CHAPTER – IV

Extra-Regional Powers and India’s National Security Concerns: Views of the Three Parties

It is argued that the threats to India’s security arose not merely from Pakistan and China but from the policies pursued by the big powers over the years, and Pakistan’s attitudes “were only symptoms of a more fundamental security challenge posed by two big powers” (Subrahmanyam 1999: 12). Also, India’s nuclear doctrine proposing a “credible minimum nuclear deterrence” for “retaliation only” defines that the “fundamental purpose of Indian nuclear weapons” is “to deter the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons by any State or entity against India and its forces”; and it also assures that India will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states or states not aligned to nuclear weapon states (Report of NSAB on Indian Nuclear Doctrine 1999). This underlines the fact that nuclear threat from any nuclear weapon state or threat from states aligned with them would be dealt with nuclear retaliation. This raises the question: besides Pakistan and China, which countries might pose such kind of threats to India? The previous chapter analysed the perceptions of the three selected political parties in India regarding nuclear threats to India from nuclear weapon states in the region. This chapter looks into their perspectives on other nuclear weapon countries outside the region and if they pose any threat at all.

If “Indian strategic policy has largely been responsive to major external events” (Cohen 2005: 154), its nuclear strategy must also be linked with the policies and involvement of outside powers in South Asia. As commonly viewed, India’s missile programme, especially the Prithvi missile, is Pakistan-specific and the Agni missile is China-specific (Dixit 1997). Also, India’s nuclear disarmament initiatives were linked to the Chinese nuclear weapon programme. However, certain aspects of superpower involvement in and around the South Asian region seem to have exacerbated India’s
nuclear weapon programme. Here an attempt is made specifically to examine in what way and if the nuclear weapon programme of India is linked with the policies of nations outside the region, especially from the point of view of the three political parties. More specifically, the chapter examines the perceptions of the three political parties on the policies of nations like USA, Russia (former USSR), UK, etc. in relation to India’s national security conception. But before going into the details of the postures of specific countries, it is pertinent to identify the links between the nuclear postures of outside powers and India’s threat perceptions.

**South Asian Security Architecture and Extra-Regional Powers**

A major portion of the region that constitutes South Asia today was mainly British India before 1947. More often, British India’s security policy is identified with British Viceroy Lord Curzon’s ideas of a three-front frontier he formulated to insulate India from the expansionist move of Czarist Russia, known as the Great Game. Curzon’s security architecture highlighted thereby India’s centrality in the Indian Ocean littoral, Asia and the world as a whole. Laying out the essence of his arguments, Curzon wrote in his essay *The Place of India in the Empire* (1909):

> The central position of India, its magnificent resources, its teeming multitude of men, its great trading harbours, its reserve of military strength, supplying an army always in a high state of efficiency and capable of being hurled at a moment’s notice upon any point either of Asia or Africa – all these are assets of precious value. On the West, India must exercise predominant influence over the destines of Persia and Afghanistan; on the North, it can veto any rival in Tibet; on the north-east and east it can exert great pressure upon China, and it is one of the guardians of the autonomous existence of Siam. On the high seas it commands the routes to Australia and to the China Seas. (Curzon 1909: 12)

In Curzon’s “forward policy” formulation, India’s frontier was consisted of three levels: (1) Administrative frontier which was directly under British control; (2) Extended zones or frontiers that the British had influence over; (3) Buffer states which were special arrangements like Afghanistan, Tibet and Burma (Sarela 2005: 18). Curzon postulated a

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1 The term Great Game is used for the strategic rivalry and conflict between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia. The classic Great Game period is generally regarded as running from the Russo-Persian Treaty of 1813 to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.
role for India within the matrix of the British imperial interests and his ideas constituted an
Indo-centric vision of South Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral. This notion of regional
supremacy has left a legacy that the post-British India has followed in dealing with the
region. The demise of British rule in India and the partition that followed culminated in an
"Indo-centric" region owing to many inherent factors. First, the asymmetry between India
and the rest of the South Asian countries is substantial. In respect of economic prowess,
military might, territorial expanse, etc. no other country in the region matches India.
According to S.D. Muni, around eleven times since its Independence India has been
involved militarily or otherwise in the internal affairs of its smaller neighbours. At the root
of this attitude of India “is the gradually growing autonomous capitalist state of India,
highly sensitive to its security concerns and to its ideological preferences in the region”
(Muni 1993: 11-12).

Subsequent policies and actions by India seem to have generated a negative
security perception among the South Asian neighbours vis-à-vis India, which till persist.
From Indira Gandhi’s tenure India has followed towards its small neighbours a policy
called India’s Monroe Doctrine.² Attempts have always been made by India to insulate the
region from outside powers, claiming the region as India’s natural and exclusive sphere of
influence (Raja Mohan 2003). Special treaty arrangements were made in this regard in
order to restrict the neighbours from looking toward outside powers. The Indo-Bhutan
Treaty of 1949 (revised in February 2007) and the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 are such
examples where these countries were made obligated to consult India in the sphere of their
defence and foreign policies. India also played a crucial role in establishing multi-party
constitutional democracy in Nepal during the 1950s. India’s relation with Pakistan has its
root in the partition of British India, and subsequently the Kashmir issue remained a
perpetual source of tension. Apprehensions were expressed by other countries in the region
when Sikkim merged with India in 1975.

² The Monroe Doctrine was introduced on 2 December 1823 by the US, stating that further efforts by
European countries to colonise land or interfere with states in the Americas would be viewed by it as acts of
aggression requiring US intervention. The Doctrine asserted that the Western Hemisphere was not to be
further colonised by European countries, and that the United States would neither interfere with existing
European colonies nor in the internal concerns of European countries.
As a result of these assertive postures, the smaller countries in South Asia seem to have developed a “fear psychosis vis-à-vis India” (Upreti 2003: 258). In response, counterbalancing India’s influence, they have often invited outside powers like China and United States through alliances or otherwise. The intention here is to highlight India’s security environment versus its neighbours to identify the role, if any, of the outside powers in India’s nuclear weapon decision-making. Also, the attitude and policies of these external powers, especially China at times, seem to have exacerbated India’s security concerns. For example, China follows a strategy of “string of pearls”³ to encircle India by building bases at strategic locations (Pehrson 2006).

Another aspect in identifying the role of outside powers in influencing India’s nuclear weapon decision-making is to locate its links in South Asian regional security architecture, to identify the spill-over effect of the regional security environment influenced by the external powers on India’s nuclear weapon decision-making process. South Asia’s security environment, which Barry Buzan described as “security complex”⁴ (Buzan 1991: 190), is a classical example of rivalry among the global powers, where the complex in “conflict formation mode” draws in outside intervention along the lines of its own internal splits.

To the extent that the other South Asian neighbours try to balance India at times by aligning with the external powers, the latter have also tried to become stakeholders, thus dragging the conflict to a deeper level. Also, some countries in the region have tried to form ties with countries of the neighbouring region. For example, though South Asian and Middle Eastern security dynamics generally are geographically separated, there are many

³ China’s growing interest and influence from the South China Sea through the Indian Ocean and on to the Arabian Gulf have been described as a “String of Pearls” approach. Each “pearl” is a nexus of Chinese geopolitical influence or military presence. Hainan Island, with recently upgraded military facilities, is one such “pearl”. Among the other “pearls” are: an upgraded airstrip on Woody Island, located in the Paracel archipelago 300 nautical miles east of Vietnam; a container shipping facility in Chittagong, Bangladesh; a deep water port in Sittwe, Myanmar, under construction; a navy base in Gwadar, Pakistan, under construction. Port and airfield construction projects, diplomatic ties and force modernisation form the essence of China’s “String of Pearls”. The “pearls” extend from the coast of mainland China through the littorals of the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, and on to the littorals of the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. China is building strategic relationships and developing a capability to establish a forward presence along the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that connect China to the Middle East.

