

**The Indian Diaspora's Political Efforts
in the United States**

By Amit Gupta

On January 9, 2003, the then Indian Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, made a long awaited statement: India would grant dual citizenship to certain groups of Persons of Indian Origin. Indian-Americans got the connection they had long wanted with their home country. Analysts both in the United States and India view the granting of dual citizenship, and the growing political mobilization of the Indian-American community, positively. In the United States, Indian-Americans are seen as the educated, technologically savvy, and wealthy minority that not only has a growing political influence but a group that could attain a bargaining power comparable to that of the American Jewish community.

Indian activist groups could soon set up an organization on the lines of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Such an outfit would help promote Indian and Indian-American interests in the United States. In fact, this is the role that the US India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) is seeking to achieve. One of its objectives is to, “provide a national platform for local leaders and organizations and give them the ability to leverage their activities and coordinate their efforts with like-minded people in our community and country.”

In India, the Indian-American community is now viewed as helping further Indian foreign policy and security goals as well as contributing towards its economic development. The Government of India's High Level Committee Report on the Indian Diaspora states:

“A section of financially powerful and politically well connected Indo-Americans has emerged during the last decade. They have effectively mobilized on issues ranging from the nuclear tests in 1998 to Kargil, played a crucial role in generating a favourable climate of opinion in Congress and defeating anti-India legislation there, and lobbied effectively on other issues of concern to the Indian community. They have

also demonstrated willingness to contribute financially to Indian causes, such as relief for the Orissa cyclone and the Latur and Gujarat earthquakes, higher technical education and innumerable charitable causes.”

The report continues, “For the first time, India has a constituency in the US with real influence and status. The Indian community in the United States constitutes an invaluable asset in strengthening India’s relationship with the world’s only superpower.¹

While the Indian-American diaspora’s progress and political mobilization have been commendable, the claims about the community’s political power are overstated. The Indian diaspora’s role as a facilitator of foreign policy will require a greater commitment from the Indian government in developing stronger ties with the Indian-American community as well as providing greater incentives to it. Further, the best lobbying efforts cannot work if there is a fundamental divergence of political views between the United States and India—as was the case when the Indian Parliament unanimously condemned the 2003 American led war in Iraq.

The Rise of Diaspora Politics

The revival of interest in Diasporas came with the end of the Cold War. Analysts who had hitherto focused on state actors now started to examine, in an era of globalization, the role of sub-state and supra-state actors like diaspora groups.² Newly democratic nations, like Poland and the Czech Republic, also sought to avail of the political, economic, and technological benefits that their diaspora communities could provide. In doing so, these countries were hoping that their diasporas would provide the same type of support that the Jewish, Irish, and Chinese diasporas had provided to their home countries. While there was a worldwide interest in utilizing the latent potential of diasporas, the question that arises is: why do diaspora groups decide to facilitate activities of the home country.

As Yossi Shain has argued, “Politics in the home country [for a diaspora group] is important for their political identity in America, and they are more likely to support those regimes whose policies coincide with American liberalism and/or US foreign objectives and actively oppose those which do not. They tend to embrace their homeland in a way that is not threatening to their identity within the parameters of American pluralism, but they must defend themselves against the charge of divided loyalties.”³ An India with foreign policy views that diverge significantly from those of the United States, or one that sheds its liberal-democratic and secular credentials to adopt more religious and nationalistic ones, is likely to receive less support among the diaspora.

Further, from the perspective of the Indian government, the diaspora’s attention can also focus on issues that are embarrassing or threatening to the government in New Delhi. The move to place caste as a form of racial oppression on the United Nations agenda and the International Conference of Dalit groups are examples of the diaspora working against the prevailing power structure in India.⁴

At the same time, the Indian diaspora in the United States will have to survive a series of challenges, not the least of which is generational change, and create a public policy agenda that works to provide leadership and guidance on policy issues in the United States.

