CONCLUSION: THE PURSUIT AND LIMITS OF COOPERATION

The forgoing pages, it is hoped, makes it clear that US-India relations during the Reagan era were, as earlier, characterised by 'ups' and 'downs'. Their relations during this period were however, marked, more by "ups" than by "downs". The former were more sustained and promising, the latter muted and short lived. This period witnessed a cautious and fitful development of cordiality and cooperation. It is, therefore, interesting to examine the motives, manifestations and limits of US-India cooperation during the Reagan administration in order not only to understand the past, but also to perceive the future directions in this regard.

THE IMPERATIVES

It is generally assumed that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and the victory of the Republican President, Ronald Reagan, aggravated Indo-US tensions by according the status of a 'frontline state' to Pakistan for bleeding the Russians white in Afghanistan. Ironically, however, the heat of the second Cold War melted the coldness in US-India relations. As discussed in previous chapters, the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan altered the basic parameters of New Delhi's prospective strategic profile and brought a grudging realisation on its part that it had to cultivate the US.
China and even Pakistan (recall the then Foreign Minister, Narasimha Rao's hints at Karachi in 1980 for a coordinated approach to the Afghan issue) to counteract the adverse implications of the Soviet move on Indian security. That the Soviet Union did so without warning the Indians exacerbated New Delhi's disenchantment and provided unwelcome proof that despite professions of friendship, Moscow would not hesitate in doing what it considered to be in its best interests, regardless of Indian sensitivities.

New Delhi, on the other hand, could not fail to notice the outcome of discussions going on between Washington and Islamabad on the Afghan issue. Their talks made it clear that neither of them was willing to go that far. Pakistan's then Foreign Minister, Agha Shahl, neatly epitomised the new relationship as "a handshake not an embrace". Once these limits were understood, the worst fears of New Delhi regarding the US-Pakistan alliance were somewhat allayed. Besides, the Reagan Administration's greater prudence in dealing with China and improvement in India's own relations with China contributed to reduction in New Delhi's immediate, though not long-term security fears, and thereby enabled it to distance itself from Moscow and move closer towards the Americans.¹

New Delhi's move to reduce its dependence on Moscow also got an impetus from its concerns regarding its non-aligned credentials, which were clouded ever since the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty in 1971. Since India was to inherit the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) chairmanship in 1983, the validation of its nonalignment credentials in the eyes of its members in
general and South Asian members in particular, who desired the condemnation of the Soviet act, had become a must. Similarly, India, with a large Muslim minority and complicated ties with the countries of the Islamic crescent, must have felt the need to show greater sympathy to their concerns about the Soviet-attempted subjugation of their Muslim brethren in Afghanistan. India, therefore rejected the Cuban concept of the USSR as a natural ally or the US as a natural adversary of the NAM.

Non-alignment credentials aside, India's softened stance towards the US was motivated by its economic requirements. Ever since the 1982 budget, Mrs. Gandhi attempted to modernize the Indian economy through trade expansion, acquisition of high technology and financial assistance, and for that purpose, she needed American assistance bilaterally as well as multilaterally.

Similarly, a developing Indian defence strategy placing priority on the indigenous production of high technology weapons, made access to US wares crucial. She had, therefore, to realize that India's interests lay not in collective confrontation with the "West" in league with a mythical Third World but in building its strength by shrewdly exploiting the potential friendship with the US and other industrialized countries.

India's substantive motives for improving relations with the US were not only recognised and appreciated by the latter, but it too, realised the imperatives to retreat from the rigid posture initially adopted by it. In other words, Washington realised that despite New Delhi's early dithering about the Soviet invasion, India shared America's interest in a Soviet withdrawal and was
opposed to further Soviet expansion southwards. This realisation on the part of Washington led it to recognise the significance of New Delhi's cooperation in Pakistan's defence. It, therefore, began to encourage New Delhi's subtle attempts to distance itself strategically from Moscow. Not surprisingly, the Carter Administration cleared, in June 1980, nuclear fuel supplies for the Tarapur plant after two years of irritating and acrimonious exchanges between the two countries.

As a corollary to its strategy of weaning India away from Moscow, Washington encouraged and rejoiced at India's gradually improving relations with Pakistan and China in order to relieve the American dilemma of dealing with regional adversaries in a zero-sum game and thereby reduce Soviet influence in the region. As discussed in Chapter III, in order to address this concern, Washington had to establish a dialogue with India.

