

Pragati

The Indian
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What the wise men say

IF INDIA GROWS FASTER THAN CHINA...
CYBER WAR READINESS
FEWER TROOPS IN KASHMIRI TOWNS
THE SEIGE OF THE RED FORTRESS
POKING FUN AT THE TALIBAN

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STRATEGIC AFFAIRS

Battleground cyberspace

The need for a cyber warfare strategy

ROHAN JOSHI

DECEMBER 24, 2008. Barely a month after the 26/11 attacks, a group calling itself “Whackerz Pakistan” hacks into the Indian Eastern Railways website, defacing it with a series of threats against Indian financial institutions and Indian citizens. Earlier that year, hackers from China attacked the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) website. Despite official denials, at least one website reported that the hackers stole login identities and passwords of several Indian diplomats. In May 2008, the National Informatics Centre (NIC), the primary IT infrastructure support organisation of the Union Government, was attacked by GhostNet, a large, China-based cyber-spying organisation. In 2008 alone, over 4,000 Indian websites, including almost a 100 Indian government websites were defaced by cyber attackers.

An understanding of the terms “information operations” and “information warfare” is important to distinguish the two from generic cyber attacks. In a document entitled “Joint Doctrine for Information Operations” (1998), the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff defined information operations (IO) as “actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems, while defending one’s own information and information

systems” and information warfare as “IO conducted during times of crisis or conflict (including war)...” The terms “information warfare” and “cyber warfare” are essentially synonymous and related to the term “cyber terrorism”, which is the use IO to intimidate or coerce a government or its people, to further political, social or ideological objectives.

The definition of cyber warfare as actions conducted during times of conflict is important because it lends light to the fact that India and Pakistan have been in a state of cyber war since the coming of the Internet age. The use of cyber terrorism against India by Pakistani hackers, then, is only a natural extension of the real world unconventional war waged by Pakistan against India.

The first true example of cyber war was perhaps the Russia-Estonia conflict in 2007. However, the use of computer technology to undermine an adversary’s military operations is not new. For example, in the Persian Gulf War in 1990, a group of teenagers from the Netherlands hacked into the United States Department of Defense (DoD) systems and obtained data such as US troop locations, weapons and exact movement of US war-

ships. They then tried to sell the information to Saddam Hussein, who, thinking it was trap, declined the offer!

The South Ossetia War in July 2008 was the first major international military conflict during which cyber warfare was integrated with conventional military offensives. Russia's cyber attacks were launched as a precursor to the full blown land, air and sea assault on Georgia, through distributed denial of service (DDoS) assaults. The attacks both defaced and rendered inoperable several government and mass media websites, greatly affecting the Georgian government's ability to communicate and disseminate information to its citizens, military and to the outside world.

India's vulnerability to cyber warfare is evident in the statistics presented earlier. The proliferation of information technology in India, coupled with low levels of security awareness (at personal, corporate and government levels) means that this vulnerability to attacks from hostile national and sub-national entities will only in-

puters or other electronic media to threaten the integrity and sovereignty of India. Some issues were addressed in the Information Technology (Amendment) Act 2008, but the amendment, passed by both houses in December 2008, is not yet "notified" and therefore is yet to come into force. The amendment, in any case, fails to specifically address the use to telecommunications equipment, electronic devices and networks in assisting, planning or executing physical acts of terror in India.

The Information Technology Act (2000) provided for the creation of a Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-in) to address cyber security incidents, but falls short of establishing an operational body for proactive defence of India's information and electronic assets. CERT-in functions in the same capacity as CERT's around the world—collecting and analysing information on cyber threats, and issuing alerts, guidelines and advisories on potential and current threats—but doesn't provide an "in the trenches" response to ongoing incidents that impact national security.

Countries around the world are realising the importance of information technology on national security. China has formulated a official cyber warfare doctrine within the framework of its integrated national plan and conducts cyber warfare simulations as part of routine military exercises. Pakistan, although lacking in a coherent cyber warfare strategy, has a well trained, mostly volunteer cadre of hackers and programmers, who regularly target India under the auspices of the Pakistani government. In addition, Pakistan maintains well trained and motivated operatives within its Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) who are adept at IO.

The robustness and maturity of China's IO capability, particularly as evidenced against the backdrop of its breach of the fifth-generation F-35 "Joint Strike Fighter" program, has forced the US to accelerate plans to establish the United States Cyber Command (USCC). In India, the nascent Defence and Information Warfare Agency (DIWA) is responsible for aggressive IO. However, the agency's capability for co-ordinated IO action against adversaries is unknown and untested.

The existence of DIWA, however, doesn't reduce India's vulnerability to cyber attacks. If anything, an argument can be made that aggressive IO will attract further retributive attacks, particularly given our low levels of security preparedness, and the lack of an operational mechanism to defend against such attacks. The consequences of dragging one's feet in the ever changing world of technology can be far reaching. The Indian gov-

All infrastructure and networks supporting government, military and essential services must go through security hardening procedures, and must include regular security audits

crease. A May 2008 report in The Times of India identified botnets as the primary mode of attack. Botnets, also known as "zombie networks", are armies of compromised computers, controlled externally to co-ordinate attacks against other networks. The more than 50,000 operational botnets in India could be employed to render inoperable government and military communication networks and wreak havoc on command and control during military conflict. The concept of employing botnets to overwhelm and render inoperable a country's network infrastructure was successfully demonstrated by the Russians in the Estonia conflict.

So what apparatus has India set up to counter the surge of cyber attacks against the nation? The Information Technology Act (2000) was passed into law in response to the need to regulate the use of electronic media. The act provides a broad framework to govern the use of information technology in India, but fails to address key areas with national security implications, including tackling the issue of cyber terrorism and the use of com-

ernment must ensure that adequate measures are in place to govern the use of information technology, and provide protection to the nation's information assets.

Firstly, the government must move forward with enacting the Information Technology (Amendment) Act 2008. Further, it must evaluate the feasibility of establishing a body dedicated to the proactive defence of India's information assets to mitigate the obvious operational risks they face at the hands of our adversaries. Also needing attention is India's revealed weaknesses in the field of cyber forensics—a fact that was evident when it had to rely on the FBI to trace the 26/11 email allegedly sent from Hyderabad by the so-called 'Deccan Mujahideen', to Lahore, Pakistan.

As part of an overall security preparedness strategy, all infrastructure and networks supporting government, military and essential services must go through security hardening procedures, and must include regular security audits. The government also must educate and encourage security awareness training across the board to anyone that accesses sensitive information electronically, including ministers, military personnel and our diplomatic corps.

The rapid adaptation of new technologies in today's world presents challenges that India, and other nations, will be forced to address. Due to the nature of cyber warfare and cyber terrorism, no nation can truly be invulnerable to attacks. Indeed, cyber attacks will continue to be weapons of choice to many, given issues of jurisdiction in

bringing offenders to book, relative anonymity of operating over the Internet, and the negligible cost associated with mounting a cyber attack (and indeed, each incremental cyber attack) against a specific adversary. However, India can, to a large extent, effectively manage many of these risks by establishing a robust mechanism to govern the use of information technology in the nation; providing for a centralised structure for proactive defence of information assets, aggressive IO, and cyber forensic analysis; establishing a process to regularly evaluate information technology risks with national security implications, and the state of preparedness; and encouraging education on information security awareness issues at personal, corporate, military and government levels.

International negotiations to prevent cyber attacks have been proposed by Russia but the United States has been opposed to an international treaty on the lines of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The European Union and China have begun to assert their own positions with regard to cyber war and international law. It is yet unclear whether the Indian government has allocated any diplomatic bandwidth on this front. It is important for India to shape the rules in a manner that its interests are protected.

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INTERNAL SECURITY

Fewer troops in the Kashmiri heartland

Different parts of the state demand different approaches

SUSHANT K SINGH & ROHIT PRADHAN

AFTER THE successful conduct of assembly and parliamentary polls in Jammu & Kashmir, the alleged incident of rape and murder of two women in Shopian saw the return of protests, rallies and agitational politics. The incessant attention of the local and the national media has placed Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in an unenviable position.

This is reminiscent of last summer when a section of the Kashmiri population led by separatist leaders agitated after a parcel of land was trans-

ferred to the Amarnath shrine board by the state government. The vociferous nature of public protests led many Indian commentators to articulate an argument for Kashmir's eventual secession from India. They despaired that India had lost the battle for the minds and hearts of the Kashmiri people.

However, only a few months later, despite the same separatist leaders issuing an unequivocal call for an election boycott, the assembly elections witnessed a very heavy participation from the

electorate of the state. This led to many separatist leaders reconsidering their stand on elections. While Sajjad Lone chose to participate in the parliamentary polls, other separatist leaders—for the first time in two decades—refrained from calling for a boycott of the Lok Sabha polls. Thus, it appeared that successful conduct of two successive elections in the state had turned the tide decisively turned against the separatists and dented their claims of representing the aspirations of the Kashmiri *awam*. In this light, the alleged incidents at Sopore and Shopian has allowed the separatists to come back from hibernation and to show that they were not irrelevant.

The Shopian and the Amarnath land agitations mark a sharp shift in separatist strategy. Despite frequent attempts by hard line separatists to cast Kashmir as part of the global Islamist jihad in the last decade, the struggle for “self-determination” has adopted an ethnic-political-nationalist idiom

The army must conduct counter-terrorism operations on the Line of Control, but it should play a secondary role to the political leadership in counterinsurgency operations in the Kashmiri heartland.

to justify its movement against the Indian state. But faced with dwindling support from the Kashmiri *awam* and little international appetite for their diatribe against the Indian state, the hardliners are now trumpeting the religious-ethnic identity argument—an Islamic Kashmir whose very survival as a “Muslim land” is under threat from a largely Hindu India—to rouse the average Kashmiri against the Indian state and revive the fortunes of separatist politics.

