unanswered, and continues to expand enrichment and deny the IAEA full access. Moreover, China has already begun to undermine US-led international efforts by filling the void that European companies are leaving behind. China depends on Iran as its third largest oil supplier, and it is already increasing its badly needed investments in Iranian infrastructure and refineries. Obama's strategy of engagement is not biting enough and is under increasing pressure. Influential members of Congress are urging him to keep force on the table if sanctions do not deliver results quickly.[10] There is not enough trust between the US and Iran for negotiation anyway, even if Tehran were willing.

The president's efforts to engage China have also failed to bear fruit. Obama's first official visit to Beijing was widely considered a failure. He was deferential to the Chinese leadership and claimed to be America's first 'Pacific president', but failed to secure commitments from Beijing. He failed to secure co-operation in countering the weapons programmes in Iran and North Korea; he failed to get them to commit to emissions limitations; and he proved ambivalent on free trade. More recently, the undervalued Chinese currency is aggravating rising tensions between the two powers. The problem relates to imbalances in trade, investment, consumption and savings; as well as domestic concerns on both sides: high unemployment in the US and social stability or 'harmonious society' in China.[11] President Obama has framed the issue as a bilateral concern and favoured currency realignment, but economists are not sure currency shifts will reach foreign customers in the form of necessary price adjustments.[12] The problem is not bilateral but a broader, multilateral imbalance of trade and a lack of savings in the United States. The US needs trade with China at present to finance the deficit, but the perception of a weak Obama continues to hamper his efforts to secure co-operation.

The Unravelling of Solid, Clear Solutions

President Obama has focused on policy process and consensus-building at the expense of delivering rapid, clear or coherent solutions. He did come up with solutions for two of the most complex challenges he inherited – Guantánamo Bay and Iraq – but in both cases his clear solutions are unravelling. It proved impossible to close down Guantánamo Bay within one year, and it may not be possible at all for both legal and security reasons. This lost the president ground on the moral dimension of American foreign policy, and his stepping up of drone strikes in Pakistan have only reinforced public perceptions that Obama may not be as committed to values as he claimed. His solution for Iraq is also proving untenable. His declaration of the end of combat missions and the formation of a new government coincided with intensifying attacks. It is also suspected that Iranian-backed militias may be jockeying for support to influence the formation of a new government. Anxiety is high, and Iraqi politics are still in a state of paralysis. Obama has failed to produce solid outcomes in crisis situations, and this has been taken as a sign of weakness and incompetence.

President Obama's vision for foreign policy was clear from the four speeches he delivered in the early part of his presidency, but his approach to engagement and his deliberative approach to policy-making have come at the expense of clear, coherent solutions two years on. His search for the middle ground and bipartisan support have fuelled his critics and undermined his credibility in American public opinion. This leaves him increasingly discredited at home and overseas in a world that had already doubted American power. The world's most troubled regions, crises and transnational threats are enduring. They arose before the Bush presidency and they have continued into the Obama presidency. Obama and his remaining supporters within the Democratic Party must regenerate an electoral base, but as Waldon Bello suggested, the 'troops that have long been disbanded and left by the wayside are rightfully asking: around what?'[13]

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Obama and India: A Robust Relationship

Nearly two years into his tenure, Barack Obama has visited India. It is one of the few countries where his predecessor, George W Bush, enjoyed considerable popularity even after the invasion of Iraq. Obama came without the gifts that Bush conveyed in 2005, when a strategic partnership was inked and a momentous civil nuclear co-operation deal was set in motion. Not only that, but he arrived weighed down with the baggage of a foreign policy that is not just failing, but, many contend, appears to be crumbling over India itself.

This view is not entirely incorrect, but it does lack perspective, particularly in light of Obama's much-heralded support for India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Strategic alignments and misalignments alike suffer from inertia, which is why India and the United States only codified and declared their rapprochement in 2005. This was over a decade after India's economic liberalisation transformed its economic base, its future prospects, and its elite's attitudes towards alliances. In 2000, India's former foreign secretary Jaswant Singh sourly noted the 'five wasted decades' that had preceded President Clinton's famous visit to New Delhi. The decade following Singh's lament could scarcely have ushered in a greater change. But it will be another decade

still before the relationship acquires its potential depth. This is not a bad timeline, considering that a great deal of mutual distrust must drain away, that the US will take time to orientate itself away from seeing South Asia through an Afghan lens, and that India must narrow the internal consensus over the terms on which it will engage with Washington and make concessions of its own.

Consider, first, the widespread sense that something is rotten in the state of Indo-American ties, that the bonhomie of the last half decade is a hollow and precarious charade that has been melting since the inauguration of President Obama. It is undeniable that the Obama administration does not view India through the same Manichean lens employed by the previous occupants of the White House, according to which democratic India was a natural counterweight to Communist, aggressive China, and thereby worthy of strengthening at the expense of American non-proliferation commitments.