The Indian-American Community: A Background

The Indian-American community is considered a model community and one that has grown rapidly in the last decade. It now numbers approximately 1.7 million people, making it the most rapidly growing Asian American group.⁵ The following characteristics have provided the community with impressive credentials:

- A median income of \$60,093, double the median income of all American families.
- 200,000 Indian-American are millionaires.
- 58% of Indian-Americans over the age of 25 have a college degree.
- 43.6% of Indian-Americans in the workforce are employed as managers or professionals.
- There are 35,000 Indian-American physicians.

- 300,000 Indian-Americans work in high-tech industries.
- 15% of Silicon Valley start-up firms are owned by Indian-Americans
- More than 5000 Indian-Americans are on the faculties of American universities.
- 74,603 Indians are studying in the United States—making Indians the largest group of foreign students in the country.⁶

Till recently, however, Indian-Americans were an almost invisible community. It had not assimilated as much as succeeded and disappeared into American society. It was a community with a low political profile and its cultural impact on the United States was low. Americans ate at Indian restaurants, occasionally visited a Hindu temple out of curiosity, and, despite the prosperity of the Indian community, saw the average Indian as an ‘Apu’ like character who ran a convenience store and prefixed every sentence with a “Blimey, Mr. Homer Simpson.”

An additional part of the problem was that the Indians in America had (and continue to have) a weak sense of national identity, choosing instead to identify with their different regional, linguistic, and religious groupings. Thus there are Indian Muslim, Indian Christian, and Indian Hindu community organizations with umbrella organizations called the Indian American Christian Association and the Federation of Indian Muslim Associations. Similarly, different ethnic and linguistic groups have set up their own national associations: the Federation of Kerala Associations in North America, Federation of Gujarati Associations in North America, Telugu Association of North America, and the Bengali Association of North America. In some cities there are Tamil Brahmin, Sri Lankan Tamil, and Tamil organizations.

Caste-based organizations have also been set up, for example there exists a Brahmin Society of New York that comprises Gujarati Brahmins.⁷ The pull of religious and ethno-linguistic ties leads to a diffusion of mobilization efforts as groups tend to focus their resources on parochial as opposed to national or diasporic interests

Coupled with this phenomenon is the problem of a “cultural freeze”. This is a situation where immigrants retain the traditions, culture, and values of their home country even though these may have been significantly modified in their country of origin. The second major wave of Indian immigrants came in the 1960s and once in

the United States froze part of their culture and attitudes. As Samuel Huntington has recently pointed out, this is not an uncommon occurrence. Writing about early settlers in America, Huntington points out, “The initial settlers bring their own culture and institutions with them. These are perpetuated in the new territory, while changes take place in the homeland.”⁸ Cultural freezes may not be conducive to the modern national identity that India projects. A young Indian woman, for example, was told at some Indian-American meetings that she was not an Indian because she was a Christian. Similarly, the excessive emphasis on caste and religion among the diaspora works against modern India’s portrayal of itself as a secular state as well as against ongoing trends in Indian society. An Indian diaspora that is living and working with attitudes that do not fit into modern India can only be viewed as hindering the relationship with the host state. The growth of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad America is a case in point.

Causes for Political Mobilization

In the 1990s, however, there was a growing political mobilization by the Indian-American community as well as a move by the Indian government to try and woo its expatriate groups. As Robert Hathaway argues, the Indian community had by the 1990s grown in size and started to make its influence felt among congressional members and their staffs. By 2004, the India caucus in Congress had the largest membership (186) of any such political group.⁹ Congressmen, who in the past had supported cutting foreign aid to India, now strenuously opposed such moves.

When India carried out a series of nuclear tests in 1998, American non-proliferation laws were automatically enforced and India was subject to both economic and military sanctions. Yet within a year legislators had given the Clinton Administration the authority to waive all the sanctions (this being done in a legislature where, as Hathaway states, knowledge about South Asia is still quite limited).¹⁰ The lobbying efforts of the Indian-American community were obviously significant in bringing about this shift in congressional attitude although other factors did play a role in revoking of the sanctions.¹¹

The Indian Government's Attitude

Coupled with rise of Indian-American activism has been a shift in the policies of the Indian government towards its greater diasporic community. In the past, India had typically adopted a hands-off approach towards its diaspora communities. Jawaharlal Nehru said that these communities should not call themselves Indian and, instead, identify with, and assimilate into, their host countries. It was only in the early 1990s, when India dropped its socialist pattern of economic development and initiated market reforms, that there was a drive to encourage Non-Resident Indian (NRI) investments in the country (even though for two decades prior to this decision Indians in the Persian Gulf countries had been repatriating large amounts of money to their families in India). Since then, both the Indian central government and Indian state governments have started developing ties with the Indian diaspora and particularly with the Indian-American community.

