United Front Government and Indo-US Relations
CHAPTER: 6


In 1996, the elections were held both in India and the United States. In India, P.V. Narasimha Rao’s Government could not win the support of majority, while in the United States, Bill Clinton won the election and could remain in office for another four years.

The result of the 1996 general election in India, which was held over three days at the end of April and early May, was that no party wins an overall majority. The largest party in terms of seats was the BJP, which won 160 seats, and with the support of the Siv Sena and other smaller allies could count on an overall legislative strength of 194 seats, while Congress gained 136 seats. The National Front and the Left Front together obtained 179 seats, with the remainder won by minor parties and independents.

As soon as the electoral position was cleared, on 15 May, the President asked the BJP under its new parliamentary leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to form the new Government and to prove its majority within two weeks. Given the antagonism felt towards the BJP by the majority of other political parties, this was impossible, and Vajpayee resigned on 28 May in anticipation of his Government’s inevitable defeat in a parliamentary vote of confidence.¹

In the mean time, the National and Left Fronts had merged to form an informal coalition known as the United Front (UF), which comprised a total of 13 parties, with the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party, the two communist parties and the regional DMK and Telugu Desam as its major components. With Congress prepared to lend external support, the UF was able to form a Government at the end of May. With no overwhelmingly powerful individual leader within the UF, several names

had been put forward to head the coalition and therefore to assume the premiership. H.D. Deve Gowda was selected to lead the UF and the new Government.

A senior Congress leader, Inder Kumar Gujral was appointed as Minister of External Affairs. Gujral continued to follow the earlier orientations of Narasimha Rao’s policies. His optimism embodied in the “Gujral Doctrine” about unilateral goodwill and generosity.²

In March 1997, the Congress started threatening to withdraw its support from the Government unless Deve Gowda resigned as Prime Minister. Although, this threat might have been a bluff, since Congress would not necessarily have won any subsequent election, it nevertheless achieved its goal by forcing Deve Gowda’s resignation in mid-April (following his defeat in a parliamentary vote of confidence).³ After that Gujral was selected to be the new Prime Minister of India.

Towards the end of 1997, Congress finally withdrew its support for the UF Government over issues concerning an inquiry into Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination and Prime Minister Gujral was consequently forced to resign on 28 November. This constituted the third government collapse in less than two years.

In early December the President dissolved the Lok Sabha following the inability of both Congress and the BJP to form an alternative coalition government.⁴ Thus, Gujral retained the premiership in an acting capacity pending the holding of a fresh general election in February-March 1998.

Gujral’s policy goodwill towards smaller neighbours, which is known as ‘Gujral Doctrine’ received a great applause from the United States. The Gujral Government had realized that a confrontational approach of negativism may isolate India on disarmament and related issues. India seems to have shifted gears to become more realistic in its approach, which was both appropriate and desirable.⁵

At the start of Clinton’s second term, he decided to seek a new and friendlier chapter in relations with India, stressing common interests and values, placing

---

³ David Taylor, n.1 , p. 160
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ J.N. Dixit, n. 2 , p. 222
reduced emphasis on the nuclear issue, changing its position on Kashmir issue and deepens the bilateral relationship with India by initiating a series of high-level visits to India.\(^6\)

There was also some change in US attitude towards the Kashmir issue, and on 20 May 1996 the US President Bill Clinton said that “Kashmir is one of the world’s two most dangerous flash points”.\(^7\) However, at this time, the US seems to be more careful not to interfere and had not done much in favour of Pakistan as before. This was more visible, when on 4 October; the United States Department rejected Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto’s call for an international conference on Kashmir.\(^8\)

On 13 December 1996, the United States Assistant Secretary of State Robin Raphel said that “the election in Kashmir is not going to resolve the underlying question of Kashmir as a disputed territory. That need to be sorted out between India and Pakistan”.\(^9\) In this way, we see that although the US stills consider Kashmir as a disputed territory but it was more careful not to interfere directly.

However, on January 1997, the United States Ambassador to India, Frank Wisner, remarked that “India should show greater accommodation towards Pakistan”.\(^10\) To this, Prime Minister I.K. Gujral terms the remarks ‘unfortunate’.

At the time when Frank Wisner left for home in July 1997, he found India “destined to be an important actor on the world stage and an important partner of the US in international affairs”. He noted “a definite shift in opinion on both sides that he led to the abatement of some of the acrimony with which the relationship was marked”. Wisner also saw greater interaction on political and economic issues, as well as on such global problems as terrorism, drug trafficking environment and population.\(^11\)


\(^8\) Ibid., p. 191

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid.