⁴ A “security complex” is defined as a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another.
interlinking issues that have fused the concerns of both the regions together. Pakistan’s attempt to balance India by seeking ties first with Iran and later with Saudi Arabia, and India’s attempt to build friendly relations with Iran and developing its Chahbahar port infrastructure can be viewed in this perspective (The Hindu, 10 July 2004). Gwadar port, built by China in Pakistan, has evoked concerns in India and Iran and has sparked a tacit competition for strategic access among these countries. Another example was the Israeli concern over Pakistan’s rhetoric about an “Islamic” nuclear bomb (Pant 2004) and the rumours-floated during the 1970s that Israel and India might, therefore, find a pressing common cause. Many such intersections can be found that have proved to be the fault lines along which the arms trade takes place.

Thus the security problems of one region may overlap the problems of another region. Especially in the nuclear environment, security issues of different regions attract wider attention since nuclear weapons have global ramifications. Overlapping regional security is characterised by an intense security dilemma: “a situation in which no community can provide for its own security without threatening the security of others” (Herz 1950). For example, the clandestine nuclear network managed by A.Q. Khan, which spanned the whole of Asia, raised India’s concerns and consequent policy decisions. With this background, the following discussion charts how the three selected Indian political parties have viewed nuclear developments in the neighbouring region and how the policies of outside nuclear powers have influenced India’s thinking.

**Perception and Views of the Congress Party**

As has been discussed before, Nehru’s ideas and decisions on foreign and security policy were unchallenged by any member of the Congress, and not even by the opposition parties, at least until the Sino-Indian border clash in 1962. His perception of India’s role led him to propound ideas and visions of a wider federation of Asian states, mainly to contain the forces of imperialism, domination and control at the global level. Long before becoming Prime Minister, he had said:

> If there are to be federations, India will not fit into a European Federation where it can only be a hanger-on of semi-colonial status. It is obvious that under these
circumstances there should be an Eastern Federation not hostile to the West but nevertheless standing on its own feet, self-reliant and joining with all others to work for world peace and world federation.

Such an Eastern Federation must inevitably consist of China and India, Burma and Ceylon and Nepal and Afghanistan should be included. So should Malaya. There is no reason why Siam and Iran should also not join, as well as some other nations. That would be a powerful combination of free nations joined together for their own good as well as for the world good. (Quoted in Muni and Raja Mohan 2005: 54)

As India’s Independence drew close, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) said in a resolution on Asian cooperation in 1945:

A free India will inevitably seek close and friendly associations with her neighbouring countries and would specially seek to develop common policies for defence, trade and economic and cultural development with China, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and Ceylon as well as other countries of the Middle East. (Quoted in Muni 1993: 14)

After Independence, the Congress under Nehru’s leadership refined this idea of a broader role of India preparing for a South Asian Federation of India, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Burma. Therefore, it would be erroneous to think that the India-led proposal for a federation and closer relations was motivated by independent India’s desire to re-create the British Empire. Rather, India seems to have erred in assuming that its neighbours were also thinking along these lines (Muni 1993: 14-15). But most of Nehru’s enthusiasm faded with the partition of the Indian subcontinent and also with the emergence of Communist China. Subsequent decades saw India’s security perception hooked into the geo-strategic make-up of the subcontinent called South Asia.

Independent India’s concerns to insulate the region from extra-regional strategic influences have often been expressed in the deliberations of both the Congress Party and other political groups. There was open resistance to the Cold War, particularly the policies of “containment” pursued by the Western powers. There was repeated denunciation, in the Congress Party’s and Nehru’s expressions, of US-led military pacts such as SEATO, CENTO and the Baghdad Pact that facilitated great-power military presence in or around South Asia (Nehru 1961: 87-98, 182-236). Nehru reacted very strongly against the US
efforts to establish a strategic relationship with Pakistan. In May 1950 he wrote to Vijayalaxmi Pandit, his sister and India’s Ambassador to the US:

It does appear that there is a concerted attempt to build up Pakistan and build down, if I may say so, India. It surprises me how immature in their political thinking the Americans are! They do not even learn from their own or other people’s mistakes; more especially in their dealings with Asia, they show a lack of understanding which is surprising. (Quoted in Gopal 1983: 63)

Nehru’s disappointment grew as the US-Pakistan military alliance became imminent. He wrote a letter to Prime Minister Mohamed Ali in late 1953 saying:

If such an alliance takes place, Pakistan enters definitely into the region of Cold War. That means to us that the Cold War has come to the very frontiers of India. This is a matter of serious consequence to us, who have been trying to build up an area of peace…. It must also be a matter of grave consequence to us, you will appreciate, if vast armies are built up in Pakistan with the aid of American money. (Gopal 1983: 185)

Similarly, when India learnt of the possibility of Western support to the autocratic Rana regime in Nepal during the anti-Rana revolution of 1950-51, Nehru expressed concerns saying, “We do not like and shall not brook any foreign interference in Nepal”. On the other hand, he reiterated the fact of Nepal’s independence as a sovereign country and urged “every other country to appreciate the intimate geographical and cultural relationship that exists between India and Nepal” (Parliamentary Debate, Lok Sabha, 6 December 1950).

India’s concerns regarding the strategic consequences of conflicting interests between itself and extra-regional major powers have in many ways been reflected not only in the pronouncements of Congress leaders but also, more prominently, in the general meetings of the party. During the Jaipur session (18-19 December 1948), the Congress expressed its solidarity and stood for ending all imperialist domination and colonial exploitation of any country or people, and opposed Fascism and all other tendencies which suppress human spirit (INC Resolutions on Foreign Policy 1947-1966 1966: 3-5). The resolution also warned about the consequences of military “entanglement” or alliances that “divide the
world into rival groups that endanger world peace".\(^5\) It made explicit the position that India was concerned about the freedom and progress of its Asian neighbours. More specifically, the party expressed grave concern at its Nasik (now Nashik) session (20-21 September 1950) over the war in Korea that “brought the prospect of a devastating world war nearer” (AICC Resolution, September 1950). The resolution earnestly hoped that “the great nations of the world will not permit fear and passion to endanger the cause of peace for which they all stand”. The party’s Calcutta session (22-23 March 1952) also referred to the accelerating drift of Cold War rivalry towards “a terrible catastrophe of another world war”. It also expressed “its full approval of the Foreign Policy pursued by the Government of India, which while avoiding alignment with any nation or group against another, seeks the friendship of all countries” (Resolution of the AICC, Calcutta Session, March 1952). In its Hyderabad session, the party expressed with

... deep concern and grave anxiety the ever-growing tension and deepening crisis in the relations between the Great Powers who have aligned themselves in rival power blocs, engaged in a “cold war” and poised to strike with their unprecedented armed might, ever mounting to greater dimensions and intensity. (Resolution of AICC, January 1953)

But while the party consistently underlined the big-power threats, this perceived threat was never translated or advanced in justification of India developing nuclear weapons. On the contrary, till Nehru’s last years as Prime Minister, the Congress was supporting eventual elimination of nuclear weapons and foreclosing India’s chances of producing them. Though subsequent sessions of the party discussions involved India’s options for nuclear weapons, the final resolutions always foreclosed India’s interest in nuclear weapons. By implication, the party protested “the extension of extra-regional great-power rivalry and conflict into the subcontinent” which “gave India a sense of weakness and vulnerability” (Muni 1993: 19).

The US proposal for military aid to Pakistan for its alliance with USA was viewed by the Congress as an “intervention of a great and powerful country” in this region. The party, at its Kalyani session (20-29 January 1954) expressed the view that this would “lead to

\(^5\) The perceived danger of military entanglements was also reflected in the Delhi Session of AICC in October 1951.
grave and far-reaching consequences which affect the whole of South Asia, and, more particularly, India” (AICC Resolution, 20-29 January 1954). But surprisingly, instead of suggesting to the government to devise appropriate security measures, the resolution gave a clarion call for “national solidarity”. The resolution said in part:

The Congress trusts therefore that in this crisis the people of India, whatever their internal differences might be, will present a united front and devote themselves to the development and strengthening of the nation through peaceful processes. It is not by a competition in armaments that India will basically strengthen herself, but by unity, self-reliance and the social, economic and industrial development of the nation. (AICC Resolution, 20-29 January 1954)

At the same time, the party protested against the discussion of Kashmir issue in the meetings of SEATO and Baghdad Pact. The AICC expressed said in its Bombay session that this activity “directly concerns the integrity and the sovereign rights of India” (AICC Resolution, Bombay, 2-3 June 1956).