Reasons for political activism

Yossi Shain argues that a diaspora group starts to participate in American political life once it gains a sense of confidence about its role in that society and “involvement in US foreign policy is in fact often one of the clearest indications that an ethnic community has ‘arrived’ in American society, and that it has demonstrated its willingness not only to reinforce and uphold American values such as democracy and pluralism inside America, but promote these values abroad.”¹² The Indian-American community has ‘arrived’ in that its political participation has shifted from symbolic to tactical-strategic goals. The objectives of Indian-American were usually symbolic for they aimed at such gestures as getting a local politician to attend cultural events or to sign a photograph. As one Indian-American activist commented, “Indians tend to sell themselves cheaply and American politicians know it. Sometimes giving a contribution just to get a photo with your Senator is considered a great accomplishment”¹³ In part such a lack of political awareness also came from the community’s transplantation into a political milieu that they were unfamiliar with.

Indian immigrants were unfamiliar, for example, with a political system that required lobbying efforts to achieve goals.

For several reasons, however, the community has become more politically active. It has reached critical mass with a concentrated population in certain major metropolitan areas—the community's population also doubled from 1990 to 2000, touching approximately 1.7 million. Further, the community is prosperous and can therefore, potentially, organize fairly effectively.

Second, it is digitally connected both within the United States and to the home nation. One of the consequences of the Indian information technology boom has been a growing web presence of both official and unofficial organizations in India that can be tapped into by the diaspora community. At the same time, India's print media has also recognized the importance of establishing a web presence and is now readily available to those interested in following the news in their own region. As Deepika Bahri points out, "Since these new technologies of representation became available, the relative isolation of expatriate South Asians in their discrete locations in Northern countries (Canada and the United States) has been effectively offset by the presence of a large, virtual, instant community that may be geographically scattered but is electronically—and sometimes epistemologically and ideologically—connected and contiguous."¹⁴

Thus the Gujarati-American community was able to respond rapidly and effectively to the 2001 Bhuj earthquake (to the extent of getting former President Clinton to help raise contributions for the earthquake relief effort). Similarly, the 2002 sectarian riots in Gujarat gained international attention because they were the first riots that the digital age was able to transmit globally (the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in India, that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi, saw a far greater loss of life but did not receive as much international attention). Secular Indian groups, both in India and living abroad, were able to mobilize and use the web to highlight the tragedy and the incompetence of the Indian and Gujarat governments in dealing with the upsurge of violence.¹⁵

Third, in the past decade, a new generation of Indian-Americans has attained political maturity. They have organized, are politically savvy, understand the process in Washington, and have a range of interests that they seek to promote. Thus, Desis

Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) fights for the rights of working class South Asians along the east coast and has sought to organize taxi-drivers in New York and northern Virginia. The Indian-American Leadership Initiative Public Action Committee (IALIPAC) seeks to train young Indians in political activism and hopes to have a dozen Indian-Americans in elected office by the end of the decade.

Fourth, a portion of the Indian diaspora now comprises the children and siblings of the Indian elite. Increasingly, Indian businessmen, bureaucrats, military personnel and, to a lesser extent, politicians have their children studying or living in the United States. This elite group has the ability to reach the most relevant sectors of Indian decision making with their complaints and concerns (as they did when the Indian Parliament passed a resolution in April 2003 condemning the Iraq war). It is also an elite group that for practical reasons—particularly business reasons—maintains a strong connection with the home country.

Lastly, diaspora groups may be passive in terms of their identity, as Scandinavian groups in the United States have become, or they may be proactive. What changes this attitude and make a diaspora conscious of its identity is a critical event that signals discrimination or conflict either within the host country or in the homeland. In the Indian case two major events have worked to raise political consciousness and mobilize the diaspora. The first event was the growing tensions between India and Pakistan that were exacerbated with India's 1998 decision to test nuclear weapons. The second was the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States.