“In a US administration in which South Asian region was less than a blip on Washington’s radar screen and lesser officials of the state Department ran their caprice in what went for South Asia policy”,12 Wisner tried to moderate the hostile edges and raise India’s stakes among influential US corporate community. Also it was because of his effort in first months of 1997, the US toned down censorious articulation about India, and the nuclear issue, though still a continuing as a contentious issue became less of a prickly point in the discourse of the Political representatives of both the countries. But he did not miss to mention Kashmir as “an area of tremendous importance (which) remained high on India – US agenda”.13

The US ambassador had visited this trouble state many times during his three year stint. On Wisner’s pontification on how India should conduct its relations with others, Mahendra Ved commented: “Prime Minister has had to criticize US ambassador for it is a clear indicator of Indian sensitivity to being needled on the Kashmir issue. Equally it was a reaction to what India perceived as the US tilt towards Pakistan”. He added “the current brush has a message for a region where Mr. Wisner candidly admits that the US has important national interest at stake”.14

The political analysts noted marked change in nuance with the US, during the year 1997, as reflected in the speeches of a new US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Karl F. Inderfurth (who replaced Robin Raphel in December 1997) as contrasted to Robin Raphel (earlier Raphel said in her first press conference that the US did not recognize the Instrument of Accession of Jammu & Kashmir to India It was admitted that “roll back of weaponization and missile advancement was unattainable in India and Pakistan. What we have decided, instead, is to cap their nuclear capabilities”.15

For the Kashmir issue, during his visit to New Delhi in September 1997, Inderfurth made it clear that the US did not intend to play an active role as mediator in the Kashmir issue. He reiterated the long – standing policy of encouraging a continuing dialogue between the two countries.

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Selig H. Harrison “The United States and South Asia: Trapped by the Past?”, Current History, December 1997
Inderfurth made an initial move, breaking with the tradition, and meeting with all of the South Asian ambassadors without waiting them to call on him and visiting all the nations in the region. According to Inderfurth, the US was not looking to make any “quantum leap” toward India, or at the same time be simply content with “incremental steps. We are in this for the long – term, for the long – haul”.  

India’s economic reform process began to influence the US think-tanks on India. Major recommendations of some of them indicated the potential for an improvement in Indo – US relations, both Indian and the United States willingly moved with their engagement in economic relations.

Another example of think - tanks was the report of New York – based Council on Foreign Relation in early 1997, outlining a new post - Cold War US policy towards South Asia, it was noted that reversing the de facto nuclear- weapons state of India and Pakistan was “currently extremely unlikely”. It noted “the time is ripe, in particular, for the US to propose a closer strategic relationship with India, which has the potential to emerge as a full – fledged major power”.

During Clinton – Gujral administration, particularly the year 1997, promised to be a turning point for an improvement in Indo – US relations. Former diplomat and eminent analyst and the author of “India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, Dennis Kux acknowledged that both countries were certainly less estranged than they ever were. Referring to the string of high-level US visit to India, Kux said: “This is the first time in many years that we’ ve seen something like that… Overall it has been a very upbeat year for Indo – US relations”.

Since 1997, American concern with Islamic terrorism has also led to a convergence of Indian and US interests and a consequent improvement in relations between the two countries. This was due to the US declared the Harkat – ul – Ansar a terrorist group. In a report on ‘Patterns of Global Terrorism, the US State Department reported on the continued official Pakistan support to militants fighting

---

16 Tarun Basu, n. 11.
17 Selig H. Harrison, n. 15.
in Kashmir. It also stated that five foreign hostages kidnapped in the Kashmir valley by Al-Faran, a front group for Harkat –ul-Ansar, had probably been killed. This report also gave details of Harkat –ul – Ansar’s bases in Pakistan and its militant operations in Kashmir, Myanmar, Tajikistan and Bosnia. Since the beginning of political insurgency in Kashmir, the Indian government had consistently maintained that several Pakistani Islamic groups enjoying the support of the government of Pakistan had been largely responsible for sending jihad militants to Kashmir region. The US State Department’s acknowledgement of Pakistan’s involvement gave a boost to India’s stance on Kashmir. In the US Congress, Frank Pallone led the Indian case and condemned ‘Pakistan’s proxy war’ in Kashmir.19

However, around this time, strong disagreement stills persisted with regard to matters of security in the context of the NPT and CTBT. Also the May 1997 US decision to put India again on the watch list for possible action under Super 301 again gave a set back to the process of development of high level Indo – US cooperation and trade relations.