The Bush administration's strength was to fashion a powerful pro-Indian bureaucratic coalition in the State Department and Pentagon, drive it forcefully through the non-proliferation battlements in Congress, and fix the narrative on the uncomplicated ideological terrain of democracy and defence.[1]

The most serious grievance has been the by-product of one of Obama's key foreign policy blackspots, the stalled war in Afghanistan, into which he ploughed political, pecuniary and human treasure.[2] It is not just that the nine year war has entailed enormous military assistance to Pakistan ($300 million in 2009, and $6.6 billion from 2002 to 2008), against whom India mobilised 700,000 troops as recently as 2002. It is also that the settlement of January 2010 was thought to sideline India and pave the way for an empowerment of the Pakistan-backed Afghan Taliban and other groups, whose reign from the early 1990s to 2001 allowed the accretion of India-orientated militants and a sprawling jihadist infrastructure. India had previously sponsored the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance and injected over a billion dollars into Afghanistan, becoming its largest regional donor.[3]

The journalist Bob Woodward's most recent book has Obama conclude, in November 2009, that 'the cancer is in Pakistan'. On the Mumbai attacks, Woodward notes that 'the CIA later received reliable intelligence that the ISI [Pakistani military intelligence] was directly involved in the training for Mumbai'.[4] The problem is that the US has consistently judged that Pakistani state complicity in abetting both insurgency and terrorism did not and does not outweigh the need to keep the government and army on side, both to urge it to expand military action in Waziristan and to facilitate supply for the numerous Western forces in Afghanistan.[5]

This underscores an important characteristic of Indo-US relations, which is that spoilers generally wield more influence than constructive actors. India has been so far unwilling to seriously promote discord within the Karzai government by renewing its links with non-Pashtun power brokers, and has repeatedly ruled out a military presence. Pakistan, on the other hand, flexed its muscles in September by closing the border crossings, giving NATO a small taste of the havoc that it could cause if displeased. India did itself no favours by toying with the idea of backing Abdullah Abdullah over the previously strongly pro-Indian Hamid Karzai in the presidential elections of 2009.[6]

India's slipping position in Kabul has not been the only source of friction. Even before assuming power Obama, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, declared his faith in the pervasive idea that the road to Kabul ran through Kashmir.[7] This had as its corollary the notion that an Indo-Pakistan peace would be instrumental in transforming Pakistan's foreign policy in accordance with American goals. Still held by many, this diagnosis is superficial and likely incorrect. It angered the Indian government, which had no wish to reward Islamabad's foot-dragging over the Mumbai attacks and its proxies' continued efforts against Indian interests in Afghanistan with dialogue over a territory seen as an integral part of India.

It is now widely accepted that India successfully lobbied to ensure that Richard Holbrooke, the US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, would not have Kashmir in his remit, and made clear that it resented what it interpreted as appeasement of Pakistan. What fuels these insecurities has been fear of the return of 'hyphenation' – the yoking together of India and Pakistan in US policy, weighing down the entire relationship. This prickliness unhelpfully reinforced long-standing American tropes of India as a reactive, stubborn and unhelpful country.

Moreover, the arrest of a Lashkar-e-Taiba operative from Chicago, David Headley, furnished another grievance. Headley had played a key role in the attacks and testified regarding the involvement of the Pakistani ISI. In contrast to the extensive access granted by India to US investigators in Mumbai, the US tightly limited Indian access to Headley, and information about the suspect's deep involvement with US agencies continues to trickle out.[8]

The frustration has not been entirely one-sided. India and China co-operated to stymie real progress at the Copenhagen summit on climate change last year; a nuclear liability bill passed by India in August might have crippled the prospect of realising the full benefits of the civil nuclear co-operation agreement; and India previously played a starring role in the collapse of the Doha round of trade talks. Additionally, as both Sumit Ganguly and Ashley Tellis have recently argued, India has done a poor job of articulating what benefits it can furnish to the US in return for US gestures and assistance.[9] India runs the risk of overstating its commercial lure and strategic weight without more intensive efforts to demonstrate its value as a partner.

More broadly, it was ironic that the deterioration in the Sino-Indian relationship – induced in no small part by the intimacy between Delhi and Washington – began at the same time as the mood in the White House shifted away from the notion of China as a threatening peer competitor, towards the belief that it was critical to realising US goals on the Iranian nuclear programme, the global economy and much else. In November 2009, a Sino-American communiqué from Beijing during Obama's visit set Indian diplomats on edge. It appeared to sanction an 'overseer' role in South Asia;[10] as with so much in US-India diplomacy, it was no doubt innocuous to its authors but little could have done more to offend Indian sensibilities.