At that time, there was Western presence in some pockets of Indian territory, like the Portuguese-controlled Goa, Daman & Diu and the French colony of Pondicherry. It was feared that in case of an outbreak of war on grounds of strategy and military necessity, the great powers would use these enclaves as springboards for offence and this would adversely affect India’s efforts to keep out of a world conflict. This may have been one reason for Nehru’s decision to absorb Goa and Pondicherry into Indian territory (Karnad 2002: 86; Cohen 2004: 131).

The Congress repeatedly voiced grave disappointment over the nuclear tests by the major powers and termed their continuation as “a crime against the human race” (AICC Resolution, 24-26 October 1958: Para 1). In its Avadi session, the Congress earnestly requested “all concerned to bring about a cessation of the experiments and the immediate consideration of this matter by the Disarmament Commission of the United Nations” (AICC Resolution, 21-23 January 1955). When the USSR resumed nuclear testing in 1955, Nehru, then at the Belgrade Conference of the Non-Aligned Nations, protested against the Soviet move and warned that the danger of war “has been enhanced … by the recent decision of the Soviet government to start nuclear tests” (AICC Resolution, 21-23 January 1955). He sent telegram to A. Dutt, India’s ambassador in Moscow, “asking him to protest
to the Soviet government on the Soviet nuclear tests" (CIA Released Documents, 4 November 1961). Later, when the Soviet Union declared suspension of tests, the Congress welcomed the move but expressed regrets about other nuclear powers who had not suspended tests, which were taking place "with increasing frequency, regardless of all human considerations" (AICC Resolution, 24-26 October 1958). At its Bangalore session in 1960 the AICC urged that the "testing, production and use of nuclear and like weapons" should be "totally banned" (AICC Resolution, 16-17 January 1960). This tone of concern about the danger of stockpiling of nuclear weapons by the major powers was reiterated in subsequent AICC meetings.6 Till 1962, the Congress followed four "inextricably linked basic principles" (formulated at its Calcutta session in 1928) in matters of India's security vis-à-vis outside powers and nuclear weapons. They were: (1) opposition to imperialism and colonial rule; (b) active sympathy and support to people fighting for independence; (c) opposition to war and devotion to peace; and (d) avoiding foreign entanglements in India.

These four principles, etched in the Congress consciousness, were components of the Nehruvian ideology. Though Nehru never consciously sought to influence the Congress Party’s debate and discussions in AICC meetings, his ideas and thoughts were adequately reflected in each resolution of the party. But as leader of the party and head of the government, Nehru was far more vocal and assertive on these matters in Parliament. In a statement in the Lok Sabha on 2 April 1954 he said:

The United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, we are told, possess this weapon and each of these countries has, during the last two years, effected test explosions unleashing impacts which in every respect were far beyond those of any weapons of destruction know to man. (Nehru, Selected Speeches, Sep 1946-Apr 1961: 187)

The considered position of the Government of India, he said, was to demand (1) a "standstill agreement" in respect, at least, of these actual explosions; (2) full publicity by those principally concerned in the production of these weapons; (3) private meetings of the subcommittees of the Conference on Disarmament; and (4) active steps by states and peoples of the world who, though, were not directly concerned with the production of these

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weapons (Nehru, *Selected Speeches*, September 1946-April 1961: 190). In a subsequent speech in the Lok Sabha on the Defence Minister's resolution on suspension of nuclear tests, Nehru, endorsing one member's view of sending the resolution to the three great powers which possessed these hydrogen and atomic bombs, said that "the passage of this resolution in this House should be something rather for the world than for being sent to some other House. We passed the resolution and it is for the world to read it" (*Speech in Rajya Sabha*, 24 May 1957; *Selected Speeches*, September 1946-April 1961: 197-98). About the threat that these nuclear weapon powers posed to India and the world at large could only be contained through a move "towards a comprehensive disarmament programme". On 27 November 1957, he said that "it is in the power of America and Russia to solve this crisis and save humanity from the ultimate disaster which faces it". He appealed to them "to stop all nuclear test explosions and thus to show to the world that they are determined to end this menace, and to proceed also to bring about effective disarmament".

In a speech on 17 December 1957, he again sounded this cautionary note:

"Today the United States of America and the Soviet Union are the powers with the biggest and the most dangerous weapons. The United Kingdom, though presumably weaker, has also joined the Hydrogen Bomb Club. I have no doubt that within a relatively short time France will also be having its test hydrogen bomb explosions, and other countries will do so before long. When this process goes on, it will become impossible to control this deterioration.

Therefore, we are today at a critical moment in history. If we fail to take advantage of this moment, the results may be very bad. (*Speech in Lok Sabha*, 17 December 1957, *Selected Speeches* 1961: 204)

The UK at that time needed India to remain centrally within its sphere of influence to enable it to retain a semblance of its previous standing as an imperial state still able to project its own power and safeguard its interests east of Suez (Darby 1973: 10-12). The Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership was also not too friendly towards the Congress regime: there was a general fear in the country at the time that Stalin might instigate the Moscow-controlled Communist Party of India to stir up trouble at home (Venkataramani 1999: 63-66)."
However, nuclear threats to India from the major powers were mostly viewed as coterminous with the global security situation. Probably, therefore, Nehru’s and the Congress Party’s policy orientation was mostly idealistic or moralistic instead of a realistic assessment. The best national security guarantee for India was therefore viewed as resulting from the disarmament of the nuclear powers. In 1958 Homi J. Bhabha had made the public but muted claim of India’s ability to construct nuclear explosive devices within eighteen months of sanction. This was two years before the French nuclear explosion, and six years before the Chinese nuclear tests (Mirchandani 1968: 229-33). Informal knowledge suggests that the Indian government consciously suppressed the demand by the scientific-bureaucratic groups for a focused drive to produce nuclear explosive elements during the years 1958-1971 (Marwah 1976: 165).

**Views of the Congress in the Post-Nehru Era**

The Nehruvian apprehension and critique of the major-power rivalry and intervention in the regional security environment were continuously debated in the Congress Party’s deliberations in subsequent years. However, different actions by the major powers in the region subsequently strengthened the apprehensions of India’s political leadership about the superpowers’ intentions (Mishra 986). Subsequent debate in the Congress Party sessions highlighted the protest on the issue of the presence of the superpowers (military bases) in the Indian Ocean, arms supply to small states in the region and stockpiling of nuclear weapons by the major powers. The presence of the US military base in the Indian Ocean (Diego Garcia) and presence of *USS Enterprise* in the Bay of Bengal during the Bangladesh crisis (1971) continued to be referred in most of the party’s debates in subsequent years. It needs to be noted that the fact that the *Enterprise* had in 1962 sailed into the Bay of Bengal on a mission in support of India against China has not been emphasised; whereas the later mission has been interpreted as a harbinger of an American strategy of encircling India. This event also brought home the impression how quickly the US could change its policies: on one occasion supporting India against China; and a few years later supporting both China and Pakistan against India. This apprehension probably stimulated India’s interest in both strengthening seaward defence and acquiring a nuclear deterrent (Cohen 2004: 136).
The *Congress Bulletin* said that “the Congress is opposed to setting up, or continuance, of military, naval or air bases by any outside Power in these regions. It likewise opposes stationing of naval fleets of outside Great Powers in the oceans around us” (*Congress Bulletin* 12, 1969: 10). It also rejected “the hegemonical claims of Super Powers, their endeavours to stake out spheres of influence and firmly repudiates the doctrine of ‘limited sovereignty’ for any country”. Congress leader Morarji Desai was very critical of the Soviet arms supply to Pakistan as Moscow knew that Pakistan had no other enemy except India.