With regard to the matter of CTBT, India has firmly refused to sign the treaty in its present form. On 20 June 1996, Arundhati Ghosh, India’s representative at the Geneva talks on CTBT, made it clear that the draft treaty was not acceptable to India. It was not doing anything new to end the existing five-nation nuclear monopoly, or taking any step to a comprehensive nuclear disarmament.20 Opposing the draft treaty, the Indian representative said: “Let me make one thing extremely clear. India will not sign this treaty unless its concerns are not taken on board.” 21

India rejected the CTBT on three major counts. Firstly, adherence to it would affect India’s security interests. Secondly, India’s demand for a clear commitment on the part of the five nuclear weapon powers to total nuclear disarmament within a fixed period was not included in the CTBT and thirdly, it was not truly a comprehensive treaty but only a nuclear test explosion ban treaty which allowed

21 Times of India, 30 June 1996.
certain types of nuclear weapon related tests to be conducted by the technologically more adept nuclear weapon states.

India’s view a treaty on nuclear test ban which would be comprehensive in character should have three essential characteristics namely: (a) it should cover all states including the five nuclear weapon states; (b) it should extend the prohibition on the testing of nuclear weapons to the underground environment as well (c) it should do so for all times.22

New Delhi has been pressing for a universal and non-discriminatory approach in dealing with the measures of nuclear non-proliferation. It has been observed that India’s “Long-standing support for the comprehensive test ban is in keeping with its position that arms control measures should be universal and non-discriminatory rather than regional and selective.”23 The CTBT, besides failing to check qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons by the nuclear weapon states, has no provision to prevent transfer of nuclear weapons materials and technology from nuclear weapon states to non-nuclear weapon states.24 The treaty has no verification provision to monitor such transactions.25

While the negotiations for a CTBT were in progress the United States and France signed an agreement which would allow the two to share for the first time a large amount of computer data drawn from simulated explosion of nuclear weapons it was obviously meant for qualitative improvement of their nuclear weapons.26 The US also has arrangement with the UK and China to cooperate in simulation explosion technology.27 Besides, the US has invested several million dollars for supercomputer to help design and test new nuclear weapons in simulation technique.

Thus, as the CTBT does not ban non-explosive sub-critical testing and computer simulation technique, qualitative improvements of nuclear weapons by the

---

26 Times of India. 30 June 1996.
nuclear weapon states will continue. The result was that the CTBT would not prevent vertical proliferation and there was every reason to believe that it would set the framework for a new qualitative arms race.

In July 1996, India insisted that a "genuine" CTBT should ban all forms of nuclear testing including "cold testing" in laboratories. In the same month, the then External Affairs Minister I.K. Gujral said in the Rajya Sabha on 11 July 1996 that "CTBT is not in the interest of India's national security". Making a detailed statement on CTBT in both houses of Parliament on 15 July 1996, he said "Our nuclear policy is intimately linked with our national security concerns,".India, he observed, was "deeply conscious that other countries in our region continue their weapon programmes, whether openly or in a clandestine manners".

Gujral firmly opposed the CTBT because of its discriminatory provisions. Such a stand ensured that India could meet its national security concerns. The same approach has also been adopted by him in dealing with the fissile material cut-off treaty. However, regarding to the relationship with the United States, Gujral stressed that India's standpoint on the CTBT would not (or should not) have a deleterious impact on the overall relationship.

By 1996 it was clear to the United States that India would not sign the treaty and was inclined to use the consensual decision-making rules of the Conference on Disarmament to prevent the rest of the world from adopting it.

After that Secretary of State Warren Christopher communicated by phone and letter with Inder Gujral to reassure India that the United States and others would not sanction or otherwise punish India for not signing the treaty, if only India would not block the Conference on Disarmament from concluding the treaty for others to sign. Dispassionate commentators in India recognized that this was a concession

---

28 Times of India, 13 July 1996.
29 Ibid., July 17, 1996
30 Ibid.
31 J.N. Dixit, n.2, p. 222
worth taking, especially because India’s veto in Geneva would not block alternate routes to completing the treaty.  

American officials, too, thought India would pocket Washington’s promise of non-coercion and then not sign the treaty. However, such views neglected the role of personalities and tone in US–Indian relations and non-proliferation policy. Gujral felt that non-proliferation, including the CTBT, was a colonial project. Moreover, he felt that Christopher had treated him patronizingly. The stubborn foreign minister put politics, pride, and principle ahead of pragmatism and refused to agree not to block the treaty in Geneva, even though the move would be ineffective. For their part, it was suggested that American officials should have known that their rather hegemonic approach to India in the CTBT negotiation was destined to backfire.

