



India's foreign policy paradoxes

When Nehru Looked East: Origins of India-US Suspicion and India-China Rivalry

By Francine R. Frankel

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BERTIL LINTNER

Francine Frankel's study of the complexities of the triangular relations between India, China and the United States could not have been more timely. We are witnessing the rise of China especially in Asia but also across the globe, and the emergence of an informal alliance, sometimes referred to as an "arc of democracies" to contain a development that could transform the global world order into one dominated by Beijing's authoritarian rulers. Naturally, India and the United States are the two most important members of that bloc, which also includes Japan and, somewhat reluctantly, Australia.

The old Cold War, which pitted the West led by the United States against the communist world with primarily the Soviet Union as the main adversary, has been replaced by a new Cold War where the battle lines are fudgier as old antagonists have become allies, albeit reluctantly so because of the legacy of conflicts which may be in the past but are still in vivid memory among the players in the new world order. There, again, a study of India's troubled relationship with the United States is precisely what not only today's security analysts but also the general reading public needs.

The author of this volume, Francine Frankel, is the founding director of the Centre for Advanced Study of India at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. She has written several other studies of India, including one about India's political economy and she has edited books on state power in modern India and India's relationship with China.¹ Frankel covers in eight chapters the 1947 partition of the subcontinent, how the Kashmir issue made India suspicious of America's South Asia policies, the Tibet question, India's role in the Korean War and its relationship with national liberation movements in Asia, conflicts between India and the United States in relation to the Middle East and Pakistan, and, lastly, the 1962 India-China war and its long-term impact on the balance of power in Asia.

The book ends with a search for a "US-India Strategic Partnership". Frankel's conclusion is that India, after the collapse of its Cold War ally the Soviet Union in 1991, was left on its own to ensure its national security against threats from Pakistan and China. Consequently, India had to "adapt to the transformed global geopolitical environment, which lay in stark contrast to the very foundation of Nehru's foreign policy".

Apart from having to come to terms with the loss of an important foreign ally, the socialistic patterns of society that had been introduced during the reign of

independent India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, were also abandoned. Now, India projected itself as the "single largest free market in the world".

The United States and India became friends and even strategic allies — but only to a limited extent. India's 1998 nuclear tests prompted Washington to impose a ban on US exports to India of nuclear fuel and reactors as well as dual-use technologies. Some 200 institutions and other "entities" were targeted and

the strategic relationship between Washington and New Delhi.

It was obvious that the United States needed to have India on its side in the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan and, more importantly, as a strategic ally in efforts to contain the rise of China. Although not covered in Frankel's otherwise detailed and excellent study, that new geopolitical world order has seen increased naval cooperation between the United States and India

It is evident from Frankel's research and that of others as well that Nehru had a vision of India's destiny as a great power and that India would play an important role in solving security problems in Asia and, especially, the Indian Ocean. However, as Frankel points out: "This vision of India's potential great power role had its paradoxical aspect — it did not include plans to build a strong military that could deter aggression. In part, as Nehru himself observed, he had been influenced by Gandhi's success in using satyagraha, or 'truth force', to tap into the Brahmanical culture of self-discipline and nonviolence, rather than unleash potentially uncontrollable violence in opposition to British rule." India had to pay a heavy price for that policy

Frankel writes, the US denial regime "ruled out cooperation in civilian nuclear energy and field unrelated to nuclear weapons, such as space and defence".

The issue was finally resolved when, in March 2006, President George W. Bush visited India and a deal was agreed upon which would protect India's weapons programmes. As Frankel writes:

This was accomplished through an agreement to place under International Atomic Energy Commission safeguards fourteen of India's twenty-two nuclear power stations, as determined by India to have no national security significance. The others were to be designated as closed military facilities.

The nuclear deal was followed in June 2005 by the bilateral 'New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship' which outlined an ambitious ten-year cooperative agenda to reinforce

in the Indian Ocean, where China in recent years has made significant inroads threatening to upset the delicate balance of power in one of the world's most important maritime regions.

Another question not addressed in Frankel's book is how far the United States will go to counter China and one that looms ever larger as President Donald Trump's rival candidate for the upcoming November elections in the United States, Joe Biden, is leading in opinion polls. India's apprehension about America's trustworthiness as an ally may thus be justified. It is also important that India's old Cold War-era alliance with Russia — which Washington still sees as an adversary — is not entirely dead. Russia remains India's main weapons supplier, and arms deals such as Moscow's sale of sophisticated missile systems have even prompted the United States to warn that it might have to impose sanctions on India as part of a wider policy against Russian arms sales.

Frankel takes us through the

evolution of India's foreign policy, how recent history has shaped it and what role Nehru played in fostering the contradictions in New Delhi's relationships with the outside world that we are observing today. She had during the course of her research unique access to a collection of documents which are called the Nehru Papers held at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. She has also made extensive use of the Indian government's white papers on the correspondence between Nehru and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai related to the onset of the border dispute and the 1962 war. It is evident from Frankel's research and that of others as well that Nehru had a vision of India's destiny as a great power and that India would play an important role in solving security problems in Asia and, especially, the Indian Ocean. However, as Frankel points out:

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India had to pay a heavy price for that policy. Communist China was not Imperial Britain, and it was only after the 1962 war that India began to strengthen its armed forces, establish a powerful foreign intelligence service and, eventually, acquire nuclear weapons. As Frankel points out, India also had to contend with Chinese support for and arms deliveries to its arch enemy Pakistan. Gandhi's and Nehru's vision of a peaceful India championing the causes of the oppressed peoples of Asia and Africa ended up in the dustbin of history.

Frankel's chapters about Kashmir and the 1962 war do not contain anything startlingly new, but provide a useful overview of India's foreign policy dilemmas in the 1950s and 1960s, and how India, not always successfully, manoeuvred through the intricacies and foreign policy complications a supposedly neutral nation with leanings towards the East had to face during the old Cold War.

When Nehru "looked east" it was motivated by a leftist notion by which India should distance itself from the West and align it with the newly independent countries of Asia and even China. India's Look East — and now Act East — policy is driven by a desire to develop Indian capitalism, link up with the booming economies of Southeast and East Asia — and to counter the rise of China. Frankel writes in her Preface that "the realignment in Asia now underway cannot be fully understood without the historical context provided by this study". It is in that context it should be read — and no one could have done that better than Frankel, with her expertise and background in Indian studies. ■

ENDNOTE:

1 Among Francine Frankel's books are: *India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1971; *India's Political Economy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006; and together with Harry Harding (eds.) *The India-China Relationship: What the United States Needs to Know*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004.