Is the change in mood warranted? Few would seriously doubt that Obama is not Bush when it comes to India. It is unlikely that an Obama White House would have crafted the ground-breaking initiatives that jerked bilateral ties onto an even -higher trajectory in the years after 2001 (though Obama did tentatively support the nuclear deal as a senator). Furthermore, it is likely that the support for India's Security Council bid will come to nothing

for the foreseeable future. But this is too cynical and one-sided a perspective on a relationship that has been transformed beyond recognition over the last decade.

First, it is natural that strands of discontinuity stand out, particularly to Indians who remember the potent sanctions slapped on them by the Clinton administration in 1998 (condemning numerous weapons programmes to failure) and the soft treatment afforded to General Musharraf after 11 September 2001 and even after the crisis of 2001–2. On the fundamentals, however, Obama has stayed the course. His commitment to counter-insurgency in Afghanistan was considerable in the context of domestic political constraints, and in accord with the Indian faith in a US military presence.

Far from enabling Pakistani hegemony over Afghanistan, he held to a moderate position on talks with the Taliban (to which there is not as much official Indian opposition as is sometimes supposed). He insisted on tighter conditionality on aid to Pakistan than that demanded by President Bush, and remained almost entirely detached from the Kashmir issue, even as the restive state is at its most prominent in a decade, and civilian deaths mount.

Second, conflicts of interest have been managed remarkably well. India has angered Iran by voting against it three times in the IAEA. Although India does not wish to see a nuclear Iran, its votes have been almost entirely a result of US pressure. This has not, however, crippled Indo-Iranian ties. India has not hesitated to invest in energy resources there, and the two states – along with Russia – are renewing co-operation in Afghanistan, a hugely important step for India's diplomacy in the region. In Burma, India's commitment to democratisation saw it lose energy access and influence to Beijing. India swiftly rebalanced its policy, and has held off American pressure very successfully.

Apart from the major standoff of 2002, India's attitude towards Pakistan has been characterised by almost extreme restraint, despite multiple attacks of suspected Pakistani provenance. This has ensured that Pakistan has had little ability to redeploy troops away from its western border – where the US wants them – by pointing to an imminent Indian threat.

In all of this, India has, contrary to popular perceptions of lumbering diplomacy buffeted by short-term pressures, balanced its interests with not unimpressive adroitness. To contrast this with another state straddling powerful alliances, Turkey has come across worse in the course of balancing competing cross-national interests in the shadow of Washington.

Third, the underlying mechanics of the relationship – bureaucratic and military ties built up over the past ten years – are more than healthy. Counter-terrorism co-operation between intelligence and law enforcement officials has quietly flourished since 2001. Although its results have been largely classified, it has served to prevent attacks and render groups, particularly Lashkar-e-Taiba, more transparent to authorities in Delhi.

Military-to-military contacts have not slowed, and joint exercises – unthinkable twenty-five years ago – continue apace. The latest were amphibious exercises in the East China Sea, a location that highlights that the US military, parts of which retain an almost organisational Sino-centrism, can still engage effectively with likeminded portions of the Indian military such as the prospering Indian Navy. These mid-level contacts are often the conduit for the most intensive and meaningful co-operation, because they have their own momentum and often take place amongst mutually intelligible technocrats and specialists.

Fourth, if the Obama administration had truly undertaken to orientate itself away from India, we would not be observing the remarkable arms deals being inked at a rapid pace. Although the US is in the process of supplying eighteen F-16 fighter aircraft to Pakistan, the scale and importance of its arms relationship with India is in many ways greater. Indeed, the F16 variant being offered to India is technically superior to that which has been supplied to Pakistan.

This is often overlooked in Indian critiques of bilateral ties. India has bought or is near to purchasing ten C-17 Globemaster strategic airlift aircraft ($3.5 to 5.8 billion), twelve P-8I Poseidon maritime reconnaissance aircraft (over $3 billion), six C-130 Hercules transport aircraft ($1 billion), twenty-four Harpoon anti-ship missiles ($170 million), light Howitzers ($647 million) and a great deal else. Two American fighter aircraft (variants of the F/A-18 and F-16) are also bidding to win India's massive contract for a fleet of multirole combat aircraft, and the success of an American engine for an indigenous Indian light combat aircraft bodes well for their chances. India has not received the full extent of technology transfers it desires, but this is a vigorously debated issue, and it is virtually inevitable that the quality and quantity of advanced technology transferred to India will increase over the next decade. This is particularly the case after Obama's November trip saw the following removed from a technology sanctions list: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Hyderabad-based Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) and Department of Atomic Energy.