On 10 August 1996, Warren Christopher said that “the US is determined not to allow a single nation to prevent from reaching a test ban treaty and terms India’s demand for setting up a time table for the elimination of nuclear arsenals not possible”.

After the above statement, on August 14, India blocked the move to forward the treaty to the full body of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, the rest of the international community took a detour and passed the treaty through the UN General Assembly where it won the support by a 158 to 3 margin. India was joined only by Bhutan and Libya in voting “no”.

However, many people’s surprise that the United States moved quickly to say that Indo-American relations were much broader than disputes on nuclear policy.

At the Special Session of the UN General Assembly convened in September 1996 to debate the CTBT, Prakash Shah, India’s Permanent Representative, pointed out that CTBT “will not end nuclear testing; it will not stop development and

---

33 George Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 382
34 Ibid., p. 383
35 Daniel Joseph Kuba and G.V. Vaidyanatha, n.7, 190
36 George Perkovich, n.53, p. 387.
qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons. Instead it will only further sustain the present nuclear hegemony.”

As the pressure on India was mounting in 1997, the intelligence agencies of the concerned nations discovered the continued proliferation relationship between China and Pakistan; all with the blessings of USA. China also flouted the MTCR and continued to supply missiles and missile technology to Pakistan directly as also through North Korea.

In spite of such evidence being available, Clinton Administration certified that China was not proliferating nuclear technologies and flouting NPT and MTCR, just because USA wanted strategic partnership with China. China was not restrained by own security interests. To top it all, Pakistan tested it GHAURI missile in April 1998. North Korea had flouted the MTCR. USA failed to take cognizance of this proliferation as well.

Thus, the stage was set for India to take notice of Pakistan’s nuclear capability and its collaboration China in nuclear field.

India did warn USA to act before Clinton’s visit to China in May 1998. Since nothing was done by USA, India decided to go nuclear before majority of the international community ratified CTBT. It decided to carry out the nuclear tests, weaponise, created adequate deterrent to bring a degree of balance in the power equations in this part of the world. India did not wish to remain in the receiving end of US duplicity and the hypocrisy of the Western World and China.

August 1997; Indo – Pakistan skirmishes on the Line of Control and the US role

Apart from the non – proliferation and CTBT issues, the tension between India and Pakistan during August 1997 has also become one of the main factor which brought the US involvement on the agenda for the discussions with the Indian and Pakistan Prime Ministers.

---

37 *Times of India*, 12 September 1996.
As Indo-Pakistan tensions were revived and exacerbated from the 24th August, 1997 with large scale skirmishes and heavy firing between Indian and Pakistani troops all along the Line of Actual Control in Jammu and Kashmir, media reports on 25th August mentioned between 50 and 70 Pakistani soldiers including some Pakistan military officers being killed. Indian casualties mentioned were; one major and two jawans. The Brigade Commander of the Indian Army, Jasbir Singh Lidder and another officer, Col. Katoch narrowly escaped death in a Pakistani shooting spree on the 26th of August.38

After the incident took place, there has been much anxiety and concern in Indian public opinion about the tension on the Line of Actual Control reaching critical thresholds.

However there was a contradiction political statements emanating both from New Delhi and Islamabad about the implications of this latest Indo-Pak military confrontation. India Army Headquarters described the developments as serious. Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, speaking at Lucknow, said “there is nothing extraordinary in what is happening; these are routine skirmishes which keep happening”.39

Though there was no direct statement from Gujral till the 27th of August, his office indicated that India takes note of the seriousness of the incidents and is capable of resisting this latest threat from Pakistan. The Indian Foreign Office spokesmen made a highly critical statement about Pakistan’s military activities, implying that the exercise was aimed at sabotaging the process of reconciliation. The Government of Pakistan did not highlight the incident at all during the first two days, preferring to describe the situation as part of a pattern of simmering tension on the Line of Actual Control. But Pakistan became stridently critical of India, accusing her of having started the military confrontation. Pakistan’s Deputy High Commissioner in New Delhi repeated this accusation. Meanwhile, Pakistan lodged a formal and detailed complaint with the UN Military Observer Group on its side of the Line of Actual Control against India.40

