

XIII. South Asia

In the early 1990s, the end of the Cold War and the growing momentum of globalization increased the significance of South Asia for the United States. The Clinton administration faced significant challenges and opportunities in the region, representative of nearly all the key issues it confronted globally in the 1990s. Over a quarter of a billion people in three countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, were struggling to make new democracies work. India, stood on the threshold of becoming a global economic and technological power and a major trading partner for the United States, but had to overcome a stifling framework of economic policy and regulation. Longstanding conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir threatened regional peace. The nuclear programs of India and Pakistan ran counter to U.S. nonproliferation goals. Other major administration objectives in the region included improving human rights—particularly for women and children, caring for and repatriating refugees, protecting the environment and preventing global warming, and stopping narcotics production.

Creation of a Bureau for South Asian Affairs

The South Asia Bureau was created in 1992 through legislation sponsored by Congressman Steven Solarz and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan to promote a greater focus on the region in the Department of State. The Bureau's first Assistant Secretary, Robin Raphel, was named in July 1993. Responsible for U.S. relations with Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives, the Bureau coordinated the initiatives that expanded U.S. relations in the region. After a National Security Council Policy Review of South Asia in early 1997, the Clinton administration sought enhanced U.S. engagement with South Asia. Secretary of State Albright and other U.S. officials visited the region, culminating with the President's historic visit in March 2000, the first Presidential trip to South Asia in over two decades.

Relations With India and Pakistan

Since Indian independence in 1947, U.S. relations with India have been marked by periods of tension. The Clinton administration engaged India as an important and full partner. Bilateral cooperation grew significantly. India joined the United States as a co-convenor of the first Ministerial meeting of the Community of Democracies in Warsaw in June 2000. In conjunction with President Clinton's visit to India in March 2000, the Department of State established Joint Working Groups on counterterrorism and international peacekeeping and concluded significant agreements on environmental protection, the elimination of communicable diseases and child labor, and cultural and educational exchanges. Bilateral trade grew from about \$5 billion in 1992 to almost \$12 billion in 1999. This growth and cooperation occurred despite the serious setback in relations caused by India's nuclear tests of May 1998. Serious policy differences between our two countries persist regarding nuclear nonproliferation, but the Department remains engaged with India on resolving these difficult security issues.

The Clinton administration also sought to maintain U.S. influence with Pakistan, which remained important to U.S. national interests because of the long-standing U.S.-Pakistan friendship and Pakistan's strategic location in South Asia and its proximity to

Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. During the past 8 years Pakistan's democratic institutions suffered repeated blows as political crises forced prime ministers and presidents from office twice before a military coup removed the elected government from office in October 1999. The Clinton administration has given high priority to encouraging the restoration of democratic institutions in Pakistan. It imposed sanctions because of the military coup, and promised that U.S.-Pakistan relations would be constrained until a democratic, civilian government was restored.

In addition to the fate of democracy in Pakistan, the Clinton administration was troubled by Pakistan's sectarian violence and perennial economic crisis, and worried about terrorism and narcotics. The United States supported IMF efforts to get the Pakistani economy on track. In a series of steps beginning with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's visit to Washington in 1995, the long-standing dispute over disposition of F-16 aircraft was resolved. And significant progress was made in counter-narcotics cooperation, with production of narcotics in Pakistan significantly reduced.

Threat of Nuclear Proliferation

Even before 1993 it was clear that both India and Pakistan were nuclear-capable. Nuclear and missile proliferation were high on the U.S. agenda with both countries throughout the Clinton years. Initiatives beginning under Secretary Christopher aimed to slow down the nuclear and missile programs of both countries. Nevertheless, India's new Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party-led government conducted nuclear tests without warning in May of 1998 and Pakistan followed suit. The tests precipitated widespread international condemnation and sanctions against both but also provided an opening for serious U.S.-South Asia dialogue on this critical issue. The administration moved quickly to exploit this opening and in June 1998, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott began a series of high-level discussions with both countries.

Over a period of 2 years, the Department of State pressed both India and Pakistan to join the international nonproliferation mainstream by signing and ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, while adhering to unilateral moratoria on testing, participating positively in negotiating a fissile material cutoff treaty in Geneva, implementing export controls on sensitive technologies and exercising restraint in nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Although these efforts have resulted in some progress, much more needs to be done, and the dialogue on security and proliferation with India and Pakistan continues.

Kashmir Conflict

The Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir was another great cause of concern to Department of State officials. A decade-long insurgency by Kashmiri Muslims claimed tens of thousands of lives. Infiltration of militants from Pakistan heightened the level of violence and caused frequent exchanges of fire between Indian and Pakistani forces along the Line of Control dividing Kashmir. From May to July 1999, with a large-scale infiltration from Pakistan into the Kargil sector, fighting flared in intensity, with hundreds of casualties on both sides, and the Department of State feared the possibility of a wider conflict. U.S. efforts to promote restraint on both sides culminated with President

Clinton agreeing to Pakistan Prime Minister Sharif's request to visit Washington on July 4. Their meeting resulted in an agreement from Pakistan to withdraw the infiltrators.

