

THE CASE FOR INDIA

Strategic Relationships in the Pivot to Asia

BY COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR
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India has a rich culture and an incredibly complex history: from the Taj Mahal, to the British East India Company, to the peaceful struggle for independence from British rule personified by Mahatma Gandhi. India has a long history of kingdoms and dynasties that have produced a storied military tradition. The strong and independent Indian military tradition continued in both World Wars and to this day with a modern military and an emerging relationship with the United States. In a case of what right looks like, Green Berets of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) are developing a habitual and mutually beneficial relationship with the Indian Parachute Regiment. The history of India is colorful and proud, but it is the future of India that looks so promising. More specifically, the relationship between the Indian Parachute Regiment and 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) demonstrates how appropriate SOF alignment in partner-nation development can produce strategic effects.



Why India?

India is a growing trading partner for the United States in large measure because of open market policies instituted by India in 1990. The country has experienced an average of 6.5 percent annual growth over the last 10 years. Some additional facts taken from the CIA Fact Book in the most recent update as of May 2013 reveal: India has the fourth largest GDP in the world; the second largest work force; the second largest population, 87.5 percent of the population is under 54; and the United States is its fifth largest import partner.¹ In 2009 the United States began what the State Department calls a “strategic dialogue”, bilateral talks involving energy, trade, climate change, education and counterterrorism.

Since the State Department strategic dialogue began, “Bilateral trade between our two countries has gone up 40 percent...”² A quick analysis of the economic possibilities highlights several potential opportunities. India represents a huge potential consumer market for American goods. Thanks to a large English speaking and educated class, foreign direct investment could open up manufacturing possibilities and provide an alternative to Chinese-based factories for American corporations. The picture is not at all perfect as India does indeed face challenges inhibiting continued growth: sprawling poverty, government corruption and control over the free-market system pose risks to corporations wishing to invest. Despite the risks, India can provide important economic opportunities for the United States and for the people of India. Just as economic ties are a part of the strategic dialogue and beneficial for India and the United States, mutually supporting efforts in counterterrorism could also benefit both countries.

Border disputes and terrorist attacks are constant reminders of the remnants of colonialism and extremism for the government of India. There are numerous disputed areas, stretching from the eastern border of Afghanistan across the Kashmir to the Arunachal Pradesh area bordering Myanmar and the large disputed area known as the Line of Actual Control to the north bordering China. The most important and strategically contested area is the Kashmir where India, Pakistan and China each claim all or portions of the area. The current status of forces has Pakistan occupying Kashmir to the north bordering Afghanistan and India retaining the Jammu and Kashmir area to the south bordering India proper. The deeply held convictions of the dispute between Pakistan and India in the Kashmir can be easily identified; J&K is approximately 77 percent Muslim but holds many religious holy sites for Buddhism and Hinduism. Religious convictions aside, a more pragmatic look at J&K crystallizes the economic impact the area has for both countries. Water rights are a major issue between India and Pakistan as it relates to the Indus River basin, the largest source of water for Pakistan, which originates in the Himalaya's of Indian controlled J&K.

As a result, India has struggled with an ongoing counterinsurgency throughout J&K. The most feared arm of the insurgency opposing Indian rule in J&K is Lashkar-e-Taiba. Initially focused on opposition to Soviet expansionism in Afghanistan, it is believed that LeT's current goal is to create a liberated united Kashmir. LeT is well known for recruiting and radicalizing members of the Islamic faith to join the fighting in Kashmir and to conduct terrorist attacks against India. The most spectacular and deadly was the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, where 12 coordinated attacks over three days killed 166 people and wounded 308. The United States designated the LeT a terrorist group in 2003, which makes targeting this group of mutual interest to the United States and India. In the defense of Pakistan's claims to J&K, the UN mandated self-determination vote contained in UNSCR's 47 and 80 relating to the Kashmir region has not taken place. As described by a paper written by Lt. Gen. Talat Masood, a retired member of the Pakistani Army, "From a Pakistani perspective, Kashmir is the core issue and the root of tension with India. It maintains



