

# India and the US pivot to Asia

ROBERT M. HATHAWAY

LIKE some modern-day Columbus, America has discovered Asia. What took so long, many Indians might reply, citing their own 2,000-year history. And the reaction of others might be, So what?

In January, US President Barack Obama journeyed to the Pentagon to unveil a new strategic plan designed to articulate US defense priorities for the coming decade. While American military forces will continue to contribute to security around the world, this document asserted, "we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region" (italics in original). This doctrine and its underlying premises have been widely described as a US "pivot" toward Asia.

But as India's ambassador in Washington has recently reminded us, the idea of a "pivot" is hardly new. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, used this term to characterize India even before there was an India, saying of his not-yet-independent country, "We are of Asia. . . . [India] is the pivot of Western, Southern and Southeast Asia."

In truth, there is little new in the Pentagon's "new" strategic posture. The January strategy document simply codified the shift in American thinking that has been under way for some years. Well before the president's visit to the Pentagon, and independent of any pivot, the United States ended military operations in Iraq and pledged to withdraw all combat troops from Afghanistan by December 2014. At a more basic level, US diplomats have been talking about the growing significance of Asia since the end of the Cold War.

New or not, what does the US pivot to Asia mean for India? Indeed, is India even on Washington's Asia-Pacific map?

On the latter point, there can be no question. The January strategy document refers specifically to "the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia." In a speech last fall, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton defined Asia-Pacific as reaching "from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas." Not to be outdone, Indian diplomats have taken to referring to the "Indo-Pacific" region a term, one can guess, that will not gain much traction in China.

Equally tellingly, the January document observes that the United States intends to invest in a "long-term strategic partnership" with India in order that New Delhi might serve as a "regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region." This is not mere rhetoric, not when one considers that none of Washington's other major Asian partners are even mentioned in this document save a sentence for Japan, Korea, Australia or Indonesia. As Clinton recently wrote, "the United States is making a strategic bet on India's future."

The pivot is sometimes portrayed as reflecting growing anxieties in Washington about a rising China. This is a vast oversimplification,

but also holds more than a kernel of truth. And to the extent that the pivot does reveal US uneasiness about China's future course, many in India, where the People's Republic of China is widely viewed as the country's greatest long-term threat, will applaud Washington's new emphasis on Asia. Nonetheless, New Delhi will not wish to be drawn into the middle of heightened Sino-American rivalry, should this occur, nor permit India to be cast as a junior partner to the United States in a cold war with China.

This Indian ambiguity reflects different views in Washington and New Delhi on both the nature and the locus of the Chinese challenge. Indian strategists worry that Washington seeks to draw New Delhi into more active opposition to Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea or

permits India to an enhanced role in guaranteeing stability in Afghanistan once NATO departs. The US drawdown, Indians warn, should facilitate rather than undermine that stability. Chaos in southwest Asia, they add, will inevitably limit the attention Delhi can give to Asia farther east.

Indian defense hawks fear the US shift to Asia for a different reason. This influential group worries about India remaining a security free-rider i.e., relying on other powers for basic security rather than committing the resources necessary to guarantee Indian security and project power far from Indian shores. To the extent that a greater US role in the region encourages such shortsightedness in New Delhi, these analysts argue, the American emphasis on Asia simply reinforces dangerous tendencies already present in India.

Ultimately, of course, Indians must decide for themselves whether they are prepared to become an Asia-Pacific power or remain only a sub-regional actor. Hillary Clinton clearly expressed US preferences on this matter when, during a visit to Chennai last year, she forcefully stated that Washington supported India's "look East" policy and "we encourage India not just to look east, but to engage East and act East as well."

In any event, for all the new US focus on Asia, declarations of intent and enunciations of strategic doctrines are not by themselves sufficient either to reorient global realities or to safeguard US interests. While it is not explicitly part of the administration's pivot toward Asia, any serious US strategy for the 21st century must begin with domestic renewal: repairing a badly broken political system that appears incapable of making tough decisions; more closely aligning government revenues and expenditures; investing in economic infrastructure and human capital; containing health care costs that, if left unchecked, will eventually bankrupt the country.

The American pivot is intended to reassure friends and warn competitors that the United States retains both the resolve and the capacity to exercise strong leadership in the Asia-Pacific. At the end of the day, however, American success or failure in the 21st century will be determined less by any pivot toward Asia than by how skillfully the United States addresses its domestic challenges. This requires both political will and significant economic resources. The same can just as easily be said for India: Success abroad will flow from, not substitute for, achievement at home.

The writer directs the Asia Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC.