39 Ibid., pp. 169-70.
40 Ibid.
The United States has evinced keener interest in Indo–Pakistan relations on the Jammu and Kashmir issue. In fact, there was an undercurrent in the US establishment’s desire to play a direct mediatory role in Indo–Pakistan relations. It would be pertinent to recall US policy statements over the last two and a half months in substantiation of this view. President Clinton stressed the need for a strong US presence in South Asia in July. Senior State Department Adviser in the South Asia Bureau, George Pickart stated early in August that the US considers Jammu and Kashmir as disputed territory and that the issue should be resolved by both countries taking the desire of the Kashmiris into account. This was followed by massages from the US Government that they would like to organize a tripartite meeting between President Clinton and Prime Ministers Gujral and Nawaz Sharif in New York when the two South Asian leaders proceed to New York for the UN General Assembly session. In fact, US authorities suggested that Gujral advance his visit by about a week so that he could meet President Clinton. India has rejected the suggestion for tripartite meeting or any mediation by USA on the Jammu and Kashmir issue.\(^{41}\)

At that time, some reports were that Gujral may rearrange his programme of visit to New York so that he could meet President Clinton. There was also information that Clinton would meet Nawaz Sharif and Gujral separately. It was obvious that Kashmir and regional non-proliferation issues would be the main items on the US agenda for these discussions with the Indian and Pakistan Prime Minister.

There was a renewed offer of mediatory assistance from the US in the aftermath of the recent military confrontation between India and Pakistan on the Line of Actual Control.

Apart from the US motivation of ensuring a stable politico-strategic environment in South Asia in terms of general considerations of peace and order, there were more specific US interests underpinning US activism on Indo–Pakistan relations. The US private sector companies were deeply interested and fairly active in accessing natural gas, hydrocarbon products and other natural resources in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The US aims at creating an area of

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 172
stability and peace along the eastern frontiers of Iran through Afghanistan and in the sub-continent to enable US economic activities to proceed smoothly for benefit to itself and for reaching out to the markets of Central Asia and South Asia as the continuing conflict situation in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and the South Asian region will impact negatively on US economic interests in the region.\textsuperscript{42}

While the US remains reticent about non-intrusive politico military presence in the region, it would like to play an over-arching and effective role in creating a stable political environment in South Asia and the portions of Central Asia where they were actively involved. US’s interest in the phase of Indo–Pakistan relations around this time was part of this overall strategic motivation. India would certainly benefit from US technological and economic involvement in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus, at this period, no doubt about the United States concerns and interests in the matter of Indo–Pakistan relations. However, there was a suggestion that what India should guard against was Pakistan taking advantage of this US motivation in any manner, which would be detrimental to India’s territorial integrity and security interests.

Prime Minister I.K. Gujral meets President Clinton in New York (September 1997)

In September 1997, President Clinton invited the Indian Prime minister, I.K. Gujral for a meeting in New York. The US President was scheduled to address the UN General Assembly on 23 September. The Pakistan Prime Minister was also reaching the UN around this time and a meeting between the two heads of government was slated. Washington apparently believed that it was necessary for the US to express its vote of confidence for Nawaz Sharif to bolster his position internally.

On 29 September, Gujral, was reached New York for his address to General Assembly. Washington was obviously uncomfortable with the US President meeting only one prime minister and not the other one of the subcontinent. So an invitation

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p 173.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
and a request came from the President to the Indian Prime Minister to advance his visit to the UN and meet him at New York on 22 September.\textsuperscript{44} This provided an opportunity to Clinton to urge the two prime ministers to intensify their dialogue with whatever help they needed from Washington.

The United States made it clear that it had no plans to hold a trilateral meeting of the three heads of government. It also assured India that the focus of the talks would be on Indo–US relations. Karl Inderfurth, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, explained that normally US goals would be to strengthen bilateral relations and also to explore with both leaders where they were leading their countries and where they would like to see their countries several years down the road. He described Gujral as “a man with his own vision in foreign policy” and expressed the US view that “it is a vision which is quite compatible with that of President Clinton”. The new US approach was to place the areas of disagreement with the States of the region in the “broader context of the full relations” and to move away from the ups and downs of the past.\textsuperscript{45}

In this visit, Gujral also took his Finance Minister P. Chidambram and Foreign Secretary K. Raghunath along with him. The 40 minute meeting took place on 22 September, possibly providing an opportunity for clearing some cobwebs and strengthening the India–US dialogue.