The tests were followed by an automatic imposition of economic and military sanctions by the United States government. Consequently, Indian groups worked actively to have these sanctions rolled back. Since then, the same groups have been active in attempting to increase US-India cooperation, in helping forge a strategic relationship with Jewish groups in the United States (under the assumption that there was a mutual interest in curbing radical Islam and, more particularly, terrorism), and in working to counter Pakistani lobbying efforts in the United States.

Of these, the link with Jewish groups is the most interesting since it is an attempt to piggyback on the lobbying skills of these groups to achieve certain political

ends—most notably the sale of defence technologies like Israel’s Phalcon airborne warning system and the Arrow anti-ballistic missile (both of which have American components and, therefore, require the permission of the State Department).¹⁶ Indian groups have been working with pro-Israeli groups to have the United States government remove its objections to the proposed sale.

There has also been some discussion about a US-India-Israel strategic relationship that is aimed at countering terrorism. In September 2002, a 21-member delegation comprised of members of B’nai B’rith International, the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Institute of National Security Affairs, and the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee met with then Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in New York. A representative from the delegation said, “We also spoke about the blossoming of relations between India and Israel. We dwelt on the common thread of terrorism that the democracies of India, Israel, and the US face. We spoke about the intensifying cooperation in the US between the Indian American community and the American Jewish community.”¹⁷ The delegation also discussed how the two immigrant communities could work together on mutually important issues. The Indian prime minister reportedly expressed a desire for enhanced cooperation between American-Jewish organizations and the Indian-American community.¹⁸

In May 2003, the then Indian National Security Advisor, Brajesh Mishra, spoke to the American-Jewish Committee about the need for concerted action by the United States, India, and Israel on security issues. He also praised the growing cooperation between Indian and Jewish groups in the United States:

“The end of the Cold War also ushered in a major transformation in India's relations with USA. Our Prime Minister has referred to the two countries as `natural allies'. The US National Security Strategy report, released last September by President Bush, asserts that the two countries have common strategic interests.

India, the United States and Israel have some fundamental similarities. We are all democracies, sharing a common vision of pluralism, tolerance and equal opportunity. Stronger India-US relations and India-Israel relations have a natural logic. I am pleased to see so many distinguished members of the United States Congress here today. They are friends of Israel. They are also friends of India. The Caucus on India

and Indian-Americans in the House of Representatives has nearly 160 members. It is perhaps the largest single country-Caucus in the House, testifying to the growing bonds of friendship between the world's oldest and largest democracies. The increasing contact between the AJC and Indian-American community organizations is another positive reflection of the shared values of our peoples."

He continued, "Our principal theme here today is a collective remembrance of the horrors of terrorism and a celebration of the alliance of free societies involved in combating this scourge. The US, India and Israel have all been prime targets of terrorism. They have to jointly face the same ugly face of modern day terrorism."¹⁹

This commonality of interests, therefore, has both national and international implications. Domestically, it allows the Indian-American community to harness the skills of a larger and more skillful lobbying group to help attain mutual goals. Internationally, it may allow India to procure weapons that have been denied by the United States to China—one of India's regional competitors. From the Israeli perspective, it strengthens both military-strategic and diplomatic ties with India. This not only provides Israel with an important regional ally in the fight against radical Islamic groups but also weans away Indian diplomatic support to the Arab states.

Such lobbying efforts will also continue on the issue of terrorism. As terrorist activity continues in Kashmir, and the Indian government makes the argument that Pakistan sponsors these insurgents, a strong case is made among Indian-American circles for lobbying the American government to put pressure on Pakistan to end its support for such organizations.

The question remains, however, whether this a long-term phenomenon or a short-term tactical alliance based on common threat perceptions. In India, several political parties, particularly the Congress, cautioned the BJP government against developing strong ties with Israel at the risk of alienating the Islamic countries in general and the Arab world in particular. It will, therefore, be interesting to see how the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government addresses the issue of relations with both Israel and Palestine.