While this “Islam is in danger” slogan is clearly successful in rallying the crowds—it doesn’t clash with the average Kashmiri’s urge for economic growth and development—the separatists realise that they must dent the credibility of the promising and charismatic new chief minister to succeed against him politically. Incidents such as the ones in Sopore and Shopian provide an excellent opportunity to the separatists to direct public ire against the state government. These unfortunate but relatively minor incidents, hardly unique to Kashmir in the Indian context, tend to conflagrate into bigger stories of Kashmiri grievance with many diverse and unconnected issues

ending up at the top of the separatists’ discourse in these protests.

The mainstream political parties in the state—from Mufti Mohammed Sayeed’s People’s Democratic Party (PDP) to the Congress Party—have shied away from confronting the separatists ideologically. While the overt armed support provided by the jihadis to the separatists certainly has a role to play in this unwillingness, it also points to the mainstream politicians’ lack of trust and faith in the central government. It is here that New Delhi must step in and initiate certain major steps to shore up the confidence of those who support India in this proxy war in Kashmir.

The first and foremost among these steps is to reconsider the deployment of the central security forces in the state, and review the desirability of continuance of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). The deployment of the central forces, under the AFSPA, is an emotional rallying point for the separatists that no elected government in the state can counter credibly.

After the Sopore protests, Mr Abdullah lobbied New Delhi hard for withdrawal of AFSPA from the state. The same story has been repeated after the recent Shopian incident. The army has opposed this vehemently—arguing that the anti-militancy operations in Kashmir would be adversely affected in the absence of AFSPA. The military operations against the jihadis in Pakistan, and resultant media spotlight on the continuing terror threat to India, has aided the army’s argument.

Nevertheless, the army’s argument needs to be examined carefully and dispassionately. Now, no sensible observer would argue that the situation in Kashmir has improved to the extent that the complete withdrawal of the army from counterinsurgency operations is plausible in the medium-term.

However, it does not follow that army should operate in the entire region in the same manner—the security contexts at the Line of Control (LoC) and Srinagar, for instance, are very different. Indeed, the prevalent notion that army requires a *carte blanche* to operate across the entire state makes little sense. The army has to be at the forefront of counter-terrorism operations on the LoC, but it should play a secondary role to the political leadership in counter-insurgency operations in the Kashmiri heartland.

Theorists describe counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy in three simplified stages: clear, hold and build. Today, Indian security forces have largely “cleared” Kashmir’s key population centres of major terrorist threats. As there is no indigenous



Photo: Dave Watts

terrorist movement in Kashmir, the process of “hold” has to be implemented on the LoC to prevent Pakistan-aided terrorists from infiltrating into the Kashmiri heartland. Its dynamics must be left entirely to the army. Finally, the process of “build” is a socio-political process that has to start from the population centres in the state under the guidance of the political leadership of the state—with a substantially reduced role for the army.

With the improvement in the security—especially in population centres—and the election of a popular government, the security goals need to be woven into the larger narrative of reconciliation and peace. The civilian-army conflict—the cause of much angst among ordinary Kashmiris—takes place not in isolated forests but in large population centres. An army-led operation to kill the terrorists in the remote forests of Kupwara is necessary and justified, but similar aggressive actions by the army in population centres can have far-reaching—and often damaging—social and political consequences.

The issue of AFSPA and the conduct of the army in population centres has always provided much ammunition to the separatists. Therefore, the greater challenge in Kashmir is to balance the security considerations with political imperatives. It is possible to resolve this conundrum if the primary responsibility for securing law and order in population centres is gradually transferred to a re-invigorated local police while the army is placed in the support role—to conduct special operations beyond the capacity of the local police. As the

army recedes in to the background in these areas, the question of AFSPA becomes superfluous to the whole debate. A lowering of political temperature would provide the government with enough space to consider a bold political decision on the continuation of AFSPA in these regions.

More importantly, such a measure will help create confidence among mainstream politicians of the state to take on the separatists ideologically. The battle for winning the ideological space in Kashmir has to be fought by mainstream political, social and religious leaders of the state. All actions of the Indian government must empower this local leadership in Kashmir. An area-wise review of deployment of the central forces, army and the Rashtriya Rifles—leading to a reconsideration of the employment of the AFSPA in certain areas of the state—will deflate the separatist balloon and move the state firmly on the path of permanent peace and normalcy.

The political leaderships in New Delhi and Srinagar must appreciate the distinction in employment and the role of the army in different parts of the state. More than the Omar Abdullah government at Srinagar, it is the UPA government at Delhi that can decide the future course of action in Kashmir.

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PUBLIC POLICY

The politics of reservations

Economic freedom and rule of law work. Caste-based quotas don't.

RAVIKIRAN RAO

THE ISSUE of reservations in India is like Yossarian's liver condition in *Catch-22*. Reservations were supposed to be for 10 years, but they have been extended again and again, for over 60 years, with their scope greatly broadened. The case for extending reservations for the next ten years is invariably that the previous sets of ten years were not sufficient. But after six such extensions in time and significant extensions in scope, it is becoming increasingly difficult to claim with a straight face that reservations are in fact the right remedy that will uplift the condition of the depressed classes.

The fact is that the policy of reservations is too blunt an instrument to achieve any sort of social justice. Originally, the policy was targeted at the so-called "scheduled" castes and tribes, the ones that were determined to have historically suffered from the worst excesses of untouchability. The reasoning in favour of reserving seats for them is similar to the reasoning that argues for dropping food packets on stranded areas during emergencies. Yes, many of the packets will be wasted, much of the food may not be in the best possible condition when retrieved and the stronger among the distressed may make a grab for the food; but if the alternative is starvation, the food drop is still worth it.

But what makes sense in an emergency does not make sense over longer periods, and reservations do not even make sense as a food drop. Reservations are provided in colleges and in public sector jobs. To go to college, one must first go to school, and the poorest castes found it difficult to do that, either for economic reasons or because they faced discrimination and suffered exclusion.

The pro-reservation answer to this is that even if it is the better off among the scheduled castes are the ones who benefit, they will work to uplift others of their caste who are poorer and more disadvantaged, either through private or governmental initiatives. The problem with this argument is that it underestimates just how fragmented the caste structure in India is. While "SC" is a convenient bureaucratic label, a typical member of the scheduled caste does not think of himself as an "SC", but as a member of a specific sub-

caste, and quite frequently, there are tensions between different sub-castes. There is no reason to expect that providing reservations that will benefit the better off sub-castes among the SCs will do anything to improve the condition of the worst-off ones. In reality, it is likely to do the opposite, as the better off castes hog the political space and try to keep competition down.

A large scale version of this phenomenon took place with the Mandal Commission report. A group of castes, not previously classified as "Scheduled Castes" rose to demand reservations for themselves. Formally, they were classified as "Socially and Educationally Backward Classes", while less formally, they were called "Other Backward Castes" or OBCs. Unlike the SCs, the OBCs were not victims of untouchability. They happened to be castes that tended to follow socially backward practices like child marriage, or were below average in terms of educational attainment, or were economically weak.

In fact, economic criteria were given the lowest weight by the Mandal Commission, which meant that there was an even chance that a land-owning caste that practised child marriage and traditionally did not need to send children to college could be classified as an OBC. The rhetoric of "historical injustice" that was used by the oppressed castes, was now appropriated by castes that frequently tended to be on the side of the oppressor.

A part of the reason why this appropriation was successful is that many of the urban and educated class tend not to understand the nuances of the caste system. While the system has multiple dimensions, what concerns us here is the distinction between two of its most important dimensions.

First, there is the dimension that relates to the shame of untouchability, where people from the lowest strata are deemed impure and contact with them is abjured.

The second dimension relates to caste as a clan, a unit of social cohesion. In traditional Indian society, people tend to socialise and marry within their caste. They get notions of what is acceptable and what is not, and which role models to follow,

from within their caste. When they get into trouble, they rely on their caste networks to sort it out, and when they want to get something done through the government, they go through an influential intermediary from within their clan.

Urban Indians tend to claim that caste does not matter much in cities any more, but this is true only about the first dimension—people do not practise untouchability, or openly express notions of superiority or inferiority of castes. But it remains true that caste networks remain important to get access. There are many examples of this—Carnatic music is dominated by Tamil Brahmins because they got their breaks in temple functions and sabhas, whose administrators tended to be Brahmins. Government offices and even traditional private companies in India tend to be hotbeds of casteist intrigue, with charges of nepotism towards members of one's own caste common. The "new" private sector tends to be relatively meritocratic—but it must be pointed out that one of the revelations from the Satyam scam was that B Ramalinga Raju was more comfortable working with, and took care to staff the senior management and board with members of his caste.

Clearly, we have a problem, and we need a sharper instrument that caste-based reservations to solve it. Most proposals that try to refine the policy of reservations by targeting castes even more finely, or by adding economic criteria suffer, from the technocratic fallacy. They assume that their preferred policy of reservations will be made by detached technocrats based on objective conditions on the ground, while in reality, in a democracy, it will be made and implemented based on electoral arithmetic, in pretty much the same way that the Mandal commission report was presented and implemented. Politics over reservations is often written of as a "social revolution", but in reality, it is business as usual—historically, castes have always moved up and down the social ladder depending on which way political winds blew.

The current system assumes that the opportunity for economic growth will remain within locked gates, with the dispute being over which political leader is to be the gatekeeper. If we really need change, we need to break down the gates. Reservations in colleges and universities will become irrelevant if we allow unrestricted entry for private universities, where they have to fight to get students. Likewise, a job market where companies are chasing people rather than the other way round is a much better antidote to discrimination than reservations.