The prospect of securing India's friendship without abandoning Pakistan, enthused those pro-India conservatives within the US — though very few in number but occupying key positions in the executive and legislative branches — who were refusing to see American policy in South Asia as requiring a choice between Delhi and Islamabad. They were encouraged by a large number of Indian expatriates in the US. While the American military bureaucracies had no real contacts with India, most of the corporations interested in selling advanced technology and military equipment to India had on their staff a large number of Indian expatriates. Almost every member of every Indian delegation that came to the US had close relatives they were visiting. These Indo-Americans counterbalanced to some extent, the lack of politico-bureaucratic contact between the two countries.
India's growing capability also contributed to the shift in US perception regarding India. Just prior to Mrs. Gandhi's arrival in Washington in 1982, the White House stated that "We will recognize which country is the most powerful country in South Asia. No one has to explain that to you." While similar views were expressed earlier, it was the first clear cut reiteration by the Reagan Administration. It revealed the Administration's realisation that India could no longer be balanced with Pakistan and that it, therefore, made sense for the US to improve relations with a power with which it would have to deal with in the years ahead.

Last but not least, the economic liberalisation programme in India, initiated by Indira Gandhi and accelerated by her successors, obviously attracted American attention. India's increasing emphasis on free market mechanisms and deregulation policies, that were advocated by the Reagan Administration at home and abroad, enhanced its interest in ameliorating ties with India. As explained in Chapter IV, this country's middle class, constituting a vast market for US goods and services, attracted the attention of American businessmen at a time when the US economy was suffering from high unemployment and trade deficit. Many large US companies, including Pepsi Cola and several high technology firms, lobbied the Reagan Administration to support expanded economic links with India. Moreover, America's economic problems obliged its policy-makers to realise that it would have to wind down its massive global presence. This shrinkage had to be met by a new strategy and thus was born the idea of "cooperative security." It implied US willingness to accept India's regional status, if it agreed to accept the American global role.
MANIFESTATIONS OF ACCOMMODATION

The mutual pursuit of accommodation by the United States and India since the 1980s was manifested in various fields, namely, personal equation, nuclear field, technological and defence collaboration, economy and politico-strategic cooperation. personally, Mrs. Indira Gandhi sought a private meeting with President Reagan at the North-South Economic Summit at Cancun, Mexico, in 1981; initiated a warm personal correspondence with President Reagan and agreed to visit Washington after a lapse of thirteen years.

As stated in Chapter V, cooperation in the nuclear field began with President Carter's clearing of nuclear fuel supplies to India in June 1980. In 1982, during Mrs. Gandhi's visit, this contentious issue was passed to the French for containing differences over this issue. Moscow's sensitivity to this flexibility was quickly demonstrated when the then Soviet Defence Minister, Ustinov, rushed to New Delhi with fresh offers of defence collaboration and enhanced trade arrangements. New Delhi picked up some of the Soviet offers, but Mrs. Gandhi appeared determined to maintain a more diversified policy.

The fact that India, as an emerging power of some consequence, appeared interested in buying arms outside the Communist bloc prompted even a conservative Senator, Orrin G. Hatch, to remark: "I believe a historic shift is underway ... ten years from now scholars will look back on this past year as an end of an Ice Age, which symbolized the cool relations between the United States and India for many years". While this statement may be exaggerated, it undoubtedly reflected a remarkably changed
atmosphere in US-Indian relations. This projection got vindicated when, in November 1984, the Reagan administration issued National Security Decision Directive 147 (NSDD 147) and personally signed off one initiative incorporated in NSDD 147. This initiative was the Memorandum of Understanding on Technology Transfer (MOD) leading to transfer of technology to India.

The MOU of 1984 and the follow up procedural implementation agreement, signed after Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to the US in 1985, introduced substantial changes in US-India relations in areas of defence cooperation and sales of military and dual-use equipment technology. Its significance lies in the fact that earlier there was a tendency especially in the Department of Defence to ask for a political price for American technological cooperation with India, namely, a compensating reduction in India’s ties with the USSR. However, since the 1984 MOU, there has been an increasing recognition in the United States of the long-term security benefits of technological transfer to India.