There also remain residual feelings in India about the need for politically distancing the country from the United States. The belief is that in the long-term such an alliance could make India extremely dependent on the United States and circumscribe its freedom to maneuver in the international system. As the Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh put it, “The broad foreign policy framework left behind by Nehru has stood us in good stead. There is no other foreign policy India can follow without becoming a satellite. The people of India will not allow this country to be a camp follower of any country, howsoever powerful.”²⁰ Further, there are those within the Indian political system who remain uncomfortable with the idea of a unipolar international system. This discomfort was partially reflected in the Indian Parliament’s unanimous condemnation of the Iraq war.

The other event that catalyzed Indian-American political action was the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of 9/11, Indians in America were attacked (particularly Sikhs)²¹. According to one estimate, 15,000 lost their jobs because of new federal regulations specifying that only US citizens man airport security checkpoints. Thus the invisible and prosperous Indian minority suddenly found that being wealthy and law abiding did not prevent an individual from being pulled out of line at an airport or being ejected from a plane because the pilot did not feel comfortable having a dark-skinned Indian onboard. The combination of these factors has created a belief both in the United States and in India that the American-Indian diaspora, along with its various lobbying and political action groups, will play a role for India similar to that of the Jewish community and AIPAC in its support for Israel. However, there are several reasons that point to the fact that this may be an over-optimistic assessment.

First, as Krishna Kumar of the Indian-American Policy Institute argues, the Indian diaspora in the United States is miniscule and even if it doubles in the next decade to approximately 3.5 million it will still be numerically insignificant in a country of nearly 300 million people. Secondly, the Jewish community has been in the United States for a much longer period of time and, therefore, has a larger donor base for both political contributions and philanthropy. The Indian community reportedly contributed about \$7 million to the 2000 presidential elections. When one takes into

account the fact that nearly \$1 billion was spent in the campaign, the total contribution of Indian-American groups is very small and does not carry the type of influence that it is believed to have.

Further, Indian-Americans remain, like most Asian Americans, fairly apolitical. As one political activist pointed out, during the 2002 elections only 10,000 of about 45,000 Indian-Americans living in Massachusetts were registered to vote.²² Moving Indians away from such political apathy will take time. Nor is the community geographically concentrated, as a part of the Jewish community is in New York or the Cuban community is in Miami, to have significant political influence in crucial electoral states.

The clout and mobilization capabilities of the community are also exaggerated as can be seen by the attempt to remove Representative Cynthia McKinney of Georgia from Congress. After Representative McKinney called for the Balkanization of India, Indian-American activist groups sought to unseat her. The attempt was successful but also underlined the limits of Indian-American mobilization capability. According to Dr. Narsi Narasimhan of the Indian Professionals Network of Atlanta, one of the groups spearheading the effort, Indian-Americans probably donated about \$20,000 in the bid to dislodge the incumbent. It was only when out of state Jewish-American contributions started to pour in, however, that the financial tide turned significantly against Representative McKinney. Very few Indian-Americans outside Atlanta made financial contributions and even within Atlanta only about one hundred people contributed (In fact Ms. McKinney has once again won the democratic primary and will be contesting the 2004 elections).²³

Thirdly, as Samuel Huntington argued, for institutions to survive they must be able to weather a generational change. The question then arises, will the next generation of Indian-Americans have the same type of affinity with the home country that their parents have? The answer is at best a mixed one and can be discerned by how young Indian-Americans define their identity. The terms they use include Indian-Americans, South Asian Americans, Hindu Americans, and Indian Muslim Americans to name a few. This suggests that rather than being unified, the next generation may well break into disparate groups based on caste, ethnic, and religious identities.

Coupled with the general shift in identity is the shift in the attitude on the India-Pakistan issue. Several young Indian-American policy activists interviewed by this author stated that as far as they were concerned the rivalry between the South Asian neighbors was a dead issue. They were Americans with positive feelings for India but did not want, quite understandably, to be dragged into the nationalistic and religious rivalries of the subcontinent.