Caste networks are, ultimately, networks of trust. While selecting people, there is always a choice between choosing trusted people and choosing talented people. In large empires that do not face external threats, trusted people are more important, as this reduces chances of rebellions and coups. When one faces a threat from outside, talent is important. Competition is a great way to force people to ensure that they hire talented people.

Another reason why people rely on networks of trust is that the rule of law is weak. Diamond trading in India, for example, is dominated by one community, the Palanpur Jains, and much of the

Most proposals that try to refine reservations policy assume that their preferred policy will be made by detached technocrats based on objective conditions on the ground, while in reality, it will be made and implemented based on electoral arithmetic.

business takes place without paperwork and on trust. With strong contract enforcement and an efficient judiciary, people will be more willing to trade with those they do not know. A well-developed financial system is a great equaliser for an entrepreneur who wishes to start his business, as he does not need to rely on his rich uncle and family wealth.

A system of governance where one does not have to rely on "connections" within one's caste networks to get things done is a much better ideal to aspire to than one we have now, where every caste is making a mad scramble towards getting its own men in power. If India really aspires to achieve a social revolution, economic freedom, competition, and rule of law are far, far better roads to that revolution.

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GEOPOLITICS

Foreign policy challenges for UPA 2.0*What India's foremost experts say*

DHRUVA JAISHANKAR

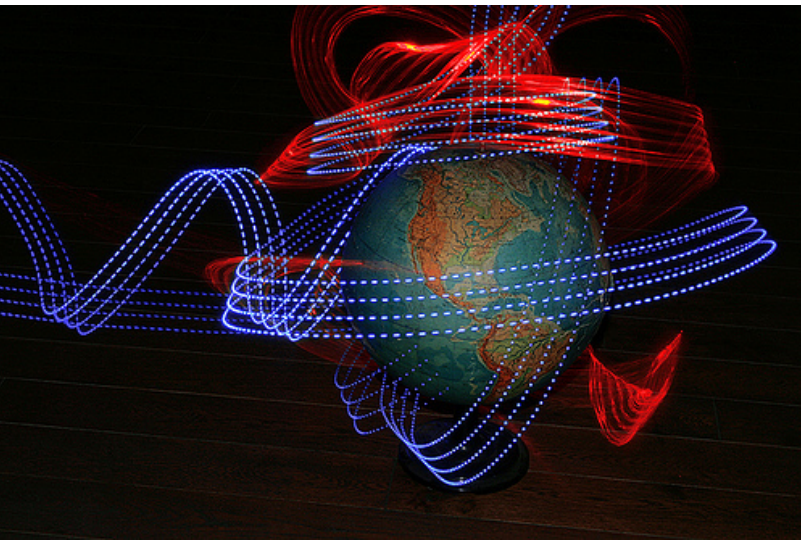


Image: Mishel Churkin

WITH PRIME Minister Manmohan Singh forming a second-successive government at the head of the UPA coalition in May, *Pragati* asked several leading Indian experts what, in their opinions, were the top foreign policy challenges and priorities for the new government.

C Raja Mohan

Many of India's national security and foreign policy priorities come together in the Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak) region. These include the unmet challenge of terrorism with links across our Western borders, the management of the bitter legacy of Partition with Pakistan, the projection of India's power beyond its immediate borders in Afghanistan and the consolidation of India's most important great power relationship with the United States. Therefore getting the policy towards our north-western neighbourhood is likely to be at the top of the new government's agenda.

The post-Mumbai pessimism about engaging Pakistan and the expectation of a less-than-warm relationship with the Obama administration seemed to have lent a dark edge to the foreign policy calculus of Dr Manmohan Singh in the second term.

I would in fact make the case for a more optimistic and even 'opportunistic' approach to the Af-Pak region. Whatever the pessimists might say

about Pakistan and Mr Obama, the current crisis in the region between the Indus and the Hindu Kush is too valuable to be wasted. India must make a bold attempt at using American weight and its current extraordinary interest in the Af-Pak region to produce long-term structural change within Pakistan and in the relationship between New Delhi and Islamabad. This will require shedding many of the shibboleths that currently guide India's policies towards Islamabad, Kabul and Washington.

C Raja Mohan is professor of South Asian Studies at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

VR Raghavan

The election results have ushered the Indian state and its citizens into a period of political stability. The government has the opportunity to boldly go forward on definitive measures in the security and strategic arena. The first need is to put into place a more responsive, effective and integrated internal security arrangement to make the country safe from catastrophic terrorist acts like 9/11 or 26/11. This requires improved centre-state co-ordination and far superior intelligence management than hitherto.

The second priority should be to build a national consensus on India's international nuclear disarmament commitment. What would India's position be if the United States and China ratify the CTBT? In my view India ratifying the CTBT, after the U.S. and China, will attain two purposes. It will enhance its role as a responsible nuclear weapons state. It will also encourage Pakistan to do so.

Third, the government should push for building the foundations of economic and social growth. Infrastructure development and widening the reach of school education are the key to national power in the long run.

Lt Gen (Retd) V R Raghavan is director of the Delhi Policy Group and president of the Centre for Security Analysis.

B Raman

Our relations with Pakistan should have the top-most priority because of their impact on our internal security situation. How can we convince Pakistan that it will never be able to change the status quo in Jammu & Kashmir by using terrorism against us?

Our relations with China should have the second priority. Military confrontation with China would be unwise, but we should strengthen our economic relations hoping that the economic linkages and the Chinese interest in sustaining those linkages would moderate its present rigid stand in Arunachal Pradesh. Political power flows out of economic power, and we are at least a decade behind China in our economic power.

Our relations with the United States should have the third priority. The Obama administration's only interest is in preventing us from retaliating against Pakistan for its acts of terrorism in Indian territory. This policy will act as a speed-breaker for further strengthening India-US relations. Despite this, we should be open to new ideas coming from the United States, provided those ideas are not detrimental to our national interests.

Our relations with Russia should have the fourth priority. Russia might be able to moderate Chinese policies towards India and is still a dependable supplier of arms, ammunition and nuclear power stations.

Our relations with Bangladesh and Nepal are important because they too have an impact on our internal security. Now that the LTTE is gone, we should get rid of our inhibitions in playing a more active role in Sri Lanka as we were doing before 1991.

Internal security management has not received the attention it deserves. Our persisting internal security problems in different parts of the country are acting as a drag on our emergence as a major economic power. We have many weaknesses, including intelligence collection and assessment, rapid intervention capability, and retaliatory self-defence capability. Finally, the preparation of a long-term perspective plan for the modernisation of our armed forces needs attention, as well as the development of military-related technologies and production capabilities.

B. Raman is director of the Institute for Topical Studies in Chennai.

K Subrahmanyam

India's top priority is to mobilise international public opinion to combat jihadism as an ideology

as was done with respect to Nazism. Support from Muslim populations, especially in non-Arab Muslim countries and cooperation with the United States, European Union and Russia is absolutely essential. The final aim is to de-jihadise the world, just as it was de-Nazified.

On regional issues, India must pay a lot of attention to Bangladesh and improve relations, security and economic cooperation to the maximum extent. It must play the pre-eminent role in the relief and rehabilitation of Tamils, and promote economic integration with Sri Lanka. A new treaty with Nepal should be negotiated. Faster economic growth of Nepal and job creation there should be our priority and friendly external powers may be encouraged to get involved there.

Particular attention needs to be paid to relations with United States, with the projection of soft power. We must develop a basic strategy of parallel defence R&D and manufacturing cooperation with Russia and the United States, as well as Israel.

Finally, success in foreign policy depends on success in economic policy. Our diplomats should understand this. The Foreign Service should give up its generalist orientation and start developing expertise on specific areas and subjects. There should be far greater co-ordination between the ministries of external affairs, commerce, defence and science & technology.

K Subrahmanyam was formerly director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses and convener of the National Security Advisory Board.

Mohan Guruswamy

India's foremost priority should be to ensure international economic stability and work to reduce the usage of the US dollar as the preferred international reserve currency. The United States' profligacy is uncurtailable and its appetite for debt undiminished. India can contribute by establishing bilateral currency trading relations with major trading partners. India must also support the enlargement of the Special Drawing Rights pool with the International Monetary Fund.

India also needs to engage China more seriously, both as a regional threat and a partner on international forums. It must also concern itself more seriously with its growing economic and political asymmetry with China. China's hostility towards India does not seem to be diminishing and India must support cost-imposing opportunities that come its way. China cannot be allowed to indefinitely subsidise the sundry consumption appetites of US and Western consumers and hurt

other low-cost production countries by taking advantage of its totalitarian regime.

India also needs to renew its military relations with Russia as the collapse of the Russian arms industry gives the United States and NATO a near monopoly on hi-tech arms such as fifth-generation aircraft. India must also reconsider its military commerce with Israel, given the costs it imposes on its relations with Muslim nations and in dealing with its own Muslim population. A reduced focus on the United States and compliance with its domestic laws will only enhance the quality of its relations with that country in the long run. India must not forget that along with China and the United States it will be one of the big three world economies in the next two decades or so. It must now learn to carry a big stick and walk, and even talk, softly.

Mohan Guruswamy is chairman and founder of the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Swaminathan S Ankelsaria Aiyar

The major foreign policy issue is undoubtedly security in the light of Islamic militancy. This has long been an issue in Kashmir, has now spread to the rest of the country. It has the potential to polarise Indian Muslims in ways that could seriously threaten internal stability. India on its own can do nothing to check the menace that threatens to take over Pakistan and Afghanistan. What can it do?

