

## *The Natural Ally and the Tactical Ally*

by Ninan Koshy

*Editor's Note: This commentary is part of an FPIF series of essays by non-U.S. analysts. See <http://www.fpif.org/outside/> for more perspectives from Outside the U.S.*

In the vaguely defined international coalition in the "war against terrorism" India and Pakistan occupy perhaps the most uncomfortable positions. Pakistan was an ally of the United States during the cold war, and India, a significant leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, was seen as an obstacle to U.S. goals and objectives. Throughout the 1990s U.S. relations with India warmed, while they cooled with Pakistan. Prior to September 11, Pakistan, an authoritarian regime, was one of three countries to recognize the Taliban, and its intelligence services had close ties to the Taliban. India, on the other hand, was a democracy, and had ties to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. By warming up to Pakistan in the aftermath of the attacks, the U.S. has reversed the tilt toward India for which it had assiduously worked for some three years, favoring its "tactical ally" (Pakistan) over its "natural ally" (India). The Indian government appears, however, to be sacrificing its traditions of non-alignment and support for international law in order to rebuild an alliance with the U.S.

The Indian government appears to have been quite pleased when a senior U.S. official called India the U.S.'s "natural ally" on the eve of Indian Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee's visit to the U.S., echoing the sentimental phrase first coined by India itself. However it was disappointed that there was no specific reference to cross-border terrorism in Kashmir (read from Pakistan) in the joint statement issued on November 10th following the first ever summit between President George W. Bush and the Prime Minister. The Indian Prime Minister offered unsolicited and unlimited cooperation with U.S. military operations in the war against

terrorism even though large numbers of Indians opposed such cooperation.

The Indian government's official position is that India has long been involved in fighting terrorism, especially of the Osama bin Laden variety, via Pakistan. For some time now India has been trying to convince the U.S. that the major continuing terrorist threat to both the U.S. and India emanates from the same or closely related sources—namely Islamist terrorism in Southwestern and Central Asia. In the official Indian view, the result of the September 11 attacks is that the U.S. has joined India in the struggle against terrorism, not the other way around. Indirectly endorsing Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis as he has done on several occasions, Prime Minister Vajpayee told the United Nations General Assembly on November 10th, "We in India know from our own bitter experience that terrorists develop global networks driven by religious extremism." Vajpayee was essentially repeating what he had told the U.S. Congress last year about religious wars: "In our neighborhood in this twenty-first century, religious war has not been fashioned into, it has been pushed to be an instrument of state policy." India seems to claim the copyright for the mission statement on terrorism.

In the context of the war in Afghanistan, the hostility between India and Pakistan will be played out on three main fronts. One of course is Kashmir. The obsession of both governments with the militancy in Kashmir hides the fact that the Kashmir problem is basically one of democracy and human rights, and has a history that pre-dates the emergence of the armed

insurgency against Indian rule in 1989. The hostility between India and Pakistan has increased since September 11 and saber rattling has reached new levels on both sides. Both use the same jargon to describe their military postures: “highest alert” and “readiness to meet any eventuality.” While India is keen to get cross-border terrorism in Kashmir on the international agenda, it still argues against “internationalizing the Kashmir problem”—i.e., holding international discussions on the demands for self-determination on the part of Muslims living in Kashmir. Meanwhile, Pakistan calls guerillas in Kashmir freedom fighters and accuses India of state terrorism. There is no movement in the debate as it repeats the classic refrain relating terrorism and political violence: “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom-fighter.”

Another front is Pakistan’s nuclear weapons. Pakistan is worried that Israel is now increasing intelligence and military cooperation with India. Interestingly, India’s Defense Minister George Fernandes has given a “safety certificate” for Pakistan’s nuclear weapons saying that those in charge are all responsible people. Until recently, Indian offi-

cial had hinted that Pakistan’s nuclear weapons were not safe.

Finally, the rivalry between the two countries also will come to the fore in the hard negotiations regarding post-Taliban Afghanistan whenever that emerges. Pakistan is keen to exclude India from the negotiations and points out that India is not among the “Six Plus Two” established in 1997 to support UN peace efforts. The forum includes six of Afghanistan’s neighbors—China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—as well as Russia and China.

Pakistan is concerned about India’s relationship with the Northern Alliance, as it fears it will be used as a proxy to promote India’s interests in Afghanistan. India has actively supported the Alliance for the past few years, along with Iran and Russia. Although the Indian government firmly denies allegations that its army officials joined the U.S. army in aiding the Northern Alliance, its senior officials have visited the area several times. It is a safe guess that any intelligence gathered from these trips has been shared with the U.S. military following the September 11 attacks. While India’s role in the present war is obviously limited, the Bush admin-

istration is keen to have a long-term military alliance with India. The Indian government, while refusing to use the term “military alliance,” concedes that there are proposals on a “new strategic framework” and “expanded defense cooperation.”

Pakistan’s predicament is understandable. It had no choice but to join America’s war. Otherwise it would have been indicted along with the Taliban. But India’s case was different. It could have supported efforts to bring the perpetrators of the September 11 terror to justice under a framework of international law. But it was absolutely unnecessary for India to have offered unconditional support to the Bush administration’s war in Afghanistan. In keeping with its tradition and on the basis of a careful assessment of the situation, India had a responsibility to give leadership to nations and peoples who wanted to avert this catastrophic war. It had a chance to stand up for peace and it blew it.

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