerging Chinese preponderance in Asia. A report by the U.S. Congressional Research Service clearly explains this strategy, reading “The United States views defense cooperation with India in the context of ‘common principles and shared national interests’ [which include] maintaining regional stability,” Washington’s code-phrase for “balancing China.”⁴¹ The U.S. believes that unless India has access to missile defence systems it would be at a disadvantage against neighbouring powers such as China and Pakistan. Since 2004, India and the United States have begun working on integrating strategic defence capabilities into India’s national military structure.⁴²

The strategy behind the new U.S.-India security framework is quite simple: to make India feel like a secure regional power. Under the larger policy of balancing it is imperative that India’s military strength and its defences be on par and preferably more advanced than China’s. The Congressional Report on U.S.-India relations states that “Many analysts view increased U.S.-India security ties as providing an alleged ‘hedge’ against or ‘counterbalance’ to growing Chinese influence in Asia, though both Washington and New Delhi repeatedly downplay such probable motives,” however, it soon confirms this analysis by reasserting its earlier premise and writing that convergences are being identified in U.S. and Indian national security which include “the emergence of a new balance-of-power arrangement in the region.”⁴³ The United States’ goal is to promote a “geopolitical equilibrium in Asia,” which by definition requires India to be able to counter Chinese military dominance.⁴⁴

In March 2006 President Bush visited India. This historic visit was to finalize another landmark in U.S.-India relations: the civil-nuclear deal. After intense negotiations the two parties finally reached an agreement at midnight, 2 March, 2006. India has been a booming economy with a thriving market, and high energy demands. India could be the fourth or

⁴⁰ Kronstadt, K.A. “India-U.S. Relations,” CRS Report for Congress, (Washington D.C.: Foreign Press Centre, December 2007), 35-37, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/99536.pdf>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Tellis, “The Evolution of U.S.-Indian Ties,” 151.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 116.

fifth largest economy by 2020.⁴⁵ The civil nuclear deal was intended to help India meet its energy demands. Furthermore, in the larger geopolitical context, this deal was to also detract India from buying energy from Iran.⁴⁶

The deal, which will increase India's nuclear capacity three-folds, however, was very controversial not only because of some clauses within the agreement, but also because India is not a signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.⁴⁷ Some of the key terms of the civil nuclear agreement are as follows:

- India shall place 14 of its 22 nuclear power reactors under international inspection.
- The remaining [eight] nuclear power reactors will be part of India's military programme.
- India will not place its experimental plutonium-based fast breeder power reactor programme under international inspection.
- The U.S. would continue to supply nuclear fuel to drive the nuclear reactors.
- Future nuclear power reactors will be classified as civil or military at India's discretion.
- If the U.S. continued to fuel the reactors, India will keep its civilian reactors open to international inspections.
- If one country stops fueling India's programme, it will be allowed to get nuclear fuel from another country [A few nations are currently providing India with nuclear fuel].
- IAEA safeguards of New Delhi's civilian facilities will be India-specific.⁴⁸

It is important to note that based on the accord, India's fast-breeder power reactor will not be inspected by any international agency, which means that India could use the fast-breeder for military purposes and a build-up of its nuclear arsenal.

⁴⁵ Jing-dong Yuan, "Elephant and the Dragon," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no.3 (2007): 135.

⁴⁶ Perry, "Why Bush Is Courting India,"

⁴⁷ "N-capacity of India to rise 3-fold, says Rice," *Dawn*, 14 March 2006, <http://www.dawn.com/2006/03/14/top15.htm>.

⁴⁸ "U.S.-India nuclear accord" *Dawn*, 3 March 2006, <http://www.dawn.com/2006/03/03/int4.htm>.

On 9 October 2008, President Bush signed the historic U.S.-India nuclear deal into a law, removing all previously imposed barriers on nuclear technology trade with India. The U.S. Senate had already ratified the deal earlier in the month by a vote of 87 to 13 (out of a total of 100 U.S. Senators) a week after the U.S. House of Representatives had also passed it by a vote of 298-117 (out of a total of 435 U.S. Representatives).⁴⁹ The Washington- created Nuclear Suppliers Group, a consortium of 45 nations involved in nuclear fuel trade, had already passed the U.S.-Indian nuclear deal earlier in 2008. Even though certain parts of this deal evoked criticism within the Indian opposition, the overall agreement is very generous in helping India expand and strengthen its defence capabilities.