First, it needs to remain calm even in the face of fresh terrorist incidents like 26/11, and resist the temptation to bomb camps in Pakistan. Such bombing will do little damage and may even increase recruitment into the jihadi cause. Rather, India should offer military force reductions on the Pakistan border to enable the Pakistan army to move forces to the trouble areas bordering Afghanistan.

The Pakistani state is now threatened by the Frankenstein's monsters that it once incubated, and is reluctantly acting against them. India's strategic aim must be to enable Pakistani liberals to beat jihadis in the war for hearts and minds. This will have to be done subtly, so that Pakistani liberals are not "tainted" in domestic debates as Indian stooges.

Swaminathan S. Ankelsaria Aiyar is Research Fellow at the Cato Institute and consulting editor of *The Economic Times*.

Bharat Karnad

Four issues, I hope, will be foreign policy priorities for the Indian government. First, it must

firm up opposition to signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty or negotiating a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. The nuclear deal will be leveraged by the U.S. to get India to sign these, but neither treaty is in India's long-term interests, mainly because India's thermonuclear weapon designs are unproven and unreliable and will require physical testing. The argument should be that given the American reluctance to accept time-bound and full disarmament, countries such as India cannot afford to remain vulnerable.

Secondly, Pakistan has to be helped to right itself. India's position that it will begin talking only after Islamabad starts "dismantling the terrorist infrastructure" is to presume that Pakistan government is in control of Pakistan. Composite talks ought to get rapidly underway and the lesser issues, like Sir Creek, formally resolved.

Thirdly, before China or some other extra-regional power intervenes in Sri Lanka, India ought to take the lead in hammering out an enduring "federal" solution for the country, with Tamils given some measure of autonomy in the north and north-east, and sufficient representation in Colombo. Economic and reconstruction aid and massive military assistance should be ample and forthcoming.

Finally, strategic co-operation with Indian Ocean littoral countries and with countries on China's periphery should be enhanced, and "free market" agreements should be extended. This will geopolitically hedge in China and limit its political options and military reach.

Bharat Karnad is Research Professor at the Centre for Policy Research.

P R Chari

The major security challenges before India arise from its traditional concerns—Pakistan and China. The threat from Pakistan is multi-dimensional, including conventional conflict, sub-conventional conflict, cross-border insurgency and terrorism. There is, moreover, the danger of Pakistan losing control over its nuclear weapons and breaking up due to its inner contradictions, which has security implications for India.

A conventional conflict with China is a remote possibility, but it could instigate subversion within its vulnerable north-eastern states. More subtly, China is showcasing its development of Tibet, which contrasts vividly with what India's non-development of its border regions. China has not abjured its traditional policy of spreading disaffection among India's South Asian neighbours to box India within the confines of the subconti-

ment. The most important foreign policy issue before India will be crafting its relationship with the United States, while seeking meaningful relations with other power centres in the world like Russia, Japan and the European community.

India needs American support to meet the security challenges posed by Pakistan and China. India needs to craft its foreign policy, therefore, to respect American sensitivities on issues like cli-

mate change, but also join US efforts to stabilise Asia.

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GEOECONOMICS

A twist in the Asian tale

If China grows slower than India...

V ANANTHA NAGESWARAN

"THE EMERGING markets are a very heterogeneous bunch," writes Willem Buiter, former member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. "Their recent economic performance and prospects range from quite good (India, Turkey, Brazil since the end of the de-stocking implosion), to prima facie quite good (China) to pretty mediocre or bad (Central and Eastern Europe), to dismal (Russia)."

Mr Buiter goes on to argue that "those emerging markets that (1) did not have their domestic financial sectors destroyed or excessively exposed to parent banks in the North Atlantic region; (2) are not excessively dependent on export demand and (3) are not too dependent on foreign funding are likely to do best and have a 'V'-shaped recovery. India ticks all the boxes"

Such observations have started to come, especially after the Indian parliamentary elections concluded in May. The elections were expected to throw up a hung parliament or a government that would be hobbled at inception by personal interests. However, in the end, those fears proved to be unfounded. The previous coalition government has returned without inconvenient allies.

The psychological impact that it has had on investors—domestic and overseas—is significant. The Indian stock market, which was a laggard in Asia and globally until early-May, became a tiger. Until recent correction, it had even managed to catch up or exceed the performance of China's stock indices that were outperforming by a big margin until then. The Shanghai Composite Index and the BSE Sensex Index occupy the 5th and the

8th places respectively in the global top-ten league of best performing (measured in US dollars) primary stock indices year-to-date.

In contrast, Mr Buiter's comments on China were trite, guarded and even sceptical. His concluding observations say it all: "I continue to have doubts about the strength of the Chinese growth performance, but would welcome confirmation that eight percent growth or more this year is truly achievable."

Echoing these views was Stephen Roach, a long-time China-watcher, adviser to China government, Sinophile and currently Chairman of Morgan Stanley in Asia. "Shifting political winds, Mr Roach wrote in the *Economic Times*, "now give a well-balanced Indian economy a real chance to emerge as Asia's biggest surprise in the years immediately ahead. India, according to Mr Roach, had slipped through the cracks in a world that had fallen in love with the China miracle. But "China now faces increasingly daunting challenges in coming to grips with long-simmering imbalances of its export—and investment-dominated macro structure. That could be a great opportunity for the "sleeper."

Coming from Mr Roach, it would have made the Chinese government sit up and take notice. For more than a decade, he was pillorying America's unsustainable consumption-savings imbalance while eulogising China's rise without taking cognisance of the reality that China's savings-consumption imbalance was the other side of the coin of America's. He is now belatedly recognising it. For India too, this would be a new experi-

ence. It has been decades since investors have put India ahead of China.

Just the prospect of India growing faster (*de facto* if not '*de reporto*') than China is likely to change the economic and political behaviour in both countries and from the rest of the world. These might even threaten the end of investors' great romance of stock markets in emerging economies that has revived lately.

What do we see under the microscope in China?

So it is important to first evaluate how realistic the prospect that Stephen Roach and Willem Buiter allude to is.

It might be odd to talk of Indian macro-economic growth outpacing China's, when both the World Bank and several private sector economists recently upgraded their forecast for China's growth this year. The problem is, of course, in knowing whether they are forecasting the actual growth rate or the government's forecast of the growth rate of the economy.

ing them into calculations would lead to the conclusion that China's fiscal health is not as robust as is routinely and unthinkingly made out to be.

Regardless of the quality of loans, it is true that such a quantum leap in loans disbursed borrows from future growth. Writing in *Caijing Economics*, Andy Xie, Morgan Stanley's former chief economist for Asia, echoes these arguments. Mr Xie contends that "the lending surge proves China's economic problems can't be resolved with liquidity. China's growth model is based on government-led investment and foreign enterprise-led export. As exports grew in the past, the government channelled income into investment to support more export growth. Now that the global economy and China's exports have collapsed, there will be no income growth to support investment growth."

So, if the global economy, as is likely, remains demand-constrained in the coming years, then China would continue to find it difficult to sustain the lending-inspired growth that it hopes to

India has a long way to go before becoming even a middle-income economic power, let alone an economic superpower. At the same time, it should be aware that the potential exists for it to outperform a stagnant China in the near-term with a range of potential consequences and reactions.

Throughout this year, many analysts—both in the private sector and some international agencies (the International Energy Agency)—have noted the apparent inconsistency of the data on electricity production declining while real GDP growth remained positive in the same period. No satisfactory explanation has been offered for the apparent failure of this reliable link to hold this year.

Then, there is the inconsistency between the continued weakness in China's imports from the rest of the world and the surge in fixed asset investment. Usually, countries that are investing vigorously would be importing raw materials and equipment (capital goods). But there has been a slide in overall imports and in the import of mechanical and electrical products.

Further, China's bank lending has grown at an unprecedented rate in the first five months of the year. The risk of bad loans arising out of this lending binge is under-appreciated. Given the majority ownership of the government in most financial institutions, the bad loans, if properly estimated, would constitute federal fiscal liabilities. Reckon-

ing this year. Even if it undertakes the much needed rebalancing, its result would take years to show and in the interim, actual growth rates would be around 4 percent to 6 percent.

India's prospects are better

India is not an export-dependent economy nor it is suffering from excess lending, investment and capacity. Its problems have been under-investment in infrastructure, shackled labour market and the education sector. The last, in particular, suffers from quantity and quality constraints. The growth rate in the economy dipped in the fourth quarter of 2008 and in early 2009 due to the withdrawal of international lending and uncertainties associated with India's election outcome.

The international lending situation has improved and trade finance has been restored. India's election outcome has also removed residual doubts about the stability and the quality of the government that would assume office, not to mention the boost it has given to India's image as

a robust, functioning democracy. Hence, there is an air of quiet expectation about this new government's (although it is led by the same Congress Party that led the previous government) policy thrust. In its initial message to the country through the President's address to the parliament, the government has also sent some welcome signals about improved governance as well.

What does it mean for the bilateral relations?

Thus, the underlying risks in both the economies are different and at the present stage in the global cycle, China's economic growth and other constraints loom larger than that of India.

What are the consequences of a growth divergence in India's favour? It is possible that China, unaccustomed to playing second fiddle to India in the Asian growth sweepstakes, becomes a prickly neighbour and power to deal with. It has clearly demonstrated its willingness to use multilateral forums to press its bilateral issues with India. It tried persistently to block the Asian Development Bank's loan package to India, a small part of which finances a power project in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, a part of which China claims as its own territory. In the end, India had to raise the stakes in the game and press upon other shareholders of ADB to clear the loan proposal. India should anticipate intensification of such behaviour on other fronts as well.