KASHMIR REGION Shown in green is the Kashmiri region under Pakistani control. The orange region represents Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir while the Aksai Chin is under Chinese occupation.

that India is in unlawful occupation of J&K and it is the right of the people of the state to determine their future in accordance with their aspirations.”³ Negotiations between India and Pakistan have produced minor agreements, but a permanent solution is still elusive. One of the chief fears of Indians at large as it relates to the Kashmir, is that as the U.S. draws down in Afghanistan, the Indians suspect increased insurgent activity from hardened Afghanistan fighters. The border dispute between India and Pakistan, where Pakistan is a critical U. S. partner in the fight against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, makes the U. S. relationship with India and Pakistan diplomatically challenging in that cooperation from both countries is needed to help combat regional terror groups.

In addition to the challenges previously discussed, China also has claims in the Kashmir region, specifically Aksai Chin. An

article by Sander Ruban Aarten, an intern at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi in 2013 describes it succinctly “The origins of the dispute date back to the British Raj which failed to clearly demarcate its border between its colony and China. By and large, its border issue revolves around two main boundary designs that have been put forward by the British. One of them, the Johnson Line, places Aksai Chin under Indian control, where as the other, the McDonald Line, classifies it as Chinese territory.”⁴ There are several key reasons why the Chinese find the Kashmir strategically important. First, highway G219 runs along China's western border and is the only Line of Communication connecting Xinjiang province in the north to Tibet in the south, it transverses Aksai Chin turning this disputed area into key terrain for national defense. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly

Sander Ruban Aarten, an intern at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi 2013, postulates that in the event of potential conflicts that bind up sea lanes, China needs an alternative land route to shipping lanes. That route would lead out of Aksai Chin, across the Kashmir and down through Pakistan to reach ports in the Arabian Sea.⁵ The potential partnership between China and Pakistan will make J&K vitally important to India in the event hostilities break out with China.

“The U.S.-India relationship is the strongest it has been since India gained its independence in 1947. A strengthened U.S.-India strategic partnership is imperative to achieve U.S. national interests including securing regional security, strengthening the international trading system, protecting shared domains, countering terrorism and bolstering international non proliferation.” — Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III, PACOM Commander, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 9, 2013.

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Military Engagements

There is a growing and mutually beneficial military relationship between the United States and India. A quick look at a map of the United States Pacific Command area of responsibility reveals the extent to which it is covered by water. This places the U.S. 7th Fleet in the forefront of U.S. presence in the Pacific and an important leader in partnership development. As early as 1992, the United States, Japan, Australia, Singapore and India have conducted Exercise Malabar. The U.S. 7th Fleet is the American beneficiary of this exercise and in 2012 Navy SEALs participated with the Indian Navy Marine Commando's, a natural SEAL alignment for SOF-to-SOF engagements. This same type of natural alignment also exists between the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) and the Indian Parachute Regiment where Green Berets are the force of choice.

The Parachute Regiment of the Indian Army is organized into 10 PARA Battalions, seven of which are designated as Special Forces Battalions. The genesis for the develop-

ment of the SF PARA Battalions was to create counterinsurgency experts and to provide a deep-strike capability. Their other core missions closely mirror those of U.S. Green Berets. An Indian PARA Battalion is organized into four troops consisting of 20 to 24 men in each troop. Each troop is organized into six-man teams lead by an officer. Each Soldier has a specific skill, very similar to our military occupational specialties, where each man is trained in a primary skill: navigation, demolitions, communications, weapons or medical and they are also cross trained in a secondary skill. The SF Battalions are expected to operate in high altitude, mountainous terrain; therefore every Soldier is trained in mountaineering. They can be deployed as a troop or as small operational teams. During Exercise Vajra Prahar 2011, two troops from the 1st and 4th PARA (SF) performed extremely well conducting troop level direct-action training missions.