U.S. officials did not shy away from making their goals behind the deal public. A State Department official expressed to the former Indian Foreign Secretary Shayam Saran that the U.S. had pursued this deal as part of its policy to create a “much greater balance in Asia.”⁵⁰ The authors of the deal were more elaborate in their remarks, commenting that this deal would help the U.S. build up India as a friendly counterweight to China.⁵¹ Another State Department official, Ashley J. Tellis, said that “a build-up of India’s nuclear arsenal is not only in New Delhi’s interest, but Washington’s. It will cause Beijing to worry more about India and less about the United States.”⁵² Critics of the deal argue that Bush’s unilateral decision to sign the civil nuclear deal with India without the consultation of other major powers like Britain, Russia, France and China not only destroyed the precious little sanctity that remained in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but also broke Asia’s nuclear balance of power. The deal has the potential of starting an arms race in the region.

How China feels about the growing U.S.-India security alliance is also important to this analysis. There is no doubt that China has subtly expressed uneasiness over U.S.-India coziness. The enhanced defence ties have not gone unnoticed and China realizes that it is the real target behind this emerging partnership. According to analysts and China

⁴⁹ Peter Baker, “Senate Approves Indian Nuclear Deal,” *New York Times*, 2 October 2008,

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/02/washington/02webnuke.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=nuclear%20deal&st=cse&oref=slogin.

⁵⁰ Perry, “Why Bush Is Courting India.”

⁵¹ Baker, “Senate Approves Indian Nuclear Deal.”

⁵² Perry, “Why Bush Is Courting India.”

specialists, the U.S.-India nuclear deal is nothing short of a security threat to China.

Stalling Bi-Polarity or Creating a Multi-Polar World?

There is little doubt that the strategic reasoning behind Washington's balance of power politics is strong. Nevertheless, the question is, how successful will this policy be? Will power politics in Asia play out in a balancing model as envisioned currently by the U.S. or will Asian international relations reveal a different set of behaviour? China and India have a history of turbulence: border disputes, "suspicion over each other's arms build-up and strategic intent, potential economic competition, and the changing balance of power and realignments" regionally and globally.⁵³ India also sees China as its strategic rival in the region.⁵⁴ However, this history is still not sufficient to prove that India will readily accept its role as a bulwark against Chinese hegemony.

As mentioned, the current strategy of balance of power politics is derived from the European political experience where states traditionally balanced one another. David Kang, who rejects the notion of balancing in Asia, is pessimistic about the United States' current policy.⁵⁵ Kang argues that Asian states, having a unique political history and culture, have not traditionally, and may still not act like European states.⁵⁶ Thus, they may not balance the power of a regional hegemon such as China. The fact that India is "wary of being seen in a role of countering China" is no secret.⁵⁷ Many on the Indian left are strongly opposed to partnering with Washington, wanting to avoid becoming Washington's bidders in South Asia. The Indian government, therefore, does not wish for its growing alliance with the U.S. to be a gesture of hostility toward China—it does not wish China to feel "encircled."⁵⁸

It must also be noted that because of the Qing and Ming dynasties, China has been the dominant player for most of Asia's history, and historically Asian states have chosen to band-wagon with the

⁵³ Yuan, "Elephant and the Dragon," 131.

⁵⁴ Teresita C. Schaffer, "Building a New Partnership with India," *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2002):37.

⁵⁵ David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: Need for New Analytical Framework," *International Security* 27, no.4 (2003): 57.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁵⁸ Schaffer, "Building a New Partnership with India," 41.

hegemon, rather than balance against it.⁵⁹ Thus, India's approach is not unusual to the Asian experience. China has a history of being a benevolent hegemon.⁶⁰ David Shambaugh, a China specialist, writes that in Asia, China is seen "as a good neighbor, a constructive partner, a careful listener, and a non-threatening regional power."⁶¹ Thus, the chances of cooperation rather than competition remain high in Asia.