In fact, global media hype about the higher growth rate in India—were it to occur—would fuel and fan such aggressive reactions. That is why it is important for India to go about its task of managing its economy without adding to the ambient noise and exuberance. In the past, India has been guilty of many exaggerations of its own. It was particularly evident in the last few years when the economic growth rate touched 9 per cent. Most commentators and investors ignored the rising cost of living, unaffordable home prices

and mounting shortages of critical infrastructure inputs. They did not appreciate too the role benign global conditions played in boosting both India's economic growth rate and the stock market.

In recent weeks, chest-thumping rhetoric has made a creeping comeback. Indian media is given to hyperbole and extreme emotions of either kind—euphoria and self-flagellation. Further, its competitive streak versus Pakistan and China would kick in, lending unnecessary edge and sharpness to the discourse. All of this will raise the hackles of the northern neighbour.

India has a long way to go before becoming even a middle-income economic power, let alone an economic superpower. At the same time, it should be aware that the potential exists for it to outperform a stagnant China in the near-term with a range of potential consequences and reactions.

Of course, global growth need not be a zero-sum game. Resource constraints exist but a lot is wasted. There is scope to stretch them. Two neighbouring countries emerging as big powers may be unprecedented but there has to be a first for everything. Hence, if growth has to be undergirded by peace and security, competitive instincts have to be kept on leash.

Finally, China should reflect on the appropriateness of the degree to which its past should guide the manner and the fact of its future rise.

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Photo: Students for a Free Tibet

CHINA

Military moves and reactions

The PLA's profile in Tibet is increasing in strength and sophistication

ARUN SAHGAL

RECENT STATEMENTS coming from New Delhi on China have once again upped the ante of the prevalent cold war between India and China, despite improving bilateral economic relations and the many confidence building measures instituted along the Line of Actual Control. When the Indian media highlighted increasing incursions by the Chinese—both in the western sector (Ladakh) and the eastern sector (Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh)—true to form, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson rejected these claims and called upon Indian officials and media to temper their language and work toward cooperative relations. At the same time, reports in the *Global Times*, a newspaper controlled by the ruling Communist party, highlighted increased Indian incursions along the Line of Actual Control.

These developments were followed by a statement attributed to General (ret'd) JJ Singh, governor of Arunachal Pradesh and a somewhat

outspoken critic of China's growing presence on India's borders in the state. He claimed that India will deploy "two army divisions comprising 25,000 to 30,000 soldiers each", along with 155 mm guns, helicopters and unmanned aircraft on the Sino-Indian border "within next few years", to improve India's defensive posture in its eastern sector.

Close on the heels came the news of Indian Air Force upgrading its profile on India's eastern borders with deployment of Su-30 aircraft at Tezpur in Assam, close to the borders. This development follows earlier operationalisation of Daulet Beg Oldi airfield in Ladakh, which is on the border with Aksai Chin in the proximity of Karakoram Highway.

Adding to the unfolding drama were the prime minister's remarks in Parliament, wherein he indicated India's desire for a close co-operative relationship with China but without compromis-

ing Indian position on the vexed boundary dispute issue.

The die was cast, and a Chinese verbal offensive was to be expected. Interestingly, Chinese officials in the past have been muted in their political statements or rebuttals to the statements emanating from Indian national or regional political leaders. Reactions, if at all, are covered in think-tank articles or websites closely associated with the People's Liberation Army.

What has apparently surprised the Indian establishment is the extent to which China raised the ante through a chain of anti-India editorials in the semi-official newspaper like the Global Times, which is widely distributed among China's research and policy communities, and also followed closely by the international community. On June 11, the newspaper published an editorial criticising Indian behaviour and warned New Delhi of the consequences of challenging China on the border. Upping the ante, the newspaper presented an online poll conducted by its Chinese language online publication, which mentioned that 74 percent of those polled believed that China should not maintain friendly relations with India and 65 percent believed that India's provocative moves of enhanced troops deployment were both harmful to India and bilateral relations. The newspaper quoted Dai Xun, an expert in military affairs, who described India's actions as "plundering a burning house", destroying the mutual trust between neighbouring countries—while the international community was focused on the widely reported nuclear test in North Korea.

The Chinese reaction appears to be a part of a well orchestrated strategy. The rationale and logic of Chinese bellicosity appears to be what they see as a critical shift in Indian defence posture, one that calls on India to expand its military horizons beyond Pakistan and pay more attention to a dangerous Chinese encirclement of the Indian sub-continent, by creating a strong "dissuasive defensive posture". The political construct of this is seen in the growing India-US relationship, a stable polity and an improving economy, which has enhanced India's global standing.

From a Chinese perspective, a lack of reaction to strong statements emanating from India and military developments along the border were particularly disconcerting. Chinese see this as a sign of weakness and an attempt by India to carve out a strategic space in its favour, particularly in South Asia, where China is weaving a web of proxies through economic and political influence and growing military cooperation.

Taking these developments on their own could

signify that India was upping the ante with China. However in this war of words, there is a need to underscore the growing Indian concerns about Chinese military build up in Tibet which provides China with four glaring strategic advantages.

The first area of concern is the discernible shift in the Chinese doctrine of minimum nuclear deterrence which has changed to 'limited deterrence', indicating capability to deter conventional and strategic conflicts as also manage escalation control. This is a clear allusion to a nuclear war fighting intent.

An important and very noticeable corollary is the integration of conventional missile forces which are part of the strategic second artillery (China's nuclear forces command) and deployment of these in conjunction with PLA troops in the Chinese hinterland including Tibet. An associated development of this has been the pursuit of greater terminal accuracy of China's missiles together with their integration as an operational precision strike weapon in their theatre offensive plans. This poses a serious danger to India.

Further, the conventional missile forces are being integrated with military area commands (equivalent to Indian army commands or even corps). This development has serious implication given the fact that China has over 1000 plus surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) in their inventory and has the capability of hitting both targets at operational (in the field) and strategic level. Presently majority of these are deployed against Taiwan; but given growing warmth in relations between the two, there are signs of an incremental upgradation against India

Second is the increasing Chinese airlift capability enhancing its rapid reaction and punitive strike capability. As per current assessments, the PLA has the capacity to transport approximately a division plus (20,000 troops) by air in one go and air-drop a brigade (3,500 troops) in a single airlift. Its heli-lift capacity is nearly two battalions in a single lift. These developments need to be seen in the backdrop of enhanced deployment in Tibet of the rapid reaction forces of the PLA. China's rapid reaction forces, better known as 'Resolving Emergency Mobile Combat Forces' (REMCF), are prepared for a 24- to 48-hour response to any contingency that might threaten Chinese interests. According to unconfirmed media reports, the PLA, in order to support rapid deployment of REMCF in Tibet and Xinjiang, has completed construction of two large heli-bases and an electronic & signal intelligence station in Aksai Chin. Some Indian analysts believe that it could later conduct early warning and surveillance missions against Indian

army positions, and also on the tactically important Saltoro range near Siachen.

The third aspect is the peculiar command and control structure of Chinese forces in Tibet. The PLA forces are divided into seven Military Area Commands (MACs) and three active garrison commands. Each MAC is an integrated command having two to three group armies, an air element and other support forces such as missile, electronic and cyber warfare units. While all military districts have a clearly delineated command and control structure, the Xizang (Tibet) military district has dual command responsibility and comes under operational control of both Chengdu and Lanzhou MACs. This is primarily on account of the two theatre constructs straddling India. Chengdu MAC is responsible for all operations in Eastern and Central Sectors whereas Lanzhou is responsible for operations in Ladakh. The implication for India is that the twin theatre threat, along with all their resources, can be brought to bear including the special forces units that are located in the region. What is more worrisome for India is that the infrastructural and forward logistic deployment have seriously enhanced build up schedules. These, coupled with improved capabilities of the Chinese forces, pose a serious challenge to India.

Fourth, is the growing Chinese air capability in Tibet. China has three main airfields in Tibet—Hoping, Pangta and Kong Ka. In addition, there are two at Lhasa and four more in the region that can be activated with little effort. These airfields allow China to speedily induct the REMCF into Tibet. In terms of air combat capability, the PLA air force (PLAAF) can support approximately two divisions in support of Xizang Military District. Furthermore, these resources can be augmented by air operations from Yunan province or use of Myanmar airspace under specific circumstances, given Beijing's close relationship with the Myanmar's military junta. China's enhanced surveillance and independent global positioning system adds to its operational capability against India.

The most important aspect concerns the infrastructural developments in Tibet. Three main road arteries link Lhasa; these together with the Gormo-Lhasa rail line and a dedicated oil pipeline have significantly enhanced PLA build up capability against India. What is most disconcerting is the deployment of five to six logistic brigades and stocking them with war like stores and commodi-

ties such as fuel, ammunition and rations. This has led to an exponential enhancement of Chinese military reach and capacity which is a cause of obvious concern for India.

The so-called Indian moves and reactions essentially highlight this emerging challenge posed by the increasing strength and sophistication of PLA's military profile in Tibet. Thus India's force deployment, in terms of upgrading its air profile, raising two rapid reaction mountain divisions and infrastructural developments are essentially defensive steps and must be seen from this perspective.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's remarks contain a resolve for a just and fair resolution of the boundary dispute in an acceptable time frame. China's stand on the boundary issue, despite certain agreed principles, is disconcerting to India. Despite raising the border dialogue to a political level, there has been no significant improvement; instead only a hardening of the Chinese position. Making Tawang a contentious issue, when it has been agreed that boundary settlement will not lead to major population shifts, amounts to shifting the goal posts and renegeing from agreed principles.