The superpower threat to India’s sovereignty was more visible during Indira Gandhi’s leadership. First, during the East Pakistan crisis, the USA, China and USSR were all anxiously watching the unfolding events and in many ways indicated their seriousness to interfere, if required. Non-aligned India probably faced the gravest threat to its sovereignty during the crisis. After his secret visit to China in July 1971, Henry Kissinger told the Indian Ambassador to Washington, L.K. Jha, that in the case of an India-Pakistan War over the Bangladesh issue, if the Chinese were to intervene on behalf of Pakistan, the US would not be in a position to support India (Subrahmanyam 1998: 30). In the view of K. Subrahmanyam, the event was “clearly an attempt at intimidation, to prevent India from acting to defend its own national interests and security, and conveying a veiled threat about the possible intervention by a nuclear China in support of Pakistan” (Subrahmanyam 1998: 30). It came to light later how Kissinger pressed the Chinese to intervene against India and the Chinese refused to do so, fearing an adverse Soviet reaction (Kissinger 1999).

Subsequently, when India intervened in the crisis that resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation, the USA sent in its Task Force 74 headed by the nuclear aircraft carrier *Enterprise* on board of which nuclear weapons were then standard equipment. But later it was revealed that there were no specific operational directions to the *Enterprise* mission (Subrahmanyam 1998: 31). President Nixon disclosed later that he did contemplate the use of nuclear weapons at that stage. But the event was sufficient for the Indian government “to assume the worst and treat it as an act of nuclear intimidation”. The assumption is that this experience of nuclear intimidation may have influenced Indira
Gandhi to give the green signal to the Atomic Energy Department to go ahead with the nuclear tests in 1972 (Subrahmanyam 1998: 30). She apprehended the US as a direct threat to her political career. The accounts by Inder Malhotra and Pupul Jayakar reveal that she feared a covert Western attempt (through the CIA) to oust her from power in the mid-1970s, particularly in the aftermath of the violent coup that eliminated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh (Jayakar 1992; Malhotra 1990). Owing to all these factors, perhaps Indira Gandhi was clear about whom primarily to deter with a nuclear arsenal – China and, after 1971, more remotely, the US (Karnad 2002: 306).

In the subsequent deliberations of the Congress, though the debate on the nuclear threat to India’s national security was not in focus on any particular occasion, the pronouncements of party members in public forums often implied that one of the motives behind India acquiring nuclear weapons was the perceived threat from superpower activities. For example, Defence Minister C, Subramanium, while delivering a lecture at the National Defence College in 1979, spelled out seven factors that might provoke India into exercising the weapon option. Six of them involved major powers (Subramanium 1979: 12):

1. Pakistan’s acquiring nuclear weapons;
2. No halt to the growth of ‘warheads’ in the American and Soviet nuclear arsenals;
3. The UK, France and China continuing with their nuclear weapon programmes;
4. The attitude to clandestine nuclear weapon development projects in Israel, South Africa and Taiwan;
5. The type of access afforded to non-nuclear US allies and Warsaw Pact partners to the American and Soviet nuclear arsenals;
6. The interventionist tendencies of the nuclear powers; and
7. The process of legitimation or de-legitimation of nuclear weapons.

Shanker Dayal Sharma, a Congress leader, raising concerns over the military bases in the Indian Ocean, moved the following resolution in the AICC meeting in December 1980:

As you are aware we have the worry about Indian Ocean. We had passed a resolution in the last Session that the Indian Ocean should be made a zone of peace but we find
that not only a military base in Diego Garcia is being established but also it is being expanded. In 1971 India succeeded in getting a resolution passed in UND that it should be a zone of peace but in spite of that we find they are going merrily about it. (*Minutes of the AICC, 6-7 December 1980*)

The fear of a possible alliance among Pakistan, China and the US to blackmail India always existed in the Indian leaders’ mind. History was a guide. For example, in 1990, Nawaz Sharif proposed bringing in the five nuclear weapon powers into the Indo-Pakistan nuclear issue (Subrahmanyam 1998: 46-47). It was also known by then that both the US and China were behind Pakistan’s nuclear programme.

The Congress during Rajiv Gandhi’s leadership was equally apprehensive of the major powers’ probable threat to India’s security and sovereignty. In his address to the Joint Meeting of US Congress on 13 June 1985, Rajiv Gandhi said: “India is apprehensive about the establishment of military bases in various parts of the world. We are directly affected by the militarisation of the Indian Ocean and the inflow of the increasingly sophisticated arms into our neighbourhood” (*Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi: Statement on Foreign Policy, 1985*: 82). The same tone of concern about the external powers’ involvement in the region was visible in his address to the National Press Club on 14 June 1985. On the arms supply by the US to Pakistan, he said: “We are against any escalation in the arms race…. We are in favour of a zone of peace in the whole area, including the Indian Ocean, and we like to include that no nuclear weapons are in that area” (*Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi: Statement on Foreign Policy, 1985*: 109-110).

With the end of the Cold War and withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, South Asia’s geo-politics underwent tremendous changes. So also did India’s stature and relations with the major powers, especially its relation with the US. The party no more sees any direct threat from the major global powers to India’s national security. In most of the AICC resolutions, only the disarmament and non-proliferation issues have been featured but not the threat that the major powers pose to India. However, some strategic thinkers are of the view that the US still poses a “latent threat” and China will continue to remain a “principal threat” to India (Karnad 2002: xvii). Karnad is supported in this view by Dmitry Rogozin, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Duma: “The current warmth in
Indo-US relations cannot hide the fact that the growth of the Indian deterrent is seen as threatening by the United States”. He recalls that not too long ago the US Department of Defence justified the hypersonic bomber programme in terms of its being able specifically to hit targets in India, among other countries (Vayu 2000). This argument would suggest that India is safe only as long as it toes the American line.

Stephen Cohen argues that “outside powers continue to play an important role in Indian strategic calculations, especially when they are perceived to have links to troublesome neighbours. In this, the US and various Islamic states, and China are singled out” (Cohen 1998: 155). He highlights the supportive American response to Indian policies in the 1999 Kargil crisis that has moderated India’s suspicion of the US, but nevertheless remains very deep despite recently evolving friendly relations between them. Not only that, the “maximalist hawks” and “moderate pragmatists” see the US as a “distant threat”. Despite these perceptions, Indo-US relations today have developed to such an extent (and they are assumed to improve more intensively in the decades ahead), that neither the Congress nor any other political group can foresee a tussle between the two democracies.

**BJP’s Perception on the External Threat to India**

The BJP’s strategic vision, that was manifested in making India an overt nuclear weapon state in 1998, is rooted in its early organisational and leaders’ aspiration of a “strong” vibrant India. The Sangh Parivar (of which the BJP is a part), embodying Hindutva ideology, has often pronounced the vision of overcoming Indian “weakness” by strengthening India’s defence forces. The BJP claims *not to be an ordinary party in the pursuit of power for the sake of power alone; rather it is part of a wider movement*, which is guided by the ideology of nationalism and whose goal is to bring about India’s all-round national resurgence (BJP Tasks Ahead, E/4/2005: 2).

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7 It is often said that the Sangh Parivar comprises numerous front organisations, of which the most prominent are the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or World Hindu Council; the Bajrang Dal or Lord Hanuman’s Troops and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which is the parent organisation of the family whose electoral wing is the BJP. Its ideology is based on V.D. Savarkar’s famous injunction: “Unite Hindus and Militarise Hinduism.”
Nevertheless, unlike the Congress which was non-aligned, with a tilt towards the Soviet Union, the BJP’s precursor, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, opted for non-alignment with a clear sympathy for the United States. Even so, it was critical of the US involvement in South Asia, especially its military alliance with Pakistan. The party was of the view that in case of a future conflict, the US would use the small pockets of territory surrounding the Indian nation in the possession of foreign powers. In a resolution in December 1953, the party expressed the view that “sandwiched between the two wings of Pakistan and studded with these foreign-pocket bases on the sea coast, India might virtually be turned a prisoner in her own home”; and urged the government “to take energetic action to liquidate these pockets” (CWC Resolution, 20 December 1953, BJS Party Documents vol 3, 1973: 29).