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Too close for comfort? US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton shakes hands with Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna.

elsewhere in East Asia, and accuse the United States of willful blindness toward Chinese intrigues in South Asia more directly threatening Indian interests such as Beijing's activities in Pakistan, including Chinese construction on the port of Gwadar and most especially Chinese support for Pakistan's nuclear activities, but also alleged Chinese inroads in Burma, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

For other reasons as well, not all Indians welcome the American pivot toward Asia. Most immediately, New Delhi, unconvinced that the Afghans will be ready to assume full responsibility for their security, is not happy about US plans to terminate combat operations in Afghanistan no later than 2014. The United States should stay the course in Afghanistan, many Indians say, and not leave India holding the bag. Some American analysts retort that India is perfectly willing to see the United States fight in Afghanistan to the last American.

This is unfair, Indians reply, and vastly underestimates the importance to India of stability in Afghanistan. Indeed, New Delhi has been a significant non-military actor in

## Yemen under new leadership: Hopes and fears

MEHERUN NESA

ABED Rabu Mansour Hadi, the newly elected president of Yemen, has stepped into a new chapter of Yemen's history. Through a peaceful election, he replaced the 33 years rule of President Saleh. Definitely it is a good sign towards a democratic transition of the country, but the country has to do a lot of hard works to realise people's dream for change. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the Arab world as well as a haven for Islamic jihadists; al-Qaeda is very active in this country. So the Yemeni administration has to leap over severe economic, humanitarian as well as security hurdles to build a stable and developed Yemen.

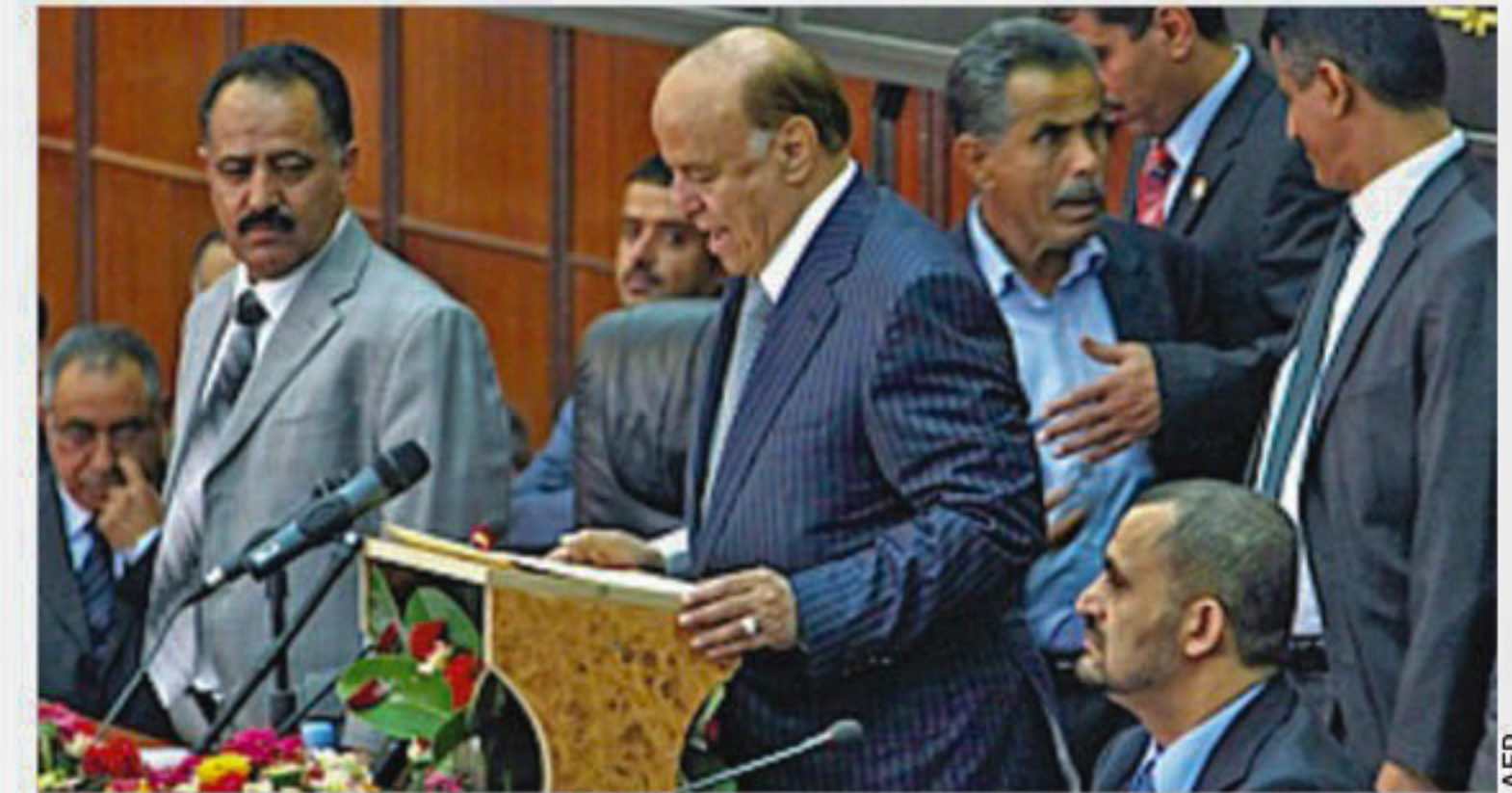
It is hopeful that the new president of Yemen has come to power through a democratic election; he got 99.6 percent of the vote. At the same token it is a matter of fear that the new democracy lacks competitive opposition. Besides, as being the former vice president of Mr. Saleh, it would be difficult for Mr. Hadi to continue independently because Mr. Saleh still wields considerable influence in Yemen and his relatives control most of the military and government security agencies. The recent experience of toppling down of Maldives president shows that dethroning of such autocratic reminiscent is an important part of democratisation.