According to media reports President Clinton told Gujral and his aides that the world was waiting for a resolution of the Indo–Pak differences as the two countries celebrated their 50 years of independence after the hopeful development in the Northern Ireland peace talks, while grieving over the stalling of West Asian talks and the deadlock over Cyprus between Greece and Turkey.\textsuperscript{46}

However, neither Clinton nor his aides spoke very much, rather they listened — apparently attentively and sympathetically — to the exposition of India’s point of view. That being so, it gave more time to the Indian side to expound its perceptions. Gujral outlined in detail the security problems India faced and its legitimate concerns in this regard, explaining cogently why India could not sign the CTBT,

\textsuperscript{44} The Hindu, 28 August 1997.
\textsuperscript{45} Hindustan Times, 20 September 1997.
\textsuperscript{46} Asian Age, 23 September 1997.
faced with the peculiar security problems that it did. He also elaborated his view (known as the Gujral doctrine) that in the new era economic developments were taking precedence over politics, creating a new climate for cooperation. He mentioned the new developments in SAARC and the plans to set up the South Asia Free Trade Association. Gujral also reportedly pointed out to the US President India’s record as a highly responsible country in regard to the entire regime of international treaties.47

The Indians took comfort from the fact that President Clinton did not mention the word ‘Kashmir’ during the meeting with Prime Minister Gujral and that the talks had led to better atmospherics for a more positive ongoing dialogue evidenced from the line up of important dignitaries set to visit India in the coming months, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and before her Thomas Pickering, Undersecretary of State and subsequently Commerce Secretary William Daley, to be climaxed by a visit by President Clinton in 1998.48

It is important here to note that such talks between the leaders of two sides during the visit were invariably held in a cordial atmosphere. Clinton was not going to lecture Gujral on Pakistan or Kashmir, nor would Gujral be interested in scoring points.

Although a clear shift in the American position in Kashmir was noticed yet unlike India, the United States still regarded Kashmir as a disputed territory. But the changed US position on Kashmir did not permit Pakistan to raise the Kashmir question in the Security Council although it continued to support secessionist forces in Kashmir.

The whole purpose of the summit exercise was to strengthen relations and broaden the areas of agreement or at least the understanding of each other’s point of view. During this meeting, Prime Minister Gujral agreed to reopen official and technical level discussions on disarmament issues with the US.49 Clinton appreciated

49 J.N. Dixit, p. 2, p.222
this stance of India as well as India’s efforts to improve relation with Pakistan and other neighbouring countries. (Under the ‘Gujral Doctrine).

The two sides tried to identify the areas where they could cooperate. Clinton clarified to the Indian that he did not wish to interfere in any way in the outstanding issues that India had with Pakistan, although the US strongly supported the Indo–Pakistan dialogue that was underway.

In his book, V.P. Dutt wrote about his conversation with former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram that Chidambaram confirmed him that it was the Indians who did most of the talking during the visit. Chidambaram himself briefed the US President and his aides on the economic reforms of India and the outlook ahead, which the US side listened to even more attentively and sympathetically. This much appeared to be evident from the nod that Clinton gave to Chidambaram’s request for a longer period than the US was earlier insisting upon for lifting quantitative restrictions on certain imports. Soon after the talks, came the US clearance signals for India’s request in regard to quantitative restrictions.50

In his letter to Chief Minister (reminiscent of Jawaharlal Nehru’s practice) about his New York trip, Gujral said that he had told the US President about the need for the countries of South Asia to settle issues among themselves through direct dialogue and that Clinton had been appreciative of the new orientation in India’s policy towards its neighbours. Gujral also wrote that outside intervention to resolve bilateral issues among South Asian countries tended to have an adverse impact. The US President backed India’s ongoing dialogue with Pakistan and ruled out any interference in resolving mutual issues.51

The result of the meeting between Gujral and President Clinton provided some momentum to the Indo–US relationship, as for example, it was for the first time the US officials extended the prestigious acronym of “strategic” to the ongoing dialogue between Washington and New Delhi. Senior State Department officials said on the eve of his visit to New Delhi that Deputy Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Thomas Pickering would engage his Indian counterparts in a “strategic

50 V.P. Dutt, n. 32, p.400.
51 Ibid., See also Times of India, 12 October 1998
dialogue”, although what “strategic” meant was not really clear to any one. There were so many “strategic” dialogues going on. The US was also engaged in a “strategic” dialogue with China, as well as with Pakistan. Russia was engaging China in a strategic dialogue. India and Russia were “strategic” dialogue partners, and so on so forth.52