India is also concerned about Chinese forays in the Indian Ocean that attempts to create supporting infrastructure in terms of airfields and port facilities in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan as part of Beijing's "string of pearls" strategy. The focus on naval modernisation and development, in light of the recent Chinese naval writings, clearly points to a projectionist mindset and an attempt at dominating sea lines of communication, which was also unveiled in Beijing's Somalia enterprise.

Instead of sabre rattling, both sides must discuss these issues across the table rather than postpone the final settlement to the next generation. An upgrading of military-to-military dialogue to bring about greater transparency, both in intent and action, would greatly help in solving these issue to the benefit of these two emergent giants. The proposal to establish a hotline between New Delhi and Beijing is a positive first step.

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Photo: Goutam Roy/Al Jazeera

WEST BENGAL

Liberation of Lalgarh

The Left Front's hold over West Bengal faces a bloody challenge

ARNAB RAY

OVER THE past three decades, the Left Front's Red fortress in Bengal had acquired an aura of impregnability based on the Party's stranglehold over rural Bengal. While anti-incumbency, outrage at lack of development, atrocities like Bantala and Birati might have led to the loss of a few seats in Kolkata and some impassioned editorials in *Anandabazar* from time to time, these remained so insignificant in the electoral scheme of things, that the Politburo merely shrugged them off as not something worth getting their tea cold over. This confidence stemmed from the strategic infiltration of the party into all the institutions of rural life—panchayats, police, business and district administration— all of which could be expected to work synergistically to keep the rural populace “in line”.

Most importantly the confidence came from the strength of the Left Front's cadre. Drawn initially from the *sarba-haras* (those who have nothing) and provided sustenance through aggressive land reforms achieved through a combination of legislative and extra-constitutional means—armies of landless labourers putting up red flags on the land they cultivated shouting slogans like “*Langol jaar jomi taar*” (he who ploughs the land

owns it)—the party apparatchik became the Left front's eyes and ears on the ground as well as their muscle. A quick way to identify the party bosses is to look for the shiny pukka houses in the countryside standing out amidst the thatched huts. Over the years, the old feudal order in the village was replaced by this cadre raj, many of whom had graduated from being peasants to “contractors”, who lorded over the population with their rule backed by the extra-legal immunity granted to them by the compliant state administration.

The recent incidents at Lalgarh (which ironically means “the red fortified town”) should be seen primarily as a desperate attempt by those outside the ambit of the Left Front's patronage network to lash out at the oppression unleashed over the decades by the cadre-police combine. From violent targeting of party offices and party “key men” to the insistence of the villagers that the superintendent of police rub his nose in the ground in front of everyone their intent is obvious—pay-back for the humiliation, the summary arrests and brutality.

This is of course not the first time that villagers have tried to revolt against the Party. But in 2009,

with the twin blows of Nandigram and Singur, the consequent migration of a significant part of the Party's strong-arm to the Trinamool, the ceaseless attack on the Party not only by its traditional opponents but also by its long-time intellectual support-base for whom Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and his cavorting with capitalists has been anathema and finally a series of electoral setbacks, the Left government is at the weakest it has ever been in the last three decades.

Add to that the steadily growing power of Maoists who have brought AK-47s to a region where the cadre have traditionally fought with machetes, country-made revolvers and home-made bombs and the opportunistic support provided by the Trinamool Congress and only then one begins to realise why the local population,

The recent incidents at Lalgarh should be seen primarily as a desperate attempt by those outside the ambit of the Left Front's patronage network to lash out at the oppression unleashed over the decades by the cadre-police combine.

manipulated by the Maoist leadership, have backed themselves to declare a revolt against the state government and the party infrastructure, which essentially is one and the same thing in Bengal.

In order to understand why the violence has been so sustained and brutal in Lalgarh, one has to look at the historical traditions of the district of Medinipur (now divided into two) of which Lalgarh is a part. From the times of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, when the village of Tilkuti in Medinipur invited the Emperor's wrath for constructing a Hindu temple in direct contravention of his decree, through to the Chuar tribal revolt in the nineteenth century and the independent Tamluk government which effectively set up a parallel administration in parts of Medinipur in 1942 to Nandigram in 2007, Medinipuris have been known for their strong streak of independence and a healthy mistrust for centralised authority.

Given this context, it is no surprise that the strongest challenge to the Left government's authority has come from this district.

In the case of Lalgarh, the seeds of the present violence was laid when a high-powered landmine blast triggered by Maoists nearly assassinated Mr Bhattacharya at Shalboni near Lalgarh while he was returning after inaugurating the JSW

steel plant in November 2008. With pressure to bring the culprits to book, the police then launched a repressive crackdown on the region, detaining, humiliating and harassing the local population, many of whom were suspected of harbouring Maoists or being active conspirators in the bomb blasts. This heavy-handedness provided the perfect fodder for local Maoists to inflame the local population and incite them to perpetrate violence against the local Left cadre. With the cadre in retreat, the Maoists then followed up with a chest-thumping "stop us if you can" march to Kolkata where the protesters brought to the city to a standstill and engaged in acts of vandalism.

The demands of the "people of Lalgarh", or more precisely the Maoists that are pulling the strings have been the removal of police posts from the region and stopping of night-time raids, demands that have been met by the state government. In essence, this has further weakened the rule of law in the region, a region where a steel plant is to be constructed, and energised the Maoists whose recruitment in the region has by all accounts been stepped up as they seek to entrench themselves from Tirupati to Pashupati.

The fallout of this on the state's investment climate, especially after what transpired in Singur, is likely to be grave. Mamata Banerjee, whose contribution to making West Bengal an attractive venue for investment is well known, is also caught in a quandary. Though she has endeavoured to extract as much political capital out of Lalgarh as she possibly can, she has stopped short of walking shoulder-to-shoulder with Maoists, possibly because she realises that should her dream of chief-ministership were to be realised she would have to handle the consequences of absolute anarchy if the Maoists have their way. To her embarrassment, the agitators have called her bluff threatening her with boycott unless she "breaks her silence". The accusation of having stayed silent is something Ms Banerjee is usually not accustomed to hearing.

And so Lalgarh remains on boil caught in a ceaseless cycle of Maoist terror and retributive violence by state police with a part of the state spiralling down into anarchy in the near future looking to be a very real possibility.. Bengal bleeds different shades of red as a result. But then again, what's new?

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ELECTIONS

Are electronic voting machines tamper-proof?

Allegations of vote-rigging are misplaced

KVIDUR

IS ANY device, electronic or not, tamper-proof? The answer, of course, is, no, it is not. Given enough technical, logistical, and human resources, one can tamper any device. This is as true of a laptop, as it is of a "black box" flight recorder, or the Indian electronic voting machine (EVM). Whether one should worry about a device being tamper-proof depends not on the theoretical feasibility of tampering, but on the practical realities of pulling it off without detection—and the gains to be had by such tampering.

The results of the 2009 parliamentary elections in India seem to have surprised everyone, including the victorious UPA coalition. The NDA's shock of losing has also been huge, and a hunt for reasons for the defeat is on.

It is basic human nature to externalise blame for a loss, at least in a short-term, knee-jerk fashion. Students blame out-of-syllabus questions for their failure in a test, and not their own lack of preparation. Cricket teams blame incompetent or partisan umpires for a defeat, and not their own sloppy performance. Civil servants blame "the system" for poor delivery of civic services, and not their own incompetence. With some exceptions, most BJP politicians, and BJP supporters, are doing the same in their post-election analysis of reasons for the defeat.

One of the reasons being pushed—mercifully only by a fringe of serious commentators—is that the EVMs were "hacked" by the ruling coalition, and the results were manipulated.

Subramanian Swamy (June 17, *The Hindu*) and Rajeev Srinivasan (May 17, *Rediff.com*) have tried to make the integrity of Indian EVMs an issue. While Mr Srinivasan's article bordered on paranoid schizophrenia ("I do not trust computers"—a direct quote, and a reasonable summary of his fears) and can be dismissed as mere rumour-mongering, Mr Swamy's critique is baffling, to say the least.

He cites an article ("Trustworthy Voting: From Machine to System", *Computer*, 42:5, pp 23-29, May 2009) that described a nine-step process to ensure free and fair elections. These steps are:

- Step 1: Generate & distribute precinct master keys
- Step 2: Create voter registration records
- Step 3: Mail proof of registration to voters
- Step 4: Prepare voting machines
- Step 5: Assemble key pairs at precincts
- Step 6: Check in voters
- Step 7: Have voters cast their votes
- Step 8: Tabulate votes
- Step 9: Publish results

One would be forgiven for assuming that Mr Swamy has not read the article he cited, because he writes "None of these nine safeguards, however, is in place in Indian EVMs." However, the Election Commission of India does indeed create voter registration records, allow voters to check registration, prepare voting machines, check-in voters at the polling booth, has them cast their votes, tabulate votes, and publish results. Steps 1 and 5, which pertain to technical operation of EVMs, are not applicable to Indian EVMs, but are meant for much more sophisticated EVMs used in the west, specifically, in the United States. The same effect is achieved in the Indian electoral system in a much less software-intensive way. Mr Srinivasan, who distrusts computers, should in fact like the paper and people based system used in India.

Most Indian EVMs have been reused since their first widespread use in 1999, when a BJP-led coalition won the general elections, without any evidence of tampering having surfaced. Given the manpower-heavy nature of Indian elections (local police personnel, central paramilitary personnel, official observers from outside the state, micro-observers, independent videographers and photographers, media personnel, and hundreds of voters at every booth) and the low capacity of individual EVMs (a maximum of 3840 votes can be recorded in one machine and a polling station typically has only 1500 registered voters), it will take an army of highly-motivated, centrally mobilised but constituency co-ordinated, election-riggers to influence the outcome at even one constituency.

