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## ABSTRACT

Raman, Anil, *United States Foreign Policy Decision-Making in the Post-Cold War Era: Case Studies of United States Foreign Policy Towards India in the Kargil Conflict and the US-India Nuclear Agreement*. MA, Department of Global and Area Studies, August 2016.

The thesis analyzes the role of presidents and their advisers in foreign policy by comparing US decisionmaking towards India during the Kargil Conflict in 1998-9 and the US-India Nuclear Agreement of 2005. It focuses on the leadership of presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush to explain the transformation in US policy towards India. The decisionmaking is analyzed through the lens of presidential style and advisory arrangements by evaluating the formal decision structures and informal decision process. The project finds that in the Kargil Conflict, Clinton's interest and involvement and the important role played by his adviser Strobe Talbott, led to the US aligning with India. In the case of the nuclear agreement, empowered advisors like Condoleezza Rice and Robert Blackwill overcame bureaucratic opposition with strong support from President Bush to transform relations with India. The thesis concludes that while external factors drive foreign policy review, individuals deeply influence the nature of change.

UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONMAKING IN THE POST-COLD WAR  
ERA: CASE STUDIES OF UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS INDIA IN  
THE KARGIL CRISIS AND THE US-INDIA NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

By

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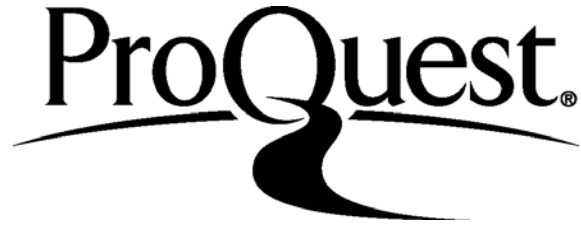
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## DEDICATION PAGE

To my parents, Raman and Shailaja and my wife and daughter, Krishna and Gayatri

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On April 12, 2016, American Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and Indian Defense Minister Manoj Parikar agreed to sign the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) which permitted the two countries to use each other's military bases (Department of Defense release, April 12, 2016). Carter also promised transfer of technology for aircraft carriers, joint military exercises, and cooperation on antisubmarine warfare. Barely two months earlier Boeing and Lockheed Martin had offered to manufacture F-16 and F-18 fighters in India (Bloomberg News, February 2016; Economic Times, February 2016). These two events were the culmination of a complete transformation in American foreign policy towards India in the past two decades. The animosity and tensions that marked the Cold War years almost seemed to have never existed.

In contrast to the recently signed agreement, American foreign policy toward India for much of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was highlighted by the contesting ideological paradigms of the Cold War in which India loosely aligned with the Soviet Union for much of this period (Cameron 2002, 22; Hinds and Windt 1991, 16; Medhurst et. al. 1997, 45). America's leaders portrayed their country in this period as the defender of Western civilization and leader of the free world, engaged in a global struggle focused against a principal adversary, the communist USSR (Mearsheimer 1990, 132). This relatively unambiguous worldview enabled the US to follow a specific strategy i.e that of containment to address the threat of communism. The president and his key national security advisors were empowered as the decisionmakers in a constant state of crisis this engendered. Institutionally, the National Security Council (NSC) was created and functionally foreign policy shifted to the White House staff (Judis 2004, 36; McCrisken 2003, 7).

However, when the Soviet Union collapsed it necessitated a review of US foreign policy from the Manichean logic of the Cold War. The resulting international environment created both opportunities and challenges for presidential choices in American foreign policy. (Kane 1991, 88; Edwards 2008, 78).

The challenges included the widespread emergence of ethnic conflicts, rogue states, AIDS, and the wider diffusion of global power. Opportunities presented themselves in the form of increased global economic integration, the revival of international organizations, and growth of multilateral linkages (Bacevich 2005, 36; Leiber 1997, 65; Schelinger 1992, 29). Some thinkers saw this as the end of history (Fukuyama 1992, 16) while others predicted increased conflict (Mearsheimer 1990, 33). Yet others foresaw an unstable multipolar world characterized by the rise of new powers (Waltz 1993, 8).