When the US resumed arms aid to Pakistan in 1954, the Jan Sangh put the blame squarely on the Indian government for mishandling the situation (CWC Resolution, 20 December 1953, BJS Party Documents vol 3, 1973: 21, 30). The party’s Resolution on Defence and External Affairs (1973) says: “… the responsibility for this lies mainly on our own foreign office which has grossly mishandled our international policies…. Our government has unnecessarily indulged in international involvements which have brought about this grave situation”. The Jan Sangh’s willingness to come close to the US was more pronounced after the Chinese aggression. Party General Secretary Deendayal Upadhyaya said, “We shall definitely be aligned with the Western world, because they have indicated their willingness to help us” (Quoted in Das 1978: 792). M.L Sondhi, another Jan Sangh leader, wrote that “Non-alignment has prevented India from exposing the incompatibility of the long term interests of Pakistan and those of United States of America and Soviet Union” (Sondhi 1968: 7).

It is unclear, however, what exactly the Jan Sangh’s strategic doctrine was (Ghosh 1999: 327). It was more likely an unspoken, yet discernible, pro-West tilt as opposed to the Congress Party’s pro-Soviet tilt. This ambiguity seems to have developed owing to the difference of opinion between its two stalwarts, Balraj Madhok and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. Madhok was all for aligning India with the USA; Upadhyaya was a little cautious (Kishore 1969: 78). Subsequent leaders of the party seem to have been more pragmatic. For example, when the Soviet Union changed its attitude towards India and the
intensity of public opinion in America grew against US involvement in Vietnam and Cambodia, the party leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee warned that these factors should make Indian leaders realise that if India's freedom, integrity and sovereignty were at any time endangered, India could depend only on its own Jawans, its own arms and its own resources, and on none else (Presidential Address, Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha Session, 18-19 July 1979: 18). From this point of view, the party suggested giving top priority to development of nuclear technology as it was necessary for national defence and economic growth.

Another BJS leader, L.K. Advani, in his presidential Address at the party's 18th All India Session on 9-11 February 1973 also warned about the situation in the Indian Ocean where the superpowers vied for domination. He advocated expansion of India's naval strength and exploring the possibility of naval understanding with littoral countries. The BJS position on issues of other regions like West Asia and Israel was based on the Nehruvian ideology of peaceful existence: insistence on continuing "full-fledged diplomatic relations with Israel and India playing an effective role in striving for peaceful coexistence between the Arabs and the Israelis" (BJS Central Working Committee Resolution, 30 June 1967: 137-38).

The Jan Sangh was generally hostile to the Soviet Union, particularly during the Emergency. From the beginning, it was anti-Communist in its political leanings (Kishore 1969: 84). It was unpleasant for the party when former Soviet leaders placed India in the "imperialist camp" and considered its independence to be fake and spurious. But Indo-Soviet relations improved later mainly owing to Nehru's ideological inclination towards Russia and Communism (Kishore 1969: 84). However, later the party was convinced of a Soviet hand in Indian politics to the detriment of India's democratic culture (Ghosh 1999: 331). Also, the Janata Party-led coalition government (in which the BJS was a constituent) emphasised "genuine non-alignment" and had a clear anti-Soviet slant. But this attitude did not reflect itself in the party's outlook on the Soviets after forming the government as part of the Janata Party. After a year in power, Vajpayee, who was foreign minister in Morarji Desai's cabinet, was gratified to report on the continued friendship and trust between the two countries. A similar shift was also marked in its stance on India acquiring nuclear
weapons: the party seemed to have compromised on its advocacy for nuclear weapons for India, maybe out of coalition compulsions. It did not object to the Janata Party-led government’s advocacy not only of total renunciation of nuclear weapons but also of peaceful nuclear explosions in the future. Speaking at a seminar organised by the School of International Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi in May 1978, Vajpayee said:

The only way to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons is to bring about complete cessation of the production of nuclear weapons and simultaneously cut off the manufacture of all weapon-grade fissionable material.... There can be no doubt about India’s policy. We can set an example abjuring the manufacture or acquisition of nuclear weapons. We have pledged against the manufacture or acquisition of nuclear weapons. We have pledged ourselves to developing nuclear technology exclusively for peaceful purposes. (Vajpayee 1978: 380)

In the same seminar, while answering a comment on his party’s pledge for nuclear weapons, Vajpayee in his characteristic humour retorted that after coming to power “I have dropped the bomb” (Quoted in Ghosh 1999: 330). This contradictory policy of the party was criticised as “fretful tokenism” (Ray 1978). With the backdrop of an intense regional and global geo-political activity, the BJP started its journey in 1980.

Perceptible trends can be marked in the BJP’s strategic views in its pronouncements on India’s national security in the early stage of its evolution as a national party and its views on the same during its rise to the centre of power at the national level. It seems that at the early stage of its emergence as a national party, the BJP perceived threats to India both from the superpower rivalry in the Indian subcontinent and neighbouring Pakistan as well. After forming government at the national level, the sources of its threat perception seem to have widened – the overall posture of the superpowers and their interventionist activities anywhere in the world including South Asia. Initially, the BJP disapproved of the continued presence of Soviet armed forces in Afghanistan and called for India’s determination to pursue an independent foreign policy (Zaid 1980: 650). It was equally critical about US policy in arming Pakistan to fight the proxy war. In his Presidential Address at the party’s National Council Session in April 1981, Vajpayee told:

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India and Pakistan, in fact the entire region, needs peace. Russian troops on the Khyber Pass and American warships in the Indian Ocean, both imperil this peace. The real clash of interests is between this region and the superpowers, and not among nations of this region.

The resolution adopted at the National Executive meeting of the BJP in April 1981 summarised the danger of the superpower rivalry as "overlapping arcs of crisis encircle the Indian subcontinent" (BJP Foreign Policy Resolutions and Statements 1980-99: 5). It further said that the party did not recognise the right of nations to intervene or interfere in the affairs of others on the basis of the imperial concept of "spheres of influence". In its view, the international scene in the early 1980s vitiated India's security environment and strategically India faced an unprecedented triangular bind with China in Aksai Chin, USSR in Afghanistan and the USA in Diego Garcia (BJP National Executive Meeting Resolution, 23 April 1981).

These lines of argument have often been expressed in subsequent years. Highlighting the "alarming" situation in the subcontinent, Vajpayee, in his Presidential Address in January 1984 at the Fifth National Council Session of the party said, "the mounting superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean region is a matter of concern to all the littoral nations". He criticised Mrs. Gandhi for not being able to obtain universal endorsement for the proposal of holding an International Conference on declaring the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace (Presidential Address, 5th National Council Session of BJP, 6-8 January 1984: 9). A similar tone of resentment is seen in the April 1984 Ahmedabad Resolution of the party:

... it is necessary to treat the developments in Afghanistan, since Soviet occupation of that country, as being part of a heightened superpower involvement in South, Southwest and West Asia. We would, therefore, treat developments in Afghanistan along with heightened superpower presence in the Indian Ocean and include in our security concerns the tragedy of the continuing Iran-Iraq War in the Gulf.... An important factor contributing to a deterioration in India's security environment is the US supply of armaments to Pakistan. This is a matter of grave concern to us, yet it needs to be understood that it reflects more the effect than the cause. The cause is the importation into our peripheries of superpower interests and involvements. (Resolutions, BJP National Executive, 31 March–2 April 1984: 16)
In response to the perceived threat emanating from the presence of external powers in the region, the party advocated (1) "a regional call for the superpowers to withdraw from the Indian Ocean and a dismantling of all naval bases like Diego Garcia; and (2) an early end of the Iraq-Iran war and an end to all superpower involvement in the Gulf" (*Resolutions*, BJP National Executive, 31 March–2 April 1984: 17). In its Election Manifesto of 1984, the party promised to "initiate fresh endeavours for a withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, a political solution of the Afghan problem, free from outside intervention..." (*BJP, Lok Sabha Election Manifesto 1984*: 21). The party's perception regarding external threats to India was essentially based on its views on regional developments only where the superpowers were involved. Its resolution in June 1989 said:

The BJP makes it abundantly clear that the principal challenge that the country faces in the field of external relations is regional; it lies in a proper ordering of our relations with all our neighbours. India's national and security interest will be served only through a larger awareness of the regional demands, regional needs, regional fears and regional sentiments of South, South-West, and South-East Asia. (*Resolution*, National Executive Meeting, 9-11 June 1989: 10)

But after the end of the Cold War, the BJP's formulation on India's national security seems to have expanded beyond the region. The party was of the view that owing to the erosion of its non-aligned position in the post-Cold War period, India's strategic flexibility had been severely curtailed and it rendered its alternative policy options uni-dimensional (*Resolution*, National Executive Meeting, 9-11 June 1989: 10). The security environment that emerged after the end of the Cold War was "challenging" as "international relations continue to be governed by the law of the jungle" (*BJP Election Manifesto 1991*). The occupation of Kuwait by Iraq and consequent US intervention was viewed by the party as a warning for India not to neglect its defence. The party, therefore, urged equipping India with a blue-water navy, which would be the first Navy in the Indian Ocean from Singapore to Aden. The party would also encourage research and further development on the Arjun battle tank, Light Combat Aircraft, Army Radio Engineering Network and Prithvi and other missiles (*BJP Election Manifesto 1991*).

The BJP has generally been viewed as being West-oriented. In the later stages, it was also seen how eagerly the BJP-led NDA government initiated a strategic partnership with
the USA. But behind its West-oriented image, the party has always remained critical of the Euro-American alliance (that includes the Soviet Union) which, in the view of the party, is pervasive in its influence on international economy, polity, defence and culture (National Executive Meeting Resolution, 30 September 1991). This conception of the party got strengthened further in the post-Cold War environment, which it characterised as fluid and turbulent. The party raised an alarm when this Alliance repeatedly gave an arms largesse to Pakistan and particularly at the “pro-Pakistan tilt” of the USA. When there was news in 1994 of US willingness to supply dozens of F-16 aircraft to Pakistan, the BJP wanted India to “continue to develop and deploy an indigenous missiles system ... in order to provide absolute security against aggression, urgently commence the process to manufacture and arm defence forces with nuclear weapons” (Resolution, BJP National Executive Meeting, 15-17 September 1994: 12-13). Also the Gulf War, where the US was involved, raised the issue of “who will control oil”. In the view of the BJP it was a “global tragedy of immeasurable dimensions” (BJP Resolution, Plenary Session, 1 February 1991: 6). The party was of the view that the United Nations in its present form could not bring a just order in the world since four of the five permanent members of the UNSC were allies (Resolution, National Council on International Situation, 1-3 May 1992: 11).

Unlike during its earlier existence as the Jan Sangh, the BJP’s stand against Israel was manifestly stronger. The party unequivocally condemned Israel’s brutal action against the PLO in Lebanon and rejected its all attempts at regional hegemonism (BJP Resolution, National Executive Meeting, August 1982). This was probably in tune with the BJP’s overall anti-US stand, particularly in the context of the US-Pak strategic tie-up. This changed attitude was clearly discernible in the party resolutions unlike those of the Jan Sangh. The latter was more critical of the Indian government for letting the US come closer to Pakistan, but in the BJP phase it was critical of the US itself for endangering South Asian security (Ghosh 1999: 342-43). Neither was the Soviet Union spared for complicating the situation by intervening in the non-aligned Afghanistan.

The party saw no prospect of peace even after the end of the Cold War as there were attempts to impose a new world order based on the military and economic strength that had “vitiated the international atmosphere” (National Executive Meeting Resolution, 9 June
1994). Perhaps, owing to its inherent scepticism of the emerging world order dominated by the Euro-American alliance, which it viewed as derogatory to India’s national security, the party in both of its *Election Manifestos* (1996 and 1998) proposed the following defence preparedness measures.

1. Expedite the serial production of Prithvi and make Agni I operational for the deployment of these missiles. In addition, hasten the development of Agni series of ballistic missiles with a view to increasing their range and accuracy.
2. Strengthen the Air Force fleet with new generation aircraft.
3. Make qualitative and quantitative improvement in our naval capabilities.
4. Invest in R&D in areas of defence and missile technology so that India becomes increasingly self-reliant.
5. Peg defence-related expenditure to real requirements.
6. Enhance the traditional and technical capabilities of the country’s external intelligence agencies.

For securing India’s frontiers against any future aggression, the party strongly suggested a proactive diplomacy, especially defence diplomacy, coupled with adequate preparedness of the armed forces (*BJP Election Manifesto 1996*: 37). “Mindful of the existing global disequilibrium” the party also advocated directing India’s foreign policy to fight for “sovereign equality amongst nations” (*BJP Election Manifesto 1996*: 31). In its election manifesto 1998, the party expressed the need to “re-evaluate the country’s nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons”. In its view, India was facing “grave challenges to its integrity and security” as the “internal and external security environment has deteriorated sharply in the last decade” (*BJP Election Manifesto 1998*).

A remarkable difference in its description of security challenges for India from the major powers like USA can be viewed between the party’s Cold War and post-Cold War pronouncements. In most of its earlier resolutions, the USA and its involvement in regional affairs was vehemently criticised but once the party saw prospects of formation of government at the centre, its critical posture towards the USA seems to have been moderated. In the later phase, the party highlights the global (and regional security) order
without naming any country as a threat. In an interview, answering the question “what was the compulsion to carry out the tests now?”, Vajpayee repeatedly emphasised both regional and global security realities as the reasons. He said:

Important measures that are guided by national security considerations don’t follow immediate compulsions. Rather, they are guided by long-term imperatives based on a sound appraisal of regional and global security realities. It is important for us and the world to know that by conducting the latest tests, India has responded to a stark regional and global reality that has evolved over the past 50 years. (India Today, 25 May 1998: 38)

Second, in its Election Manifesto 1999 the party said, “in today’s unipolar world it is of paramount importance that India constantly maintains and strengthens the state of preparedness, morale and combat effectiveness of our Armed Forces” (BJP Election Manifesto 1999: 8). It is evident from these two pronouncements that the party followed a realist approach towards India’s national security, instead of accusing particular states as it used to during the Jan Sangh days. The BJP’s pronouncements subsequently seem to have focused on the challenges and opportunity for India becoming a world power. And power, the party opined, could be achieved through strengthening India’s national security. Hence, security consideration was the top priority in the foreign policy calculation of the BJP. In pursuit of this, the party, while proposing to acquire both nuclear and conventional weapons with the latest technology, expected to cooperate, to the fullest extent, with France, Germany, Britain, Israel, etc., while continuing close cooperation with Russia (Chiriyankandath 2004: 202). In the aftermath of the nuclear tests in 1998, it was the BJP-led NDA government that initiated the Indo-US strategic partnership. A sense of idealism and ambition can be seen in its vision when it vigorously campaigned for securing a permanent seat for India in the UNSC by emphasising the age-old dictum Basudhaiva Kutumbakam (the whole world is a family) (Swain 2001: 149).