As mentioned, India does not see itself as a bulwark against a rising China, and alternatively envisions itself as the backer of a "multi-polar world" with itself being one of the poles.⁶² India has maintained its independent foreign policy and has often declined to tow the U.S. line on international issues, especially its relationship with Iran.⁶³ China and India both pursue the development of a "fair and equitable international political and economic order" and an enhanced and continued role of the United Nations. Thus, both indirectly want to rein in US hegemony.⁶⁴

In January 2008, Indian Premier Manmohan Singh visited China for the first time since becoming the Prime Minister; the trip was declared to be a "landmark visit." India and China pledged cooperation by signing an agreement in which the two countries agreed to work bilaterally on military and economic matters. China and India deepened their trade relations, agreeing to raise bilateral trade to \$60 billion by 2010. Sino-Indian diplomats declared that the two nations would begin an era of economic and security cooperation. The leaders of both nations

⁵⁹ David C. Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations," *International Security* 28, no. 3(2003/2004): 175.

⁶⁰ David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security* 29, no.3 (2004/2005):95.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 64 - 87.

⁶² Teresita C Schaffer, "Building a New Partnership with India."

⁶³ Since the beginning of the century Iran, Pakistan and India have been involved in multilateral negotiations for the creation of a gas pipeline. The pipeline, coming from Iran, would provide India and Pakistan with energy. The U.S. has publicly opposed India's involvement with Iran and spoken out against the negotiations. The civil nuclear deal also aimed to reduce India's energy demand and create an alternative to buying energy from Iran. However, India has continued its negotiations with Iran and openly denounced the U.S. criticism. In April 2008, the Iranian President, Mehmoūd Ahmadinejad, visited Pakistan and India to finalize the deal. See "Gas pipeline to be finalized in 45 days: Iran," *The Times of India*, (May 2008), <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/2996492.cms>.

⁶⁴ Yuan, "Elephant and the Dragon," 133.

reaffirmed their support for an enhanced level of internationalism and the United Nations.⁶⁵

Analysts explain that Indian-Chinese relations are moving toward a new direction.⁶⁶ Whereas territorial disputes may not disappear, the two may compete in the Indian Ocean over resources and control, and India and China may not return to Nehru's famous call of "*Hindi-Chini bhai bhai*" ("Indians and Chinese are like brothers"), nevertheless, there still exist signs of an Indian-Chinese rapprochement. The two states look forward to pursuing state interests and seeing a gain in cordial relations. They have vested economic interests and realize that they both can benefit from each other's growth through strong trade relations and diplomatic cooperation.

Before Premier Singh left for China he was sure to mention that India envisions a cooperative role with China, looked to cultivate a positive relationship with the country, and would not be a part of any effort to "contain" it.⁶⁷ Such statements have been the hallmark of Indian foreign policy, which has largely been defined by nonalignment. India pursues friendship and energy cooperation with Iran, while pursuing a bilateral relationship with Israel in nuclear and security matters. It wants to cooperate with the U.S. in economic, energy and security matters, while simultaneously pursuing a strong relationship with China. In short, wanting to emerge as one of the great powers of the twenty-first century, India pursues a policy of multilateralism and refuses to become the member of any one "camp." It is this multilateralism which then questions the viability of current U.S. policy of balancing China's growing influence in Asia and whether it will help stall the rise of China and a bi-polar world order, or, will it accelerate the birth of a multi-polar world order?

⁶⁵ "India, China pledge new era of cooperation," *Dawn*, 15 January 2008, <http://www.dawn.com/2008/01/15/top13.htm>.

⁶⁶ Scholars continue to examine Sino-Indian relations and conclude that the two giants have moved from an era of hostile competition to greater cooperation. See Gillian Goh Hui Lynn. "China and India: Towards Greater Cooperation and Exchange," *China: An International Journal* 4, no. 2 (2006): 263-284; Zhao Hong. "India and China: Rivals or Partners in Southeast Asia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29, no. 1(2007): 121-142.

⁶⁷ J. Yardley; S. Sengupta, "Two Giants Try to Learn to Share Asia," *New York Times*, 13 January 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/world/asia/13singh.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=manmohan+visits+China&st=nyt&oref=slogin.

As Samuel Huntington writes, the international system is currently in a state of uni-multipolarity, and by using India as a bulwark against Chinese ascendancy, the United States is trying to maintain that structure. There is no doubt that with continued U.S. economic and security cooperation India will indeed rise to become one of the great powers within the coming decades. However, strong U.S.-India relations may not necessarily result in Sino-Indian competition. If India continues to follow a policy of cooperation with China and pursues economic and security integration, the international structure will no longer be “uni-multipolar” and the U.S. attempt to strengthen India will then fail to prevent bipolarity. China’s rise will lead to the creation of a bi-polar world order and the rise of India, which shall follow soon after, will usher the world into a multi-polar system.■