There was denied by The State Department officials about any implication of “political, military or geo-strategic connotation”. It only meant a “high-level, comprehensive and forward – looking dialogue, which led to an agenda where issues can be resolved and agreements can be reached” – a rather stretched meaning of the term strategic. The State Department officials briefing the press added that such dialogue must “strengthen our relations, lead to joint projects and shared views”. The Indo – US dialogue, they said, was not a “grocer’s list”, checking off items. They added. “We want to examine underlying assumptions,...get a better sense of the futures that are being projected by the countries”.53 (India and Pakistan),

**Thomas Pickering visit New Delhi 1997 (October)**

On 17 October1997, Thomas Pickering visited to New Delhi. The visits were significant in developing greater mutual understanding and areas of cooperation. The Two – hour discussion with Prime Minister Gujral and his aides was reported to have been “broad based”, encompassing bilateral, regional and international issues. Foreign Secretary Raghunath described the talks as having “opened a new chapter in Indo - US relations with new areas to be taken up for the dialogue”.54

Thomas Pickering showed an effort to improve the bilateral relations with India and suggested that América would engage India in a “strategic dialogue”. The US considered that this term expressed Washington’s increasing interests in India, and hoped to promote the development of US – India relations thereby. The US Congress was interested in developing the bilateral relations, too, and nearly 120 Congressmen formed an Indian Caucus, which was the largest and single organization in the Congress for interest in other countries.

52 Ibid., p.401.
53 Ibid.,p. 401., See also The Hindu, 16 October 1997.
54 Hindustan Times, 20 November 1997.
During Pickering's visit to India, a bilateral agreement to combat terrorism was concluded and the agreement was signed by Pickering and Indian Foreign Secretary K Raghunath. Pickering declared that India and the US would cooperate against terrorism—“Whether it is from across the border, home-grown or from the moon”.

To this visit, both sides had been deliberating with each other on issues of international security and world peace as well as peace and security in the region. Quite clearly the US would like to see India signing the NPT and CTBT as well as adhering to the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). It was also using all its leverage to halt India's ballistic missile programme. It was keen to see the resolution of the Kashmir issue, the observance of human rights and the intensification of the Indo-Pakistan dialogue.

During this visit, Pickering assured India that the US would give a second thought to its policy of banning the sale of dual use technologies to Indian scientific establishments. Both sides discussed other important issues like non-proliferation, expansion of the UN Security Council, international terrorism and others. During the visit an agreement to extend the validity of visas of traveling businessmen and tourists to 10 years was signed on 17 October.

During the visit, India was conveying its concern about the discriminatory nature of the international regimes that were being set up, including the NPT, CTBT, FMCT and MTCR. Even while giving in to US pressure and putting a hold on Agni and Prithvi missile, India was resisting the signing of the NPT and the CTBT and other such one-sided international regimes. It was urging the United States to use its leverage with Islamabad to cease its terrorist activities in Kashmir and elsewhere in India. Above all, India strove to overcome the US insistence on maintaining a posture of parity between India and Pakistan.

India was also tried to get a support from the United States for its permanent seat on the Security Council when it was reformed and expanded. Pickering, on a visit to India, said that "his country will support India's claim for a permanent seat


255
in the United Nations Security Council if it is backed by all Asian countries.” India expressed unhappiness with the United States stand on this.56

US Secretary of State Madam Madeleine Albright visited India: Short but 'substantive’

In November 1997, the US Secretary of State Madam Madeleine Albright visited India and held talks with Indian Prime Minister and other officials. At this time, the visit of Ms. Madeleine Albright is regarded as the first US Secretary of State to visit India in 14 years.

Although the Secretary of State’s visit had to be shortened because of developments in the Gulf region, The Indian government could, however, derive genuine satisfaction from the fact that in spite of her extremely heavy schedule for over a week when she had been hopping from one capital to another, virtually without rest, she still kept her engagements in New Delhi.

In an obvious attempt to pre-empt any negative impression about the visit, Foreign Secretary K Raghunath claimed that the visit was very "substantive", and that it would be wrong to describe it as downgraded. "The important point is that the programme was maintained," he added. "We have managed to have everything achieved. In no way was it a lowering of priority”.57

For a little over two hours, Ms. Albright and Prime Minister I K Gujral held "broad-based" discussions on bilateral, regional and international issues as part of the "strategic dialogue" launched at the Gujral-Clinton meeting in New York on September 22.58

During her visit, the strategic dialogue was pursued further and other issues like, nuclear non–proliferation, cross border terrorism, and reforms of the UN were discussed. Both India and the USA decided to set up an Indo – US Science and Technology Forum.