Views of the CPI(M) on the Threat to India from External Powers

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is of the view that India’s security is threatened not so much by China or Pakistan as by the United States (Banerjee 1966). In almost every pronouncement of the party, the USA has been termed as an “imperialist power” and the penetration of American imperialism is the biggest threat to India’s “national independence
and sovereignty” (Political-Organisational Report of the Central Committee 1968). The Political-Organisational report of 1968 also highlighted “the necessity and urgency of mobilising the widest anti-imperialist democratic forces and building a powerful and broad-based anti-imperialist movement to defeat the chief aggressor and world gendarme, U.S. imperialism, and its imperialist allies”. The other power from the socialist world – Soviet Union – was also in the scanner of the CPI(M) for destabilising India’s security environment. Despite perceiving such threats to India, the party opposes India acquiring nuclear weapons (People’s Democracy, 26 May 1974: 2) and suggested drastic reduction in the defence expenditure (Report of the Central Committee 1968). On the other hand, it suggested that India should quit the Commonwealth and develop new relations with the neighbours and Afro-Asian countries with the aim to isolate USA as the chief enemy of world peace from its allies, especially Britain (the immediate enemy) and the Commonwealth (Nizami 1971: 50-51).

At the organisational level, the party stands for nuclear disarmament and opines that India’s security lies in a nuclear-weapon-free world; nevertheless, it congratulated the scientists for successfully conducting the nuclear tests both in 1974 and in 1998. But at the individual level, some members of the party support India acquiring nuclear weapons under certain circumstances. For example, P. Ramamurthi is reported to have said that it is open to any country to manufacture its own nuclear weapons if it felt threatened, “particularly when the nuclear powers had not refrained from making nuclear bombs and stockpiling all such weapons. If it feels threatened, India certainly has the right to manufacture atom bombs if it so desired” (The Statesman, 12 May 1966). Contrarily, the party has never been supportive of India’s nuclear weapon programme even though, according to its pronouncements, India has come under “the frenzied attacks of neo-colonialism led by U.S. imperialism – in the form of economic aggrandisement, political blackmailing and enmeshing … in military alliances” (Political Resolution Adopted by the 8th Congress, 23-29 December 1968). In every resolution the party calls for fighting against the neo-colonial US threat but does not prescribe any effective strategy to fight such threats.
CPI(M) Views on USA as a Security Concern for India

The CPI(M) senses threats to India from USA in different ways. First, it sees America as an imperialist power which has already penetrated into India in both military and non-military ways. During the Cold War, through forming military alliances and building military bases across Asia and the Indian Ocean, it had encircled the region, thereby encircling India for its larger design to fight an ideological war with the Soviet bloc (CPI(M) Election Manifesto 2009). In the post-Cold War phase, the penetration of American capital and India’s growing reliance on American aid is viewed by the party as just “a bulwark of neo-colonialism” that will create a dangerous situation for the country (Karat 2000). Also, the party thinks that American imperialism has tremendously sharpened and it is directly facing the people of India in the shape of frontal attacks on their standard of living and jobs and direct imposition of starvation and destitution on millions. Monstrous military blocs like NATO, SEATO, CENTO and ANZUS built with the leadership of USA have further complicated the geo-political scenario of this region. The party is of the view that the American intelligence agency CIA has been involved in India for long, being mainly active in the North-Eastern region, to destabilise it (Political Resolution, 23-29 December 1968). Its agents were directed to study social tension and how to use them for the purpose of destabilising the situation under the code name “Project Brahmaputra”. According to the Marxist doyen P. Ramamurti, the US State Department launched its covert operation Project Brahmaputra with the agreement of the Special Operation Research Office of the George Washington University, taking help from the US outfits in India (Documents of the Communist Movement in India, XIX: 501).

The party is very critical of the USA’s alliance with, and supply of arms to, Pakistan. It criticised the Government of India for downplaying this threat for the loans and credits secured from Washington and screening the inimical role of the US imperialists from the Indian people. A party resolution says, “the enemy of India (US) was presented as a helpful friend” by the government itself (CPI(M) Political Resolution, June 27–July 2, 1972: 17). It accused USA of constantly opposing all liberation struggles and also always taking a hostile attitude towards India at every crucial turn in politics. Ever since the East Pakistan crisis of 1971, the CPI(M) on every occasion raises “the treacherous character of the
American imperialism”. It criticises the US for accusing India being “the aggressor” and threatening India by sending the Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal (CPI(M) Political Resolution, June 27-July 2 1972: 17-18).

US presence in the Indian Ocean has been one of the main arguments in the CPI(M)’s views of challenges to India’s security. The party resolution on the Asian Security Pact adopted by the Polit Bureau on 10 March 1974 said:

The recent agreement between the USA and Britain to develop Diego Garcia Island, just a thousand miles from India, in the midst of the Indian Ocean, half-way between Africa and Australia, into a full-fledged major naval and air base of American imperialists with their nuclear missiles, poses a grave threat to the security of Afro-Asian nations and other littoral countries of the Indian Ocean, especially to India. (CPI(M) Resolution adopted by Polit Bureau, 10 March 1974)

Therefore, the CPI(M) gave a clarion call for an Asian Security Pact to pinpoint the real nature and source of threat to the freedom and security of Asian nations (CPI(M) Resolution adopted by Polit Bureau, 10 March 1974). According to the party, the real enemy to the Asian nations is American imperialism and the threat arises from its aggressive designs in Asia. The proposed Asian Security Pact was mainly to direct Asian unity against American and other imperialists’ designs in Asia and to warn them to abolish immediately all war bases in Asia and withdraw forces from these bases including in the Indian Ocean. In this pursuit, the party felt it urgent to forge unity amongst the Asian countries and peoples to defend their security and sovereignty and rebuff the American imperialists’ threat. In this effort, the party urged effective participation of Socialist China, Democratic Republic of Korea and Democratic Republic of Vietnam along with other Asian countries that stand against the imperialist America and its Asian allies. The party also suggested two approaches in this endeavour: (1) pursuance of a policy of non-alignment as a struggle against imperialism (CPI(M) Political Resolution, April 1978); and (2) implementation of the 1971 UN Declaration aimed at establishing a “Zone of Peace” in the Indian Ocean area.

When a nuclear-fuelled power pack (spy device) was installed by USA on the heights of Nanda Devi with the knowledge of the Janata Government (April 1978), the CPI(M)

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vociferously condemned the act (Statement of the Polit Bureau, 18 April 1978). The party statement said that “this collaboration was with U.S. imperialism, which ever since the early fifties, has stood against India at all crucial moments, while building different military alliances like SEATO and CENTO to bully India”. But when the Diego Garcia issue did not appear in the statement of the NAM Foreign Ministers’ Conference, the party accused the Indira Gandhi government of “vacillation in its foreign policy” approach (Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the CPI(M), January 1982: 29).

In most of its later pronouncements, the party highlighted two important developments which in its view have sufficient bearing on India’s security perception. First, the arming of Pakistan by the US, and second, the expansion and increasing activities of the US in Diego Garcia. The arming of Pakistan is considered by the CPI(M) as an “imperialist conspiracy” which is the gravest danger both to the democratic forces of Pakistan and the people of India (Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the CPI(M), January 1982: 294). The Pakistani military clique is acting as a tool of US imperialism and therefore poses a serious threat to India and the entire region. This act of the US and Pakistan “brought the danger of war to India’s doorstep” (Documents of the Eleventh Congress of the CPI(M), January 1982: 381). The party also criticised the US for refusing to supply nuclear fuel for the Tarapur nuclear plant on the plea that the newly enacted US law did not permit the supply of such fuel supply while it supplied Pakistan with modern arms even though it was known that Pakistan was working on a nuclear bomb. This made the party suspect that the US was bent on feverishly arming Pakistan’s military rulers to create a constant threat of war between the two countries (CPI(M) Central Committee’s Press Communiqué, 27 October 1980). In this way, the USA was playing the Pakistan card to pressurise India to shift its foreign policy, especially its stand on Afghanistan. On the other side, the Pakistani dictator, unable to seize any issue to mobilise the people, was using the Afghanistan card by acting as the anti-Soviet spearhead of the USA to stockpile arms to be used against India (CPI(M) Central Committee’s Press Communiqué, 27 October 1980).