This became evident in October 1986, when a high level Pentagon delegation led by the Secretary of Defence, Casper Weinberger, visited New Delhi to negotiate transfer of military and military related technology to India. Again in April 1988, the then US Defence Secretary, Frank Carlucci, visited New Delhi and agreed to sell India a ring-laser gyroscopic for use for light combat aircraft. On its part, New Delhi permitted American naval vessels to visit Indian ports and allowed US officials to inspect Indian defence facilities. An American analyst of South Asain politics argued, “If the United States has a ‘tilt’ in South Asia on military sales, it may be argued that it is towards India rather than Pakistan.”

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We can not of course, endorse this view. As we have explained in Chapter III that the US continued to accord priority to Pakistan, in South West Asia, to bleed Russians white in Afghanistan. However, by the time President Reagan was elected for the second time, his administration began to accord priority to India in other parts of South Asia. As explained in Chapter III, Washington was the first country to welcome India's sending of peace-keeping force in Srilanka in 1987. When President Abdul Gayoom of Maldives faced military coup and demanded assistance from the US, it advised him to seek Indian help. Similarly, Washington advised the Napali King to try to live up with India during Indo-Nepal tensions in 1989 over the issue of trade and transit. It may, therefore, be argued that since the second Reagan administration Washington moved towards accepting India as a regional power. On the other hand, India began to accommodate Washington's global concerns. This manifested, among other things, in India's acquiescence of on U.S A's military activities in the Indian Ocean since the mid 1980s.

The economic relationship, too, became important in the last half of the 1980s as the US replaced the Soviet Union as India's largest trading partner with a relatively balanced exchange relationship. There was, for instance substantial growth in Indian software exports to the highly competitive US market.

Undoubtedly, The US-India cooperation in the aforesaid areas reflected political understanding between the two democracies. Washington not only extended tacit recognition to India's regional responsibilities and role in South Asia, except Pakistan, but it also began to cooperate with India for containing terrorism. In order to allay Indian suspicions regarding American
encouragement to ethnic conflicts in India, the US refused to grant a visa to a Sikh nationalist leader, J.S. Chauhan. When Sikh extremists hijacked an Indian airliner in September 1984, the US cooperated with India in ending the siege and flew the captured aircraft back to India. Similarly, the importance of US expertise, technology and intelligence capabilities in this regard. India thus benefited from the "opening" in the 1980s—whether Washington to Delhi or Delhi to Washington.

The US-India cooperation during the period under review thus manifested in various fields. The undercurrents of political and strategic cooperation apart, both the democracies cooperated with each other in the fields of science and technology, trade, culture, communication, etc. The diversities in their cultures arouse the interest in each other and encouraged cultural age exchanges. These reached their climax in the Festival of India and the Festival of America at that time. The two government also encouraged joint projects in the field of science and technology. Washington showed interest in participating joint projects and providing economic assistance to New Delhi for developmental programmes. Though the US direct aid to India underwent reduction during the 80s, yet it remained an important contributor to the various monitoring organizations which provided economic aid to India. The US hesitation to transfer technology to this country though came in the way of US-India defence ties during the first Reagan administration, yet the second term witnessed a new phase in the relations. As a result of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Science and Technology Initiative (STI), the relations received a boost, which was seen in the visits of the two US Defence Secretaries.
to India. The desire to improve their bilateral relations was also reflected in the exchange of visits by important dignitaries of the two countries. The most significant visits were those of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the three visits of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the visit of Mr. George Bush and the four visits of Mr. George Shultz. Thus an element of cordiality was witnessed in the US-India relations during Eighties.