Finally, one needs to examine what the long-term economic stakes the Indian community has in the home country. One may argue that the stakes of the Indian diaspora of other countries are much higher than those of its constituents in the United States. There are approximately 3.6 million Indians working in the Persian Gulf countries and this group, for several reasons, has higher stakes in maintaining stronger ties with India and in identifying themselves as Indians.²⁴ Most of the Indian labour force in the Gulf cannot bring its families to those countries because of the financial restrictions placed by host governments (only white-collar employees have high enough incomes to qualify for bringing in their families).

Moreover, the inability to get citizenship in these countries has meant that the Indian diaspora has been forced to develop stronger economic, political, and even educational ties with India. Thus the Gulf Indians have set up 38 schools that follow the Indian higher secondary curriculum—this permits their children to be automatically considered for admission to Indian universities.²⁵ Those who cannot bring their families remit significant amounts to their households in India and, in fact, it is these remittances that have provided significant hard currency earnings to the Indian government since the mid-1970s (the Gulf Indians provide more than half the NRI investments in India). The Gulf Indians have also made generous financial contributions whenever India has faced natural calamities or war. They made financial donations during the India-Pakistan conflict over Kargil in 1999 and following the Gujarat earthquake of 2001. Further, the Gulf Indians have invested heavily in special Indian government bond issues like the India Millennium Deposit bonds.²⁶ In contrast, the Indian-American community has been able to move entire households to the United States and, more importantly, to secure citizenship. This naturally leads to a diffusion of ties with the home country.

Further, the role of the diaspora in terms of its contribution to Indian economic development has been exaggerated. Indian government documents point out that the best inflows of capital into a country are of Foreign Direct Investment—actual investments to develop industries in the country. As the 2002 Indian budget stated, “FDI inflows are an indicator of the foreign investor community’s long-term stakes in the host economy.”²⁷ India compares poorly with China in terms of the ability to attract FDI investment. While China received approximately \$46.8 billion in 2001, India received only \$3.9 billion in FDIs in the same year. Surprisingly, the largest investor was Mauritius with the United States a distant second (this is because Indian firms have gone off-shore to Mauritius because of tax-breaks and a more favourable investment climate).²⁸ The commitment of the Indian diaspora to FDIs was low: in 2001-2002 it was only \$35 million.

The bulk of the diaspora’s money was in portfolio investments—where the investments are volatile and short-term—and in fixed deposit schemes that are fully convertible to hard currency. The government report points out, “The volume of expatriate FDI in India is in sharp contrast to China, where the bulk of the FDI is from expatriate sources.”²⁹ The Indian diaspora, therefore, would seem to be more concerned about making quick profits rather than a long-term commitment to Indian development. These investments have, however, been as the Reserve Bank of India states, a major source of capital inflows during the 1990s and helped boost India’s hard currency reserves.³⁰

Nor can the Indian-American diaspora be viewed as a major supplier of technology. Most of the technologies that India needs would require Congressional approval and there is little that the Indian-American community could do to facilitate such transfers. The reluctance of the American strategic community to transfer the Arrow anti-ballistic missile and the continued US insistence that India, ideally, sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty are examples of the continued resistance in American governmental circles to open the technological cupboard to India and to treat it as an equal partner.

Perhaps the best way to understand the political mobilization efforts of the Indian-American community is to recognize that from being a group in themselves

they have become a group for themselves. A great deal of the political mobilization that is taking place is to enhance the economic standing of the community, to secure legal protection for it, and to develop the networking ties that would promote the careers of the next generation of Indian-Americans.

Coupled with these factors has been the lackadaisical approach of successive Indian governments on how to cultivate and nurture links with the Indian diaspora. While, as mentioned earlier, the Indian government would actively seek remittances from the Indian diaspora, little was done to provide constitutional and legal rights to these groupings. Dual citizenship, which would not only have provided legal guarantees to the diaspora that they were welcome in India but also have created strong emotional ties to the home country, was rejected as an option by successive Indian governments. Yet for Indians living in ethnically and racially tense nations like South Africa and Fiji this would have provided a lifeline that they could depend upon in case conditions in their host country became intolerable.