Deploying such an army would reduce to zero the chances of keeping everything completely se-

cret. Let us not forget that state secrets, known to a select few who undergo regular scrutiny by intelligence agencies, leak with alarming regularity in India. If any ruling coalition had the capability to pull such a thing off, it would also be able to deliver good governance of the kind that would render such election-rigging unnecessary.

Some important security features of the Indian electoral system, and EVMs, are:

1. Labels of the names of contestants/parties are attached at constituency level. This rules out systemic fraud at the manufacturing stage. Even if a political party can somehow ensure that EVMs will assign disproportionate votes to, say, the number 5 slot, it has no way of ensuring that its candidates will be assigned the number 5 slot in constituencies.

2. Agents of political parties are present at every stage of handling EVMs. This rules out systemic fraud at the constituency level. Sample vot-

process by flicking a switch as soon as he senses a booth-capturing attempt in progress. Thereafter, no amount of muscle power can reopen polling at that booth.

There is only one valid point made by the critics of the Indian EVMs: the embedded software used in them is not available for public scrutiny. However, this only leaves open the possibility of malfunctioning EVMs, not ones that can be tampered systemically. It is not something that should keep people awake at night, agonising about the election having been stolen. A simple right to information (RTI) application, or a public interest litigation (PIL) petition, ought to address this shortcoming easily.

What is most saddening about the discussions surrounding this non-issue is that so many educated Indians still seem to have an inferiority complex about Indian capabilities. The derivative nature of the debate is clear when Mr Swamy and

What is most saddening about the discussions surrounding this non-issue is that so many educated Indians...compare Indian EVMs to American ones and conclude—without bothering to note the differences between them—that since the American EVMs are flawed, the Indian ones must also be so.

ing is carried out to show the agents that EVMs are counting the votes correctly, and the agents verify that EVMs are empty of votes before polling begins. Electoral rolls are not linked to EVMs, and the agents verify that the number of votes cast is equal to the number of votes counted by every EVM.

3. EVMs are designed to record a maximum of 5 votes per minute. This virtually eliminates the kind of booth-capturing prevalent in the days of paper ballots. Even if some goons manage to take control of a booth, they can do no better than casting 5 votes per minute. At this rate, they'll get about 300 votes in an hour. That is more than enough time for security reinforcements to arrive from elsewhere, who can be alerted immediately in our mobile phone era. In fact, an alert polling official can simply terminate the polling

Mr Srinivasan, both highly educated people who have seen the world, compare Indian EVMs to American ones and conclude—without bothering to note the differences between them—that since the American EVMs are flawed, the Indian ones must also be so.

Those who insist on scaring the Indian electorate with EVM-tampering articles must be held to account, and asked to present credible supporting evidence for their views. Else, we are set to see a repeat of similar stories from fringe supporters of Congress Party when BJP wins an election somewhere, as it eventually must.

KVidur works for an Indian multinational.

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NEPALESE PERSPECTIVE

Return of the meddler

The change in government in Kathmandu has turned public opinion against India

ADITYA ADHIKARI

NEPAL, WITH a population of almost 30 million, may be a medium-sized country. But its location between the two colossi of India and China leads some of its inhabitants to believe that they live in a tiny country, whose internal politics is but a reflection of larger geopolitical machinations undertaken by their larger neighbours. “Everything that happens in Nepali politics happens according to what Indians want”—this oft repeated phrase, hyperbolic as it may be, sums up the resignation and frustration towards India and towards Nepal’s own inept politicians who seem perennially beholden to the external power down south.

And of course India has always played an extraordinarily influential role in Nepal’s politics. It helped negotiate the democratic transitions of 1990 and 1994, and facilitated the alliance between the Maoists and the traditional parliamentary parties in 2005. It has kept close tabs on the Nepal situation since then, has stepped in as arbiter and attempted to influence outcomes during almost every period of crisis during the peace process.

Sections that have historically been close to the monarchy and view the institution as the sole defender of Nepali nationalism continue to maintain that the alliance against the King would not have formed if not for Indian interference; that India’s intention in supporting the anti-King alliance was to foment instability so as to extend its influence over Nepal. This, however, is the view of a small minority.

Broadly, there has been less resentment towards India’s hand in Nepal’s affairs over the past three years than there was in the 1990s. Then, it was perceived, that all of India’s efforts were geared towards fragmenting political forces, cultivating sections friendly to it and extracting concessions—on river sharing agreements or hydro-power projects, for example—to the benefit of India and the detriment of Nepal. After the beginning of the peace process, however, until perhaps to the holding of the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections in April 2008, India’s role in Nepal has been perceived by the political class and most sec-



Photo: Ingmar Zahner

tions of the public as largely positive. For once, it was thought, India was putting aside its self-interest and contributing to a process that was to the benefit of the Nepali population.

There were occasions during the process when India visibly appeared to coerce political actors into following a particular direction. Some resentment arose during such occasions, but it was muted. For, after all, even when the Indian establishment extended its might, it often did so for the benefit of the peace process. In early 2008, for example, a number of Madhesi parties were holding violent protests in the Terai, threatening to boycott the CA elections scheduled for April if their demands were not met. The Indian ambassador in Kathmandu, in a dramatic turn of events that received wide coverage in the Nepali media, summoned these leaders to Kathmandu and forced them to reach an agreement with the major political parties. Without this intervention, the elections would not have been held on schedule.

This state of affairs began to change after the results of the CA elections were revealed. India has always been somewhat antagonistic towards the Maoists and had calculated that they would perform dismally in the elections. This, it was thought, would enable the Nepali Congress and other traditional parliamentary parties to negotiate with the Maoists from a position of strength,

and possibly even renege on some of the agreements reached with them earlier. It was this calculation that led the Indian establishment to totally ignore crucial areas of the peace process – such as the integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants – and only focus on pushing the parties to hold elections. This was a strategy widely criticised by some Western diplomatic missions and the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN), who maintained that much attention had to be paid to the implementation of the peace agreements if trust was to be built and long-term stability gained. But they lacked India’s leverage and knowledge of Nepal, and it was the Indian view that prevailed.

The strong performance of the Maoists in the elections and the dismal showing of parties

The Indian establishment played a major role in the collapse of the Maoist-led government. It was largely due to pressure from India that two parties in the governing coalition withdrew support to the Maoists.

backed by India – the Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML and the Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP)—led to a loss of face for the Indian foreign ministry and embassy officials responsible for Nepal policy. They had displayed supreme confidence, even hubris, in their strategy and had scoffed at the “white liberals” who, they felt, were guided more by idealism than rationality. But the Maoists’ victory gave them more leverage over the other political parties, and it suddenly appeared that it would have been in India’s (and the traditional political parties’) advantage to have resolved outstanding issues of the peace process before the election after all. Among diplomatic circles in Nepal, accustomed to deferring to India as the country with the most knowledge and leverage, it appeared that the emperor had no clothes after all.

For the Indian establishment, the Maoists’ strong performance in the elections raised the immediate problem of having to revise its strategy vis-à-vis Nepal. New Delhi’s antagonism towards the Maoists was well known, and they had not countenanced the possibility of having to deal with a Maoist-led government. Nevertheless, Indian officials initially put on a brave face, stating that they were willing to work with any government in Nepal, and even granting Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal “Prachanda” great hospitality during his first official visit to India as

prime minister.

Over subsequent months, however, India’s relationship with the Maoists soured. The Maoists, it was felt, were keener on using their hold over the state to expand their influence and marginalise the other political parties. Their actions and words raised doubts about their commitment to multi-party democracy. And, most importantly, they appeared to be encouraging Chinese penetration into Nepal’s internal affairs. So when most of Nepal’s non-Maoist political forces rallied together to oppose the Maoist attempt to sack the Army chief in April, citing that this was an attempt by the party to undermine the integrity of the institution and take it over, India too took a vehemently anti-Maoist stand.

The Indian establishment played a major role in the collapse of the Maoist-led government. It was largely due to pressure from India that two parties in the governing coalition—the CPN-UML and the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF)—withdrew support to the Maoists. India was also instrumental in bringing together an array of 22 parties led by the CPN-UML to lead the new government. This is, in the words of an Indian diplomat, “a course correction.” The Maoists are to be marginalised from the affairs of the state until they clearly demonstrate that they are committed to competitive politics and to maintaining Indian national security interests in Nepal.

The Maoists, meanwhile, have raised a hue and a cry against India’s “interference”; they have labelled the current government an “Indian puppet” and called on the population to participate in a mass movement against it. And although there is wide recognition that the Maoists are largely to blame for the collapse of the government, the highly visible Indian role in this affair as revealed by the media, has been jarring. India’s actions have once again raised resentment among the public. The new government’s legitimacy has been undermined in the popular eye because of its perceived dependence on India. The Indian establishment’s intervention in Nepal’s politics, it is felt, strongly resembles its efforts in the 1990s. India, once again appears to a broad section of the Nepali public as unable to tolerate a government that does not play along with it, and willing to undermine such political forces through any means necessary to achieve their ends.

Aditya Adhikari is with the *Kathmandu Post*

PAKISTAN

Defeating the Taliban: one joke at a time*Seriously!*

SOHAIL INAYATULLAH

WHILE THERE were many reasons for the Republican Party's loss in the 2008 US presidential election, one reason was the ridicule poured on former President George W Bush. Whether by Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* or Will Ferrell impersonations, few could see Bush in any serious light. He had become a comic figure, even tragic, such that a journalist in Iraq could consider throwing his shoe at him. The story of "most powerful person on the planet" had been transformed into "inept leader."