LIMITS OF ACCOMMODATION

It will, however, be misleading to ignore undercurrents of differences in the US-India relations. On the question of Kashmir, for instance, Washington, unlike New Delhi, never regarded Kashmir as an undisputed territory. In fact, the process of US-India accommodation was punctuated by sticky patches of differences over issues such as arms supply to Pakistan, activities of the Sikh terrorists in the US, the Bhopal gas disaster of 1984, which involved a US Multinational Corporation, and so on. One should not, therefore, exaggerate the Indo-US accommodation since in 1980s. Take for instance, American support to India's action in Sri Lanka and Maldives. As a practical point, these regions were hardly ones that the US could have done much about had it wanted to. And there were, undoubtedly, limits as to how far the Administration was willing to go in acquiescing to Indian management of regional affairs. Moreover, even this accommodation, as explained earlier, was related to Washington's hope that recognizing Indian primacy would make it more amenable to keeping the Soviets in check in the Indian Ocean and reducing New Delhi's criticisms of US presence there. Washington also hoped that New Delhi would share American non-proliferation concerns in South Asia.
Similarly, if the pursuit of accommodation was evident in US-Indian relations, so too were the limits. For example, the limits were evident in the fact that there were no major weapons sales from the US to India as there was considerable hesitation in both the countries about trumpeting their new found defence links given domestic political considerations. The absence of major defence sales was in both countries' interest. In addition, India did not sign a General Security of Military Information Agreement in order to avoid giving the impression that it shared strategic and defence perceptions with the US. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi implied this much when he remarked, "The peoples of India and America are not allies in security strategies, but they are friends in larger human causes-freedom, justice and peace".

As regards Pakistan, Washington never jettisoned it in favour of India. It may be argued that the limits of US-India detente during the Reagan era were apparent from the fact that while Washington attempted to improve its known-strategic ties with India, it maintained intact its strategic linkages with Pakistan in the context of its larger military objectives. Though this assessment may appear to be simplistic, especially in its sharp distinction between known-strategic and strategic policies—indeed, Reagan's accommodating stance towards India was rooted in his strategic aim of weaning New Delhi away from Moscow — yet limits of US-India accommodation during the 1980's cannot be ignored. In fact, Pakistan had been an integral part of US Strategic thinking. The Reagon administration continued the policy of wooing Pakistan, which had been renewed by President Carter in the last year of his tenure. While the US supported the cause of the promotion of human rights in principle, it was unwilling to condemn their violation
at the hands of the military dictator, President Zia-Ul-Haq in Pakistan. Washington made no attempts to pressurize President Zia for announcing elections, preventing assistance to the Indian Sikh's and Kashmiri extremists or limiting Islamabad's nuclear program.

Pakistan apart, Washington used to play, its 'China card' to serve its strategic interest in Asia. Since China shared its border with Afghanistan, it acted as a conduit for arms to the Afghan rebels, which brought it to the central stage of the US strategic perception. India viewed these growing ties between China and the US with great concern. India saw every enhancement in the Chinese military power as a threat to its vital interest. It, therefore, disliked China receiving US assistance. The developing US-Pakistan - China axis during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan, thus endangered Indian security and drew the two democracies apart.

At the global level, the two democracies deferred over several issues. While the US regarded its military basis in the Indian Ocean, region as vital to its security. India being one of the largest littoral states, championed the cause of the Indian Oceans being declared as 'Zone of Peace'. India, therefore, played a leading role in opposing the US moves in the Indian Ocean, though it subdued its voice since the second Reagan administration.

Another international issue over which India and the U.S. differed was South Africa, which India viewed as a 'bastion of colonisation and racialism'. In spite of their commitment to democratic ideals and opposition to colonialism and racialism, the two democracies could not adopt the same approach towards
South Africa. The U.S. and India shared their condemnation of apartheid, in principle, and support to the cause of Namibian independence. However, the methods advocated to solve the problems by the Reagan administration and the Congress government in India differed greatly. India advocated the imposition of sanction to pressurize South Africa into renouncing apartheid. It believed that if all the nations took punitive measures against South Africa it would be forced to end its discriminatory policies. The Indian government was not willing to let this, moral purpose be suppressed by any strategic or economic considerations. Since 1946, India had terminated its diplomatic, and trade relations with the racist regime, practiced sports and cultural boycotts and contributed to the funds for assistance to the victims of apartheid. These sanctions were continued ever after the new constitution was presented by the Botha regime in South Africa 1983, since it had provided democratic rights to the Indians and the ‘Coloureds’ along with the ‘Whites’, but continued to deny them to the ‘Blacks’.

Thus, the U.S. pursuance of its global objectives and attempts to gain a strategic victory always remained a fact which adversely affected the bilateral relations of the US and India. Their views regarding the means to solve international issues continued to vary due to their different conceptions of national interest.