The President's initiative in July 1999 was part of an ongoing U.S. effort to lower tensions between the two countries, and to regularize India-Pakistan dialogue at the senior levels. The Department made numerous demarches in both capitals as well as orchestrating personal communications from the Secretary of State and the President. With the Lahore Summit between the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers in February 1999, the two sides established such a dialogue, albeit short-lived one. The dialogue was derailed first by the Kargil crisis, then by the removal of Sharif from office by General Musharraf. Resuming this dialogue has been an ongoing focus for U.S. diplomacy in the region.

Civil Wars: Afghanistan and Sri Lanka

Internal conflicts continued elsewhere in the region. A shifting lineup of factions in the civil war in Afghanistan did not distract the Clinton administration from pursuing the only long-term, sustainable solution—a political settlement among all Afghans creating a broad-based, representative government. The administration worked toward this goal through talks with the factions and neighboring states, consultations with other Afghan groups, and promotion of the "6+2 process" (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Pakistan, and China plus the United States and Russia) and other UN initiatives. The wave of successes by the Taliban from 1994 was made possible, above all, by the breakdown of law and order under the previous Rabbani government and the desperate desire of Afghans to end their civil war. But instead of a regime bringing peace and justice, U.S. policy-makers confronted a force of Islamic zealots who repressed womens' rights, tolerated narcotics production, gave sanctuary to Usama bin Ladin, and sponsored terrorist training camps.

In response to almost two decades of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, the administration encouraged a dialogue between the separatists and the government and supported constitutional proposals to provide autonomy and devolution in that country. At the same time, the United States became concerned about the terrorist activities of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In 1998 Secretary of State Albright designated them a foreign terrorist organization. Beginning in 1999, the United States supported a Norwegian initiative to mediate between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. In spite of very heavy fighting with tens of thousands of casualties and failed cease-fire and negotiations, the conflict between the government and the LTTE seemed no closer to resolution in 2000 than in 1993. As 2000 ended, an offer of talks from the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam insurgents was being considered by the government.

Prevention of Terrorism and Narcotics Trafficking

The rise of global terrorism brought a greater focus to the South Asia region, particularly on Afghanistan, where Usama bin Laden and other terrorists have refuge. In retaliation for bombing of U.S. Embassies in Africa, President Clinton ordered U.S. cruise U.S. missile strikes against bin Laden's facilities in August 1998, slowing bin Laden's operations. A U.S.-initiated resolution (UNSCR 1267), passed unanimously by

the UN Security Council on October 15, 1999, sanctioned the Taliban for not expelling bin Laden to a country where he could be brought to justice. When the Taliban refused to respond to that resolution, the Security Council passed a second resolution on December 20, 2000, with more onerous sanctions against the Taliban. U.S. successes against terrorism in the region included the capture of Ramsi Yusef, who was responsible for the World Trade Center bombing, and Mir Amal Kansi, brought to justice for the shooting at Central Intelligence Agency headquarters. Nevertheless, attacks against Americans continued in South Asia. An American tourist was kidnapped and probably murdered by militants in Indian-controlled Kashmir in 1994. Unknown assailants killed two U.S. officials in Karachi, Pakistan, in 1995 and four American businessmen in the same city in 1997.

South Asia also became a battlefield the U.S. global war against narcotics trafficking. Opium production in Pakistan has been almost eliminated, but production rose steadily in Afghanistan, encouraged by the continuing anarchy there. Afghanistan is now the world's largest producer of opium.

Supporting South Asia's Democracies

The Clinton administration has sought to promote democratic institutions and values in South Asia. India, the world's largest democracy, increasingly joined the United States as a partner in these international efforts. While the young and fragile democracies of Bangladesh and Nepal grew stronger with U.S. encouragement, they still face major problems. Pakistan has seen a series of significant setbacks for democratic institutions and until there is a restoration of democratically-elected national government there, U.S. relations with Pakistan will be constrained.

During the Clinton administration, the United States supported development efforts throughout the region. President Clinton's visit to Bangladesh in March 2000, the first ever of a U.S. President, showcased Bangladesh's successes in combating child labor, promoting microcredit enterprises, and expanded trade and investment by U.S. businesses. The Department of State encouraged Maldives' and Bhutan's development efforts and provided humanitarian assistance to alleviate the effects of natural and manmade disasters throughout the region. U.S. efforts on behalf of refugees helped support millions of Afghans in Pakistan as well as Burmese refugees in Bangladesh and Tibetans in India. The Department worked to assist in the resolution of the problem of refugees in Nepal claiming Bhutanese citizenship. The administration also sought, and often achieved, progress in global issues throughout the region, such as curbing child labor in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan; preventing trafficking in persons; promoting the rights of women and minorities; protecting the environment and combating global warming; and improving health and fighting infectious diseases.