The Indian government's main objections stemmed from the inability to check the backgrounds of those who applied for dual citizenship and the more practical fact that people from Bangladesh and Pakistan could claim dual nationality and create internal security problems in India. Now that the Indian government has offered dual nationality, it has done so with definite commercial and economic interests in mind. Indians from only a select group of western nations and Singapore will be permitted to apply for dual citizenship. Members of the Indian diaspora from Trinidad and Fiji, where communities exist in sensitive ethnic divides, have been denied the right to claim citizenship—while they perhaps require such a tie the most. It may, therefore, be the non-American part of the Indian diaspora that will be the one to strongly identify with India and work towards further cooperation with it.

Finally, diaspora groups, as Shain argues, tend to support the home country as long as it fits into the interests of the host nation. When these interests diverge, the diaspora group tends to side with its country of domicile rather than its country of origin. The development of significantly better ties between India and the United States have come about not primarily because of the lobbying efforts of Indian-Americans but, instead, due to a changed political perception in both countries. In the

United States, in the latter part of the Clinton Administration, interest arose in trying to develop a better relationship with India. India's market reforms coupled with the recognition in Washington that India was an emerging power, led to a push for a better relationship. In New Delhi, there was a recognition that India had to adjust to the existence of a unipolar international system.

The push from both capitals for greater engagement was spurred by the advent of the Bush Administration which not only viewed India as an emerging power but also as a possible counter to China—with Beijing being regarded by the new administration as a possible “strategic competitor.” The United States government, therefore, despite a growing link with Pakistan to combat the Taliban and al-Qaeda, has made significant moves to improve the relationship with India. These have included ten sets of joint military exercises, the possible willingness to sell hitherto restricted military and civilian technology to India, and to include India in American plans to establish a Ballistic Missile Defense capability. Future plans for military cooperation are ambitious and include the possibility of the two countries mounting joint operations. But several regional and international issues could hinder the relationship's growth.

An inability to resolve the Kashmir issue with Pakistan will continue to drain Indian resources and prevent the country from taking a more proactive role internationally. Future US proliferation concerns could also potentially hurt the relationship. Current Indian plans are to develop and eventually deploy a 3,500-kilometre range missile. At some point of time the Indian government may decide it needs a longer-range missile that then, conceivably, could threaten American interests in other regions of the world.

The other possibility is that the United States' relationship with China does not deteriorate significantly and, instead, there is a rapprochement as China begins to attune its behavior to match US interests. There has already been growing cooperation between the United States and China in the war on terror. China has passed stringent new laws on the export of dual-use technologies and it helped facilitate the May 2003 meeting between North Korean and American officials.³¹ India, similarly may not view its relationship with China as a potentially hostile one and instead move to build on the

bourgeoning trade links with that nation. If that were the case, then the current bonhomie between the United States and India may cool down to a more modest relationship. This would be something that the Indian-American diaspora would have little ability to prevent.

Thus it would be premature for the Indian government to expect that the diaspora will work to help further Indian goals in foreign, economic, and security policy over an extended period of time. What the Indian government needs to do, and the High Level Committee Report on the Indian Diaspora addresses this, is to create the type of cultural, emotional, and economic links that will withstand the transition from a predominantly Indian born diaspora to an American born one.

In practical terms, the Indian government will have to create cultural and educational centres in the United States so that young Indians can learn about India and the current trends within Indian society. Further, a serious move to establish India chairs in universities around the United States will have to be attempted. At present the Indian government's sole attempt to establish such a chair has been at Cambridge University in England. India chairs in the United States have been brought about thanks to private donations made by the diaspora. Coupled with such efforts there has to be a set of programmes that can take young members of the diaspora from all over the world to study-abroad programmes in India. Indian universities and think-tanks should be encouraged to create summer courses for American colleges that would permit young Indian-Americans to come to India, study about it and get to travel around the country. It is remarkable that existing Indian government programmes are covering virtually every country in the world but do not make a concerted effort to attract the Indian diaspora.

There is also the need to attract retired Indians to come and contribute to the country's developmental efforts. This could be done in several ways. One could be to get diaspora donations to set up a technologically advanced university and staff it with retired or visiting faculty—this has already been done in Bangladesh with the creation of a North-South University. Another strategy may be to establish an Indian International Voluntary Service that permits members of the diaspora to come and contribute to national developmental efforts—an Indian style peace corps.

