

## 'New era' on defense for India and U.S.

By **Amelia Gentleman** International Herald Tribune  
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**NEW DELHI** A 10-year military agreement just signed by the defense secretaries of the United States and India is intended to provide for numerous advances in the relationship, including joint weapons production, greater sharing of technology and intelligence as well as an increased trade in arms.

A statement signed by India's defense minister, Pranab Mukherjee, and the U.S. defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, in Washington on Tuesday night said that the United States and India had "entered a new era" and declared that the two countries' defense relationship had advanced to "unprecedented levels of cooperation."

Ten years after India and the United States signed their previous agreement on defense, and seven years after Washington broke military relations after India's first nuclear tests, the new framework upgraded the agreement between "the world's two largest democracies" from a "defense relationship" to a "strategic partnership" that is intended to strengthen "our countries' security" and "build greater understanding between our defense establishments," according to the document.

The agreement was greeted with mixed reviews in New Delhi. Some analysts interpreted it as a significant manifestation of Washington's recently stated commitment to help India transform itself into world power in the 21st century.

Raja Mohan, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi specializing in relations between the United States and India, described the agreement as a "huge step forward."

"There has been a lot of skepticism about America's intentions, but this lays out a fully fledged framework for the next decade," he said. "It's a serious document."

But others were more doubtful, asserting that the agreement had more to do with U.S. strategic concerns than with a single-minded desire to engage with India.

Many of these analysts interpret the recent U.S. courtship of India as part of a wider goal of containing the growing power and influence of India's Asian rival, China.

Lalit Mansingh, India's foreign secretary between 1999 and 2001 who subsequently served as ambassador to the Washington until 2004, agreed that this was a significant agreement. "We have much greater shared interests than we did 10 years ago, and we are talking now about co-production of arms," he said. "This is quite clearly a new step towards strategic partnership."

However, he also sensed a shadow of shared U.S. and Indian unease over China lingering over the document, which he said would be the subject of close scrutiny in Beijing. "China is like the ghost at the banquet - an unspoken presence that no one wants to talk about," Mansingh said.

"No one in Washington or Delhi would admit that this has anything to do with China," he continued with a reference to ideological neoconservatives in the United States. "But the U.S. neocons say that the long-term threat to the U.S. can only be from China, and India also realizes that it has a neighbor with whom it has border disputes, whose economic and military growth is greater than its own."

The agreement paves the way for increased joint military exercises and aims for more "opportunities for technology transfer, collaboration, coproduction, and research and development" and expanded collaboration on missile defense. "This defense relationship will support, and will be an element of, the broader U.S.-India strategic partnership," the agreement concluded.

Mukherjee was in the United States in advance of a visit by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, scheduled for July 18, when the Indian delegation will be hoping to secure further proof of U.S. warmth, in the form of backing for its campaign for a permanent seat on a reformed UN Security Council.

Many of the aspirations in the framework need to be negotiated in detail and are subject to approval from lawmakers in both countries. The document was nevertheless seen in Delhi on Wednesday as an important signal of intention.

Mohan stressed that the document should not simply be viewed in the light of U.S. fears about Beijing's rising influence.

In a speech Tuesday before the document was signed, Mukherjee urged Washington to go further and lift a ban on nuclear technology transfers to India, imposed in the wake of India's nuclear tests in 1998. **He also suggested that U.S. defense industries could outsource some of their functions to India - in areas such as repair, overhaul and servicing.**

In an apparent attempt to preempt any domestic concern that the deal would lead to an excessive reliance on the United States, Mukherjee made a point of stressing in a separate speech to the Carnegie Institute on Tuesday that India would retain its independent foreign policy, rejecting any notions of a "unipolar" world.

Uday Bhaskar, director of Delhi's Institute for Defense Studies, said this was a crucial element of Indian policy and said that the framework agreement should not be seen as a move by India toward dependence on Washington.

"I don't think that India has the DNA to allow it to become a Japan or a Britain in terms of adopting a subordinate status to the U.S. and allowing them to guarantee the nation's security. India's strategic culture would not allow it," he said.

Other analysts in Delhi highlighted the ongoing conflict between the U.S. policy of friendship toward Delhi and its continued military support for India's nuclear rival, Pakistan.

"While the U.S. is trying to build this long-term relationship with India, it is also selling weapons systems to Pakistan," said Brahma Chellaney, a defense analyst with the Center for Policy Research. "It is a contradiction which won't be easily resolved."

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