The second important issue that the party frequently raises is that the “standing danger to India and all littoral states” emanates from the Diego Garcia base. The base,
known to harbour nuclear arsenals, makes it possible to conduct military operations against littoral states and in successive intervals has been expanded with additional personnel and resources. Therefore, the Election Manifesto 1980 of the party demanded "bold action against the latest aggressive moves of the US imperialists in Diego Garcia and in Indian Ocean region and for making it a zone of peace". The 12th Congress of the party adopted a resolution expressing grave concern on US activities in the following words:

In the Indian sub-continent the USA conspires to surround India with a ring of reactionary Governments subservient to it, supplies sophisticated arms to Pakistan for purposes of aggression, tries to rouse chauvinist feelings against India taking advantage of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, and openly supports internal disruptive and secessionist forces in pursuance of its policy of dismemberment of India. The U.S. imperialists are trying to ring India with hostile bases in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Indian Ocean. Through its agents and reactionary elements in India, it directs attacks on the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and India's friendship with Socialist countries.

... Regardless of the wishes of the littoral States, the U.S. is militarising the Indian Ocean, its nuclear arms ships are swarming all over it. It has established a nuclear naval base at Diego Garcia which constitutes a serious threat to the security of many nations, including India. (CPI(M) Political Resolution, 25-30 December 1985)

But the strategy the party suggested and the approach it adopted in reaction to all these developments gives an impression that except raising the awareness on certain issues, it has no concrete policy prescription. The dangerous scenario narrated by the party out of the US engagement in the Indian Ocean and Asia required "a realistic strategy" if India wished to counter it (CPI(M) Political Organisational Report, May 1986: 3). The party, as usual, called for mass mobilisation of anti-imperialist people to unmask imperialist plans. The Vijayawada Party Congress Resolution said:

The Eleventh Congress ... expresses its grave concern over the growing danger which threatens to plunge the world into a nuclear holocaust. It regards this development as a danger to the existence of mankind and calls upon all people of goodwill in India to be aware of the danger and resist it... It is the urgent task of the working class and all progressive sections to combat this danger, expose and unmask imperialist plans before the people and mobilise all peace-loving anti-imperialist forces to save the world from nuclear devastation. (CPI(M) Political Organisational Report, May 1986: 3-4)
In pursuit of this lofty goal, the party also observed a week-long programme on a mass scale in West Bengal where people were mobilised in defence of world peace and in opposition to the US imperialist drive towards militarisation of space and the drive to atomic war. In Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Tripura and several other states a week was observed to campaign in defence of world peace. The party also vowed during the 12th Congress “to redouble its activities on the peace front and carry the message of world peace, while exposing the war-mongering U.S. imperialism and their henchmen” (CPI(M) Political Organisational Report, 12th Congress, May 1986: 6).

In 1995, when India decided to sign the Indo-US military cooperation agreement, the CPI(M) expressed grave concern. The Polit Bureau of the party expressed its strong opposition to the decision taken by the first Indo-US Army Executive Steering Committee to exchange officers on courses and military exercise and developing Army-to-Army cooperation. The US strategy towards India was clear, the party opined. “After the dismantling of the Soviet Union, it wants to ensure that no major third world country emerges with an independent economic military power.” Military cooperation would “spell a grave threat to India’s independence and sovereignty as this cooperation seeks to integrate India in the strategic military cooperation of the United States” (CPI(M) Polit Bureau Statement, 15 January 1992). The growing Indo-US defence collaboration might have harmful implications for India’s sovereignty and foreign policy and would compromise India’s security interests (Central Committee Report on Political Developments, 18-20 October 1995).

Therefore, the Polit Bureau called for scrapping the Indo-US military cooperation pact signed in January 1995 and immediate cancellation of the joint naval exercises in March that year. The pact, the party said, “provides the Americans ample opportunities to penetrate the Indian defence establishment” (CPI(M) General Elections 1996: 5). It criticised vehemently the Narasimha Rao government for “jeopardising India’s vital security interests by continuing with the totally uncalled for collaboration with the Pentagon and the U.S. armed forces” (Polit Bureau Statement, 3 February 1996).
The party advanced a twofold justification for its opposition to India-USA military cooperation. First, the US administration exerted tremendous pressure on India not to deploy Prithvi missiles and stall further testing of the Agni missiles. Also, it barred India from following an independent nuclear policy. These anti-India policies coupled with the adoption of the Brown amendment to resume arms supplies to Pakistan, the party said, constituted “an inimical factor to India’s security interests”. Though the US did not provide F16 fighters, the American Congress sanctioned the arms deal which included Orion reconnaissance planes and Harpoon missiles. This situation was viewed by the party as a “trap” for the Rao government “to yoke India and Pakistan together under military hegemony in the subcontinent” (Central Committee on Political Developments, 18-20 October 1995).

Second, the party suspected that the joint naval exercise would be on a larger scale and duration than the one conducted in May 1996. And “some of the U.S. naval vessels like the nuclear submarine, to be deployed for the exercise, may carry nuclear weapons” which was not in the interest of India’s security (Polit Bureau Statement, 3 February 1996). It therefore, demanded cancellation of the Indo-US military cooperation agreement which links up India with the US global strategy and also demanded removal of nuclear weapons from the US military base in Diego Garcia (CPI(M) Election Manifesto 1999: 7). The party also accused Prime Minister Vajpayee of “mounting an aggressive anti-China campaign in his letter to the US President” and deliberately ignoring “the long-standing threat perception of India concerning the US nuclear base in Diego Garcia” (CPI(M) Polit Bureau Statement, 15 May 1998).

**Soviet Policies and India’s Security Concerns: Views of the CPI(M)**

The CPI(M) not only slammed the policies of USA impacting India’s security but also equally pointed its fingers towards the other superpower for its attempt to escalate India’s security vulnerabilities. Particularly, the party was very critical about Soviet arms aid to Pakistan in 1968. First, the party criticised the Indira Gandhi government for covering its diplomatic failure when Mrs Gandhi said, “any country was free to give aid to any other country – though we are not happy about it” (Basu 1998: 377). This Soviet decision, in the view of the party, highlighted the “crisis of the foreign policy of the Government of India”
The party also highlighted the changed Soviet stand towards India and the end of India’s exclusive friendship with the Soviet Union (People’s Democracy, 14 July 1968). Third, the party expressed the view that arms aid had much to do with Pakistan’s friendship with China and it was an attempt to wean that country away from People’s China. India’s shift did not seem to be the only reason for the change in Soviet attitude. As India was given arms to fight China, Pakistan was also given arms to wean it away from China. Lastly, huge aid was offered at a time of military dictatorship in Pakistan. This helped bring legitimacy to the military government.

The party expressed worries about Soviet aid to Pakistan which created fresh problems in India in the form of incessant demands for (1) increased defence expenditure; (2) greater reliance on the US; and (3) a more chauvinist stand on Kashmir. The party hoped that India would realise that all this was due to its bankrupt anti-China policy and not settling the Kashmir issue to the satisfaction of the people in the Valley. Therefore, the Central Committee of the party warned “against reactionaries who, utilising the Soviet Government’s arms supply to Pakistan are campaigning to force the Indian Government to give up its friendly relations with socialist countries and totally align with U.S. imperialism” (Central Committee Resolution, August 1968: 4). To save India’s economy and independence, the Central Committee demanded of the government to:

1. Give up its hostility to China and create a climate conducive to negotiation;
2. Initiate talks with the leaders of the people of Kashmir;
3. Take steps to settle all outstanding problems with Pakistan;
4. Stop forthwith all aid from imperialist countries. (Central Committee Resolution, August 1968: 5)

Unlike the perceived threats from USA, threats from the Soviet Union did not feature frequently in subsequent CPI(M) pronouncements. Even Soviet arms aid to Pakistan was criticised by the party rather moderately. While explaining the rationale of Soviet aid to Pakistan, the party criticised the Government of India for mismanaging the situation. Maybe the socialist brotherhood was the motive while considering Soviet actions.