As far as technological development is concerned, the focus should be not on acquiring dual use technologies but instead focusing on the technologies of peace. India continues to have severe energy problems and it would be useful to engage the Indian-American scientific community in developing alternative energy programmes. Similarly, scientific programmes that provide improved transportation capabilities as well as cheaper methods to carry out construction projects should be pursued. As part of this process the Indian government would be well served to develop a database of Indian-Americans and the skills that they can potentially contribute.

The other crucial area is making India genuinely investment friendly for the diaspora investor. Indian bureaucratic red tape and corruption have forced Non-Resident Indians to put their money in stocks and in savings accounts. Some of the recent proposals made by the new minister for NRI affairs, Mr. Jagdish Tytler, may be relevant—his suggestion that one ministry act to facilitate and clear investments of NRIs is worth considering.³² If the Indian government wants to tap into the overseas community's entrepreneurial skills it will have to create a favourable climate for investing in India. Then only will there be a genuine, long-term connection between India and its diaspora.

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- ¹ *High Level Committee Report on the Indian Diaspora*, (New Delhi: Government of India, January 8, 2002) pp. xx-xxi.
- ² See for example Joel Kotkin's book, *Tribes* (New York: Random House, 1993), that examines the emergence of global diasporas like the Chinese, Indians, and Jews.
- ³ Yossi Shain, *Marketing the American Creed Abroad: Diaspora in the U.S. and their Homelands*, (Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 8-9.
- ⁴ Gail Omvedt, "Dalits mobilizing," *The Hindu*, May 27, 2003.
- ⁵ www.census.gov
- ⁶ Figures available at USINPAC website, page about USINPAC-about Indian-Americans, [http://www.usinpac.com/Content.asp?SEC_ID=44]
- ⁷ Madhulika S. Khandelwal, *Becoming American, Being Indian*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 165.
- ⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Security*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 41-42.
- ⁹ As of June 18, 2004 see U.S.-India Friendship.Net, [http://www.usindiafriendship.net/congress/caucus/caucus.html#].
- ¹⁰ Robert Hathaway, "Unfinished Passage: India, Indian Americans, and the U.S. Congress," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Spring 2001, pp. 21-22.
- ¹¹ Hathaway argues elsewhere that congressional pressures to continue the sale of food grains to Pakistan also led to a shift in congressional attitude. See Robert M. Hathaway, "Confrontation and Retreat: The U.S. Congress and the South Asian Nuclear Tests," *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2000.
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- ¹³ Interview with Anna Pediyakal, India Abroad Center for Political Awareness, July 23, 2002..
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- ¹⁷ Ganesh S. Lakshman, "American Jews moot India-US-Israel coalition against terror," *The Hindustan Times*, September 14, 2002.
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¹⁹ Address by Shri Brajesh Mishra, National Security Advisor of India at the American Jewish Committee Annual Dinner, May 08, 2003, available at [<http://meadev.nic.in/speeches/bm-nsa-ad.htm>]

²⁰ "Bad domestic policy can never produce good diplomacy," *Frontline*, Vol. 19, Issue 16, August 3-16, 2002.

²¹ For details see, *American Backlash: Terrorists Bring War Home In More Ways Than One*, available at [<http://www.iapolicy.org>].

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²⁴ *The High Level Committee Report on the Indian Diaspora*, (New Delhi: Government of India, January 8, 2002), pp. 20-22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁷ *Economic Survey, 2002-2003*, Ministry of Finance and Company Affairs, Government of India, available at [<http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2002-03/chapt2003/chap612.pdf>]

²⁸ *Economic Survey 2002-2003*, *ibid.*

²⁹ *Economic Survey, 2002-2003*, [<http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2002-03/chapt2003/chap613.pdf>]

³⁰ Reserve Bank of India, *Report on Currency and Finance, 2001-2002*, available at [<http://rbi.org.in/sec21/35542.pdf>]

³¹ Kenneth Lieberthal, "Has China Become an Ally?" *The New York Times*, October 25, 2002.

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