Vajra Prahar is an annual bilateral exercise between the United States and India that involves conventional and SOF engage-

the newly formed Alpha Company validation requirements, the unit established an AOB headquarters to orchestrate the round-robin training and support the culmination event by providing C2 for the PARA troops and ODAs on a combined direct-action training mission. Alpha Company concluded the exercise with a layout of SOF-specific equipment and attendance to the 4th Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) activation ceremony. This exercise was a unique opportunity for the 1st PARA (SF), who brought elements of the battalion command to provide leadership, planning and command and control, to take advantage of the great training facilities at both JBLM and YTC. Fortunately for 1st PARA (SF), Alpha Company was able to incorporate 4/160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, the premier SOF rotary-wing asset, to make the exercise a world-class training event. The company sergeant major during the exercise, Sergeant Major Klingenberg, agrees “There was a huge benefit for the Indian

participants as they rarely leave the country as part of a JCET program. They departed with an introduction to new techniques in close-quarters battle, fast-rope insertion and extraction system and sniper marksmanship to include aerial sniper training. We also conducted a 70-man combined hit on a target at an urban-training site complete with FRIES infil from 4/160 Special Operations Aviations Regiment. This was a rare opportunity for the Indians to participate in this scale of an operation.”

As part of the Special Operations Command Pacific Country Action Plan, the 1st SFG(A) conducts numerous JCETs to India annually. The engagements are almost exclusively with the Indian Parachute Regiment. One of the most significant elements of the relationship is the ability to grow capability, to build, not only expertise at the Soldier level but collective skills at the troop level and higher. This correct SOF-to-SOF alignment occurs in other nations in the PACOM AOR and is another example of what right looks like. By aligning with a specific unit,

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TO THE TOP Members of the 1st SFG(A) participate in mountaineer training in India. *U.S. Army photo.*

in this case the Indian Parachute Regiment, ODAs can move well beyond individual Soldier tasks and work on collective tasks, battalion long-range planning, embedding of enablers as examples, at the tactical and operational levels.

In 2012, Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st SFG(A) deployed with three ODAs on a JCET conducted with the 1st PARA at the Indian Special Forces Training Facility at Nahan Cantonment, India. This was a mutually beneficial training event where both units alternated instructors to conduct combined training. The skill level of the Indian instructors was first rate as highlighted in the after-action review by Alpha Company, “Indian SOF has very knowledgeable instructors and good instructional materials leading to well taught classes. Transcending Indian operations, USSF should continually assess their partner-nations’ expertise and levy lessons-learned briefs and case studies to not only build combat effectiveness but also build rapport.” Because of the experience and expertise of both SOF units, a true peer- to-peer style exchange of training and TTPs occurred. By aligning with the right unit, building a habitual relationship, establishing peer-to-peer relationships that create trust and respect, tangible and measurable gains at organizational effectiveness can be realized. A backward glance towards

Iraq and Afghanistan and the Green Beret creation of and partnerships with Special Weapons and Tactics and SOF units are examples of the right SOF-to-SOF alignment and how establishing habitual relationships can produce very effective units.

Future Roles

In India, the United States could have another strong partner with mutually supporting interests in economic development, regional stability and combating terrorism. As senior U.S. policy makers look East in the pivot to Asia, in terms of the case for India and future partnerships with the United States, the future does hold promise. While 1st SFG(A) is one small piece of U.S. efforts with India, their role in building capability with the Indian Parachute Regiment and its role in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts for the country of India will have strategic implications. The economic opportunities for both nations could shape the balance of power in South East Asia and provide strategic impacts on world markets. Finally, a mutually supporting effort in combating terror in the remote and historically volatile region of the Kashmir could help create space and time for the fledgling government of Afghanistan to find its identity and move forward as the United States begins to pull its forces and resources back home. **SW**

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Notes

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