One of the most significant issues in Yemen is wide discrimination between traditionalist Northern and marxist Southern Yemen even though they have been unified since 1990 after years of bloody border wars and skirmishes. Since unification Yemen has been modernizing and opening up to the world, but southerners still feel discriminated and marginalised; Saleh government conspicuously maintained this discrimination. Although Mr. Hadi is from the southern province of Abyan, he fled to Sana in the 1980s and is seen as a traitor by many in the south. So Mr. Hadi should be much more careful regarding this matter. He has to be neutral.

Combating al-Qaeda is another great challenge to the new president of Yemen. The country came under limelight at the end of 2009, after crackdowns on al-Qaeda-linked militancy in Afghanistan and Pakistan raised concern that militants had moved to Yemen for shelter. Last week, a General was abducted by al-Qaeda in retaliation of government attack on military stronghold of al-Qaeda in Southern Yemen. The new government in Yemen is partnering with the United States in a striving plan to patch up its military to combat al-Qaeda franchise that has exploited the political turmoil to seize control of large swaths of the country's south. "One of the most prominent tasks is the continuation of war against al-Qaeda as a religious and national duty," the newly elected president vowed in his inaugural speech. According to the State Department figures the United States has allocated \$53.8 million in security assistance for Yemen this year, a significant increase from \$30.1 million last year. It has been ensured by the American official Mr. Brennan that the US administration would slowly start resuming security aid to Yemen that was suspended in 2011. At the same time, the administration will work with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf allies to train and equip Yemeni security forces to counter al-Qaeda's wider threat to destabilize Yemen.

Yemeni people have given their full support to President Hadi ; now, he have to act upon their will or face the same fate of Saleh!

The writer is a Programme Officer, UGC-HEQEP on Teaching and Learning in International Relations (TLIR), Dept. of International Relations, University of Dhaka.



The writer directs the Asia Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC.

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# Reopening the debate on limited war

ALI AHMED

THE former Army chief General Deepak Kapoor joins his predecessor General V.P. Malik in dwelling on the contours of Limited War. In a recent article, he writes: "... it may be mentioned that in the emerging security paradigm, where future wars may be limited in scope and time, new thinking is essential." He concludes: "The necessity for a tri-service approach in such operations has been well established and must be duly ensured."

Kapoor's successor, General V.K. Singh, is also seized of the matter. In an interview to Maj. Gen. (Retd.) G.D. Bakshi, one of the leading votaries of the Limited War paradigm, V.K. Singh, in his avatar as Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee, said, "conceptualisation and promulgation of joint doctrines, including the visualisation of Limited War against a Nuclear Backdrop, forms an important facet of our integrated approach." The contours of this joint approach presumably find mention in the Joint Doctrine of 2006 and the Air-Land doctrine of 2010. General Singh's statement may be a cryptic indication of an ongoing project at the Head Quarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) on the formulation of an explicit Limited War doctrine. If so, this is a welcome step; more so as it is a top-down initiative. The respective services can, taking cue from this document, either formulate their own specialised doctrine or add a chapter to the next edition of their existing doctrines.