As discussing in Chapter V, both the countries also differed over the nuclear issue. Since the Reagan administration had accorded high priority to nuclear non-proliferation, it intended taking all actions necessary to enforce the provisions of the NPT. The
U.S. therefore, attempted to pressurize India into following its dictates by threatening a termination of fuel supplies to Tarapur atomic power reactor but the Indian scientist had developed by that time an alternative to the fuel, called mixed oxide. The Indians were therefore confident that even if supplies were terminated by the U.S., its power plant would continue to function. At the same time, if the administration stopped the supply of fuel, India would be able to end the subjection of the Tarapur plant to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. Thus, the Indians were not alarmed over the U.S. threat. However, the U.S. did not want to lose the little control that it had over the Indian nuclear programme and therefore assisted in the negotiations, which resulted in the supply of nuclear fuel by France. Though the differences over nuclear proliferation between India and the U.S. continued, the crisis of 1981-82 was resolved, preventing a major reversal in relations.

Finally, both the democracies quarreled over the issue of the 'North South' divide. India, being a leading country of the 'South' came into conflict with the U.S., the leading state of the 'North'. India, like other nonaligned countries supported the demand for a New International Economic Order in the place of the unjust and exploiting international system. It proposed a system based on general rules applicable to both the rich and the poor countries.

On the other hand, The Reagan Administration, like its predecessors and some other developed nations, held the view that the NIEO was not an economic programme intended to solve the existing crisis of the Third World countries. It was a weapon being used by them to attack the developed nations. The U.S. held
the developing countries responsible for their own economic problems. Their inaccurate planning and inefficiency were the cause of economic crisis. Thus, the U.S. found it difficult to understand the Indian advocacy of the NIEO. Secondly, while India saw the existing situation as one in which the 'South' was dependent on the 'North', the U.S. held the view that international interdependence existed in the present system and no country was treated differently. Thus, the U.S. opposed the idea of NIEO which stands for restructuring of international economic relations by making appropriate changes in the international economic institutions, like IMF and the World Bank. It was of the view that if any reforms were to be worked out, the discussions should be held in specialised agencies only. In this way, India's concern for the economic problems of the Third World and its advocacy of NIEO came in the way of the U.S. national and economic interests and weakened U.S. - India relations even during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan.

At a deeper level, several unresolved problems in US-India ties continued to that plague Washington's relations with New Delhi during the Reagan administration. The first and foremost among these problems was the question of the status of India in American strategic perception, namely whether India could act as a partner of the US or merely as its camp-follower. This question was not yet resolved. In a way this still plagues U.S. - India ties. History does not suggest that Washington would give much to the Indian view on global matters and India is not going to completely forgo its autonomy in international relations. India's geo-strategic location, its having been a seat of great ancient civilisation, its socio-cultural milieu, the
ideals of its freedom struggle and democratic political system did not allow it to do so earlier, and will not permit it to do that now.

In particular, the democratic systems of both the countries instead of strengthening their bonds of friendship, exacerbate their differences. Their free press and democratic governments have permitted disputes, flowing from their different priorities, to be openly and heatedly debated. At the same time, these similarities exacerbate problems also by engendering unrealistic expectations. One hears from both capitals, for example, the refrain for good relations because of shared democratic values. Such oversimplifications breed and sustain disappointment by generating unrealistic expectations. That is why, US-India differences over issues such as Kashmir, human rights, nuclear proliferation and trade and intellectual property rights, generate sharp tensions in relations between the two democracies.

There is, however, too much at stake in these relations for New Delhi to act peevishly. The U.S. is too significant an entity to be wished away from the realm of India's foreign policy. New Delhi must, therefore, resist any emotional domestic demands that may unduly complicate its differences with Washington. It is in this context that the experiences of Reagan era, when both accepted their differences with great equanimity and cooperated in areas where they could, assume relevance as a guiding point for contemporary US-Indianies. Indeed, there are reasons to believe that relations in the 1980s let the ground work for more amicable relationship in the post Cold War era. The U.S-India experiments in trying to live up with differences apart.
their move during the 1980s towards accommodation in US-India relations that began during the Reagan era and withstood, despite setbacks, changes of three guards in White House and eight Prime Ministers in India will survive and perhaps grow during the post Clinton administrations in the US.
END NOTES