Far, far away from Washington in another land, the opposite is occurring. It is the Pakistan government that is mocked, and President Asif Zardari still seen by many as "Mr 10 percent" and by most as a lackey of the Americans, Barack Hussain Obama notwithstanding.

Pakistanis do not wish to fight their own; they especially do not wish to fight fellow Muslims. The Taliban, many believe, are pure, virtuous, fighting the good fight. And when evidence to the contrary is given, most Pakistanis assume the ubiquitous foreign hand theory. It must be the Indians. We are innocent, they seek to destabilise us. The basic tenet of social science—correlation is not causation—is forgotten; perhaps never even learned.

Creating change in a cynical population will not just result from financial promises, since that is what citizens believe governments do to placate them—promise money. And if the money—schools, roads and water projects—is delivered, more money continues to create a feudal dependency relationship, instead of feudal lord it is now the Islamabad government a classic child-parent bonding pattern.

Fighting and defeating the Taliban militarily is unlikely as well. They are not trained in classical war with the goal of holding territory. Rather, their training is in guerilla tactics. Moreover, along with al-Qaeda, they excel in organisational innovation. Their organisational structure is more viral and mobile than fixed. By being peer-to-peer focused with some degree of command and control they can quickly change shape. They also

have ideology on their side, and believe they are destined to win. Finally, they are fighting in their own territory. What hope then does NATO have of defeating the Taliban in Afghanistan or in Pakistan?

This is what they used to say about General Zia-ul Haq, that he would rule forever. Yet there was one writer, Syed Abidi, who argued that one way to judge if a regime is about to fall is to listen and observe how the masses talk about their leaders. He argued that ridicule was one indicator that a regime was on its way out. Before General Zia's death in a mysterious plane crash, Abidi in his field work recounts the following jokes.

President Zia is in Paris for a conference where he sees a Pakistani woman dressed in Parisian attire. He asks one of his men to tell her that the President wants to see her. At the hotel, the President invites her to his room where he chastises her for wearing foreign clothes. He tells her to take off her French coat. She does. "As a Muslim woman, how dare you wear a skirt. Take it off," he says. She does. "Don't you know about Islamization in Pakistan, how you dare wear such frilly underclothes. Take them off." She does and stands there naked in front of the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. "Now come embrace Islam," he says with his arms outstretched.

Clearly the alleged purity of General Zia was being questioned. The citizenry understood that he was buttressing the Islamic right wing so that he could stay in power.

Now, everyone knew General Zia's Islam was sham, a strategy. Not so with the Taliban. They appear to be above mockery. Perhaps it is time to use humour to dislodge their claim to purity and their claim to be God's warriors.

Richard Holbrooke, Washington's special envoy to the region, commented in early May that beyond killing there was an important battle of communication. As he says: "The Taliban have unrestricted, unchallenged access to the radio which is the main means of communication in an area where literacy is around 10 percent for men and less than five percent for women.

Mockery and humour must be a central tenet of any long term information and communication strategy against the Taliban. Being mocked is what the Taliban are deathly afraid of (not death).

Mr Holbrooke has wisely asked for funding to counter Taliban communication supremacy. But what should be broadcast?

The answer to this comes from Steven Levitt and Stephen J Dubner in their *Freakonomics: A rogue economist explores the hidden side to everything*. Messrs Levitt and Dubner demonstrate how mockery became the decisive tool in defeating the rise of Ku Klux Klan (KKK) after World War II. Intending to defeat bigotry, one citizen, Stetson Kennedy, decided that he could de-legitimise the KKK. Stetson infiltrated the Klan and learned their success. Once Stetson had figured out the culture of the Klan—code-words, rules, acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, he embarked on a mission to expose them. He first tried to expose their financial base. Then he would tip off leaders of Klan activities. When these didn't work too well, Stetson "felt as if these were merely throwing pebbles at a giant." Finally a new idea came to him, he chanced upon the Superman radio show. He passed on all his secret information (on handshakes, what they called the Klan Bible—the Klo-

ran, interestingly enough) to the producers, who had Superman take on the Klan. Mr Levitt writes:

One Klan member coming home from a meeting saw his young kids playing in the street. When he asked them what they were doing, he said they were playing a new type of game, like cops and robbers but called, Superman against the Klan. He said: they knew all our secret passwords and everything... I never felt so ridiculous in all my life. Historians now consider the work of Kennedy as the "single most important factor in preventing a post-war revival of the KKK in the North.

Along with protecting those who stand up to the Taliban, creating an understanding of social science, creating economic equity and productivity, the way forward must include reframing the debate within the terms of syncretic Islam. Mockery and humour must be a central tenet of any long term information and communication strategy against the Taliban.

Being mocked is what the Taliban are deathly afraid of (not death). As religious warriors they wish to be respected, seen as strong and as virtuous, brave in the face of every obstacle. They are not. A new story has to be told.

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» **Apes on treadmills (Continued from page 26).** Surely, the existence of large numbers of nuclear weapons had something to do with it?

One shortcoming of Mr Rhodes's book is the exclusive focus on the United States and the Soviet Union—it excludes the motivations, arsenals and policies of the other actors—Britain, France and most importantly, China. Indeed, as history shows, the most dangerous acts of nuclear proliferation were not the placements of Soviet or US nuclear weapons in their satellites, but China's transfer of nuclear technology, material, warheads and delivery systems to North Korea, Pakistan, Iran, Libya and others.

During the Reagan-era and after, the focus on the reduction of the Soviet arsenal and the security of the warheads in the post-Soviet states came at the cost of action against the China-Pakistan-North Korea nuclear nexus, with damaging consequences for the world today.

Despite its blind spots, *Arsenals of Folly* does make a strong case for the nuclear powers to reduce their arsenals, take them off hair-triggers and co-operate to reduce the risks of nuclear war. The time is ripe for minimum deterrence. Complete disarmament—even as it provides a hopeful vision for the distant future—is unrealistic in the early twenty-first century geopolitical environment: with big, dramatic shifts in the global balance-of-power on the one hand, and possession of nuclear weapons by regimes such as North Korea, Pakistan and Iran on the other. Great geopolitical shifts are frequently accompanied by great wars. If there is a nuclear disaster, it will be because of these arsenals of folly. But if the early twenty-first century is spared of another Great War it might well be due to the wisely-retained remnants of those self-same arsenals.

Nitin Pai is editor of *Pragati*.

REVIEW

Apes on treadmills*How they ended up with way too many bombs*

NITIN PAI

IT IS partisan. It is biased. It demonises some characters and lionises others without any attempt at balance. And it is written from a perspective the correctness of which the author presumes is self-evident. That said, Richard

Rhodes's *Arsenal of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race* is an unputdownable book. It is a gripping narrative of how the advent of nuclear weapons transformed military strategy even before the end of the great war that dramatically altered the global balance-of-power. It is a story of how the twentieth century's two superpowers realised that they couldn't just stop worrying and live on with so many bombs. By the time Ronald Reagan, one of the book's heroes, concludes that a "nuclear war cannot be won and hence must not be fought", the United States and the Soviet Union had not only amassed enough nuclear weapons and delivery systems to destroy the world many times over, but had come close to a nuclear war entailing mutually assured destruction.

Mikhail Gorbachev is the book's main hero—and a tragic one. He helps save the world (well, put it on the road to being saved) but loses his own job in the process. Side-stepping the usual negotiating routine, he sincerely proposes bold, deep and unilateral cuts in nuclear warheads and missile systems.

Unfortunately, Mr Reagan, his American interlocutor, though a genuine believer in the need to eradicate nuclear weapons, is caught between his diabolically hardline advisors and a delusional faith in a fantastic non-existent technology (the Strategic Defense Initiative, a comprehensive missile defence shield that came to be known as "Star Wars"). The deal doesn't go through, at least initially, because the hawkish villains in the US security establishment play various tricks to prevent every attempt at a compromise.

Perhaps the biggest of those villains is Richard Perle, whose calculated refusal to yield to a compromise on Star Wars wrecked the 1986 Reykjavik

Review

Arsenal of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Raceby Richard Rhodes
Knopf, 400 pages, 2007

summit. But he is only one of a series of individuals—including Paul Nitze, Albert Wohlstetter, General Curtis LeMay, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney—who goaded on the United States to build, deploy and refuse to reduce

deliverable nuclear weapons in their tens of thousands. Mr Rhodes does not entertain the possibility that their motives might have had something to do with a genuinely different way of looking at the world. True, they cleverly use the US political system to promote their policy agenda, but Mr Rhodes can hardly argue that such tactics were the monopoly of the nuclear hawks. Nuclear strategy followed the development and use of nuclear weapons, and in those early years of the Cold War, it would have been reasonable to expect both antagonists to build bombs first and think about what to do with them later.

In Mr Rhodes's description, the Soviet Union is really a distressed, militarily weak power, always playing catch-up with the United States, and therefore, never really the adversary it was made out to be. In hindsight, he is right. But those who lived outside the Soviet bloc during the Cold War might not have agreed then. Soviet accomplishments, if not Soviet power, impressed many, not least an idealistic prime minister of a newly independent country that had just broken free from British colonial rule. The Soviets might have been playing catch up, but their strategic arsenal was no less serious because of it. No one, for instance, can reasonably argue that the threat from today's Pakistan and North Korea ought to be taken lightly because they are fragile or failing states.

While it is undeniable that the Cold War arsenals hugely increased the risk of planetary annihilation, Mr Rhodes underestimates the significance of the fact that since 1945, no country has used nuclear weapons, and until Pakistan's Kargil misadventure, no two countries with nuclear weapons had directly gone to with each other.

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