Measures to firm up Limited War possibilities have, over the past decade, included organisational evolution, such as setting up of the South Western Command, and enhancing the offensive potential of pivot corps, etc. Periodic reports since, of training exercises of formations, such as the recently concluded Exercise Sudarshan Shakti that validated the theorised logistics system concept, indicate the distance the military has traversed.

The journey began in the wake of the Kargil War, when General V.P. Malik laid out a case for Limited War at a seminar in the first week of 2000 at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. However, the lessons learned were not quite in place by the time of Operation

Parakram. Reflecting on that experience, General Padmanabhan stated in an interview: "You could certainly question why we are so dependent on our strike formations ... and why my holding Corps don't have the capability to do the same tasks from a cold start. This is something I have worked on while in office. Perhaps, in time, it will be our military doctrine."

The effort Padmanabhan hinted at culminated in the Army's 2004 doctrine, which was published during the tenure of his successor, General Vij. The shorthand for the doctrine in the media has been the mildly controversial term, "Cold Start". (Incidentally, the term, otherwise attributed to Maj. Gen. Sammanwar, the army's chief information warrior in 2004, first appears in Padmanabhan's statement reproduced above!)

In 2010, the Army chief clarified that "there is nothing called Cold Start", implying that it is not so much a doctrine but a strategy option of choice if warranted by the strategic circumstances. That the military option exists is evident from his words during the 2012 Army Day: "A lot has changed since the days of Op. Parakram. If we did something in 15 days then, we can do it in seven days now. After two years, we may be able to do it in three days."

General Kapoor's recent revisiting of the concept indicates that there is room for further improvement. As mentioned above, there is need for an explicit doctrine. In the current doctrine, Indian Army Doctrine (2004), the term Limited War finds mention twice: once in the diagram on the Spectrum of Conflict (p. 19) and then in the

paragraph on Conventional War: "It may be total or limited in terms of duration, the range of weapon systems employed, scope, objectives and its ultimate outcome. Given the prohibitive costs in terms of human lives and material, as well as the rising lethality of modern weapons, conventional war may be of short duration (p. 22)." It is interesting that five years into the nuclear age, beginning with the 1998 tests, the doctrine does not mention the nuclear factor as a compelling limitation.

There are three issues that need addressing and make the debate worth reopening. First, at the organisational level, the General's suggestion is that "Prosecution of limited wars will require requisite re-orientation of our concepts and possibly, even some force structures." Can this be construed as a reference to the continued existence of the strike corps? The deputy director of United Services Institution, Maj. Gen. Sandhu, had pre-empted the question as far back as 2004, opining: "...our military hierarchy has taken an easier way out. If you can't handle them (strike corps), do away with them." While he spiritedly defended their continuance, but, neglected to touch upon the nuclear issue. Media reports on the annual exercises of the strike corps in rotation suggest that the strike corps continue as formed entities. That they are armoured formations suggests that they are eminently capable of reforming in real time and on the move into battle groups and combat commands as the situation develops.

Therefore, they are perhaps already reconfigured for a

nuclearised battlefield.

The second is the conceptual issue raised in General Padmanabhan's consequential observation that "...the kinds of limited strikes some were pushing for would have been 'totally futile'." According to him: "If you really want to punish someone for something very terrible he has done, you smash him. You destroy his weapons and capture his territory." The logic is that "War is a serious business, and you don't go just like that." In effect, firstly, what political purposes can a "Limited War" achieve? Secondly, owning up to a Limited War plan will not serve to deter the adversary from continuing its proactive policy of exporting terror at the subconventional level.

A reopening of the debate is, therefore, not unwarranted. One, this would be to the advantage of in-service thinking on the issue. It would help streamline the conventional-nuclear interface so that the three institutions, the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), HQ IDS, and the service HQs are on the same page. Two, the discussion would certainly be followed in Pakistan and serve to persuade its security minders that India's options are not foreclosed by "Nasr" or otherwise. Third, it will condition the public debate to, in turn, impact political thinking. This will help in the exercise of choice when push comes to shove.

But thirdly, and perhaps more importantly, a debate can provoke articulation of the strategic doctrine by the government. A military doctrine must either have governmental imprimatur or be integrated with strategic doctrine. It would become implausible in case there is dissonance between the two. Currently, perspectives on India's strategic posture range from defensive deterrence through offensive deterrence to compellence. While such plurality yields dividend from the point of view of ambiguity, it does not help much with locating military doctrine in the governmental scheme. The Limited War doctrine has the advantage of reconciling military doctrine with the government's inclination towards a "strategy of restraint."

The writer is a Research Fellow, IDSA. ©IDSA. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.



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