56 Daniel Joseph Kuba and G.V. Vaidyanatha, n.7 , 190
57 The Hindu, 19 November 1997
58 Ibid.
Foreign Secretary Raghunath, briefing media persons after Ms. Albright left for Geneva, described the talks as having "opened a new chapter in Indo-US relations with new areas to be taken up for dialogue". But it was obvious that the short duration of dialogue could only touch on the frequently reiterated positions on various issues by both sides.

Both India and the USA decided to set up an Indo – US Science and Technology Forum. Another agreement was signed on 19 November 1997, for promoting and protecting US investments in India by facilitating investment support to the US investors from the Overseas Private Investment (OPIC), a designated US Government agency.

Thus apparently no headway was made in respect of the most contentious issues like non-proliferation and United Nations reforms and restructuring (including the issue of the Security Council expansion with India claiming a permanent seat for itself on merit), with both sides reiterating the off-repeated positions.

In December 1997, despite the collapse of the Gujral Government, the U.S. Commerce Secretary, William Daley visited India. Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations on the eve of his visit, the Commerce Secretary described India as “one of the world’s most dynamic emerging markets with an economy growing at 6-7 per cent a year” and predicted that India would “overtake China as the world’s largest economy by the middle of the 21st century”.

Daley assured that his mission would not be deterred by the political uncertainly in India. Emerging markets, by definition, did not guarantee a smooth ride. “President Clinton”, he said, “targeted them the knowledge and understanding that there might be bumps along the way. We cannot give up on India and other developing countries during times of political or economic stress. Rather, we must step up our engagement, to help promote stability and enhance our own strategic interests”. He said “dramatic geopolitical changes in recent years had offered the

---

59 Ibid.
60 V.P. Dutt, n. 32, p.402.
chance of a new beginning, and President Clinton had seized the opportunity, “putting India at the centre of our national export strategy”.61

On 14 April 1998, a high level delegation of the United States, led by the Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, arrives in New Delhi for talks with Indian officials on the implications of Pakistan’s Ghauri missile (Pakistan tested the Ghauri missile, reputedly with a range of 1500 kilometers on 4 April 1998. Most of India’s major cities come under its range.) Reportedly, Richardson said that “the United States has a special relation with Pakistan and cannot simply take India’s stand on the issue”.62

Richardson said “one purpose of his trip is to encourage India and Pakistan to resume a dialogue aimed at reducing tensions”.63 For improving Indo-US relations Mr. Richardson said “Washington and New Delhi have had differences in the past over matters including nuclear weapons proliferation”. But he said the United States does not have a one-issue agenda with India”. US officials said “Washington wants to broaden and deepen its relationship with New Delhi”.64

The next day, on 15 April 1998, Indian and the United States describe the two days strategic dialogue as highly successful. The US Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth said “we are open to discussions in the area of transfer of technology and nuclear co-operation for civilian used”.65

Thus, we can appropriately conclude that the period from 1996 – 1998 in India was the period of political uncertainty. Although during this short period, Indo-US relations could not register much improvement as some differences still persisted, but the effort from the leader of both countries to develop their bilateral relationship was clearly visible, many agreements has been concluded, for example an extradition treaty was signed by both countries in June 1997, a memorandum of understanding on joint space exploration in December 1997, and in the same month,

---

61 Cited in ibid., See also Hindustan Times, 5 December 1997
64 Ibid.
65 Daniel Joseph Kuba and G.V. Vaidyanatha, n.7, 194.
India and the US signed a workplan for 1998-99 for cooperation in research and
development in agriculture and allied sectors, etc.

With regard to their differences such as NPT and CTBT, during this period
both the countries were adopted soft attitude towards each other. Therefore, it makes
an atmosphere of Indo – US relations improved. This was also because of US
showed that it will not interfere in the Kashmir issue and let the issue be solved
bilateraly between India and Pakistan. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist and the
US concerns with Islamic terrorism has also led to a convergence of Indian and US
interests and a consequent improvement in relations between the two countries

Thus, we can say that the political instability in India from May 1996-March
1998 did not impede positive and constructive improvement in Indo – US relations.

The effort of both countries to improve their bilateral relations was, however,
interrupted by the decision of the Hindu nationalist BJP government that took power
after winning elections in early 1998 to test India’s nuclear weapons. The US
response angrily to this move of India’s nuclear test in May 1998 and the imposition
of economic sanctions against India caused relations to the low ebb once more (see
next chapter).