None of this is consistent with the image of a US administration insensitive to Indian needs. Of course, there are straightforward commercial reasons for American arms sales, but they are not without strategic import. The US is augmenting India's airlift capacity in ways that will genuinely reinforce India's ability to counter China's much-improved Tibetan infrastructure. The improved maritime reconnaissance capabilities will help India in placing tighter limits on any future Chinese naval expansion into the Indian Ocean, in turn bolstering the security of India's anticipated three carrier groups. The supply of Howitzers is crucial to addressing the army's crippling artillery shortage, which renders them particularly vulnerable in the mountains of the northeast.

Although US sales to Pakistan are obviously inimical to India's security, they are no more serious than they were under the supposed watershed of the Bush years. Similarly, India has legitimate concerns about the reliability of US sales. Will spare parts be forthcoming in any future conflict with Pakistan, and will the limited technology transfers impede the advancement of indigenous Indian industry? These, though, have been ever-present and yet gradually shrinking obstacles in the relationship for many years.

What is suggested here is that we temper the recognition of minor Indo-American misalignments with the wider perspective of a relationship that has kept up the momentum it was painstakingly given in 2005. In Afghanistan, the shifts favouring Pakistan were a function of a faltering war, a weak president in Kabul, minimal Indian commitment, and Pakistani resolve to use even self-destructive means of preserving

so-called 'strategic depth'. Although the US stance towards Pakistan has been lethargic and misguided long after it should have adapted, this is not unique to Obama and his foreign policy team.

Decision-makers in Delhi might also note that some of the most important restrictions on the relationship do not emanate from Washington, but arise out of Delhi's own uncertainty over the partnership. Strategic elites in India are wary of forming anything resembling an overt coalition against China, but complain that others have been insufficiently attentive to China's newly aggressive stance on disputed territories. On the nuclear deal, India dealt remarkably poorly with what was a highly generous offer, and has subsequently operationalised the deal with comparatively little thought to American interests.

Barack Obama nevertheless understood the perception that the two countries were losing traction with one another, and threw his first state dinner for the Indian prime minister, who is not even a head of state. In previous years, a visiting US president would neither have gone to such lengths to address these issues, nor ensured that Kashmir was kept resolutely off the agenda for fear of giving offence. The underlying strategic imperatives that drove together the 'estranged democracies' remain in place and will act upon respective governments and bureaucracies in ways that will continue the trend of 2000–10. This is perhaps even truer in light of the US global position weakening more quickly than was thought likely a decade ago, and the gradual but perceptible Chinese willingness to act with greater assertiveness than before, whether in maritime disputes or possible rare earth embargoes.[11] This is why there is much more continuity between Bush and Obama than observers have hitherto assumed; it is easier to point to Obama's published views on Kashmir than it is to carefully track the actual course of American policy, which has been largely in tune with Indian demands, and so the overall picture is bound to be misleading. As such, the partnership will continue to move out of its adolescence, perhaps not in the direction of a more perfect union, but surely towards a less imperfect partnership.

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Iraq: Stability or Partition?

The latest terrorist attempt to hit at the West and bring the aviation industry to its knees was frustrated by the effective and timely intervention of Saudi Arabia's intelligence services, who provided information about explosive ink cartridges loaded on cargo planes. However, this is not the only contribution to regional stability made by the government in Riyadh. For Saudi Arabia is also deeply involved in attempts to form a stable and broad government in Iraq, and these efforts deserve stronger Western endorsement.

Supporters of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki have claimed that Iraq is close to forming a government that will combine the talents of the moderate Shia group of Ayad Al-Allawi with the Basra-based Shia group of the more extremist Muqtada Al-Sadr. But, despite all the claims to the contrary, such a government would be anti-American, pro-Iranian and a strong factor in an eventual partition and break-up of Iraq.

Until a few weeks ago the Sadrists were strongly opposed to the re-election of Maliki, who himself appeared appalled at the prospect of association with the group that has rendered Basra largely ungovernable.

The apparent *volte-face* on both sides has brought out into the open a bitterly fought political, religious and tribal conflict that has concerned observers and regional players for the past six months. Essentially, it would appear that Iran has been pouring arms and unlimited amounts of cash into Iraq as well as into other strategic points throughout the Middle Eastern region, as part of Tehran's concerted campaign of destabilisation.

Iranian weapons have been routed through the new drugs gateways in Western Africa, aimed at Morocco, Gaza, Egypt and Sudan. Arms and cash have also been pouring across the Iraqi and Afghan borders from the government in Tehran. It is clear what the Iranian regime wants: to create powerful surrogate warlords over Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Sadrists in Iraq and various elements in Afghanistan, all with the intent of manoeuvring Iran into a position of power and influence in strategic countries, and giving Tehran the capabilities to frustrate the interests of the West and its allies for the foreseeable future. It is essential that this unacceptable level of interference on the part of the Iranians is firmly opposed and countered by a diplomatic initiative backed by a show of military strength.

The government in Saudi Arabia, greatly concerned by the situation and the potential for political chaos on its borders, has recently offered to host a crisis conference in the Kingdom immediately