Domestically too, the US was undergoing great change with the public attention shifting, after the Gulf War, from national security to the economy (Walters and Gray 1996, 23). This feeling led to a domestically and economically focused William J. Clinton defeating the victor of the Gulf War, George H. W. Bush in the 1992 elections (Report, Miller Center; Miller, 1993). The change of presidents ushered in changes in traditional US foreign policy of interventionism and unilateralism (Newnham 1995, 26). Clinton's vision for the world was one of globalization, international cooperation, and economic engagement (Dumbrell, 2002). These changes were neither automatic nor swift, as the entrenched doctrines clung to by the permanent bureaucratic structures and the vested interests of agencies strengthened institutional inertia and generated resistance to adapt (Ripley and Lindsay 1997, 55). Therefore, after the Cold War ended, the international environment and domestic political calculations created a complex scenario for US

presidents, like Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and their advisors to formulate or reorient foreign policy.

Presidents played a vital role in change as they grappled with major transformations in the global order and the collapsed paradigms of the Cold War. As George H.W. Bush explained to a Joint Session of Congress in 1992:

Even as President, with a fascinating possible vantage point, there were times when I was so busy managing progress and helping to lead change that I didn't always show the joy that was in my heart. But the biggest thing that has happened in the world in my life, in our lives, is this: By the grace of God, America won the Cold War.<sup>1</sup>

This was the speech of a man who clearly felt that he had led the foreign policy changes that transformed the global order. We still need to ask how and why does foreign policy change happen? To what degree does it happen – is there continuity in policy despite an apparent change in the international environment and what factors explain the shift or lack thereof? In particular, what role do the president and his central advisors play? Under what circumstances can leaders shift policy or when must they go with the status quo? How does the president lead change, with what tools and constraints? What is the process and how are decisions made? Why should we focus on a set of question such as these? This thesis argues, as many foreign policy scholars do that while the structural constraints and ideological divides, which characterized the Cold War, reduced the flexibility of US presidents in foreign policy, the succeeding era gave leaders new opportunities to mold foreign policy (Hermann and Hermann 1989, 22; Rosati 2007, 77). However, presidential leadership and the contribution of advisors in decisionmaking in foreign policy varied from the president to president reflecting their individuality and the nature of issues they faced.

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<sup>1</sup> *Public Papers of the Presidents of the US: George Bush, 1992–93*, Book 1, January 1 to July 31, 1992, published in 1993.

This period was one of rapid change in US foreign policy as the uncertain and dynamic security, economic, and political paradigms of global politics threw up both new opportunities and new constraints in the foreign policy agenda for American leaders. One of these policy areas was the US ties with India, which since the end of World War II had been cool with sporadic bouts of hostility (Kux 1992, 28). After the Cold War, India rose on the policy agenda for Presidents Clinton and Bush for a number of reasons. This included the collapse of ideological barriers, the changing balance of global power; India's growing economic and military stature; fears of nuclear instability in South Asia, and increasing strategic congruence against Islamic terrorism (Ganguly. 2003, 124).

As Sumit Ganguly (2003, 34) observes, domestically, there was increasing bipartisan support for enhanced US-India ties due to commercial opportunities in India's growing economy and increased linkages in information technology. Politically too, India's strong democratic credentials, which had been ignored during the Cold War, were suddenly an attraction for the American foreign policy establishment. Presidents appreciated this feature since not only was it an example for the developing world, it also had domestic appeal in the US (Ganguly et al. 2003, 34; Cohen 2013, 12). These factors partially explain the transformations in US foreign policy towards India, which manifested in the US response to the India-Pakistan nuclear tests and war in 1998-9 (hereafter referred to as the Kargil Conflict) and the US-India Nuclear Agreement in 2005. Thus, within the space of a half a decade, the suspicion and ambivalent hostility that traditionally marked US-India relations were replaced with a sense of optimistic cooperation and common purpose. While environmental drivers created the conditions for this change, as we will see the leadership roles of presidents and their advisers were significant to the new approach towards India.

This study seeks to explore the nature of decisionmaking towards India in the two presidencies of Clinton and Bush and shed light on the process of foreign policy. The thesis illustrates how the study of leadership at critical points in history can help to explain foreign policy change. In particular, this thesis focuses on the U.S. decisionmaking towards India at two critical junctures which contribute to foreign policy change in distinct ways. The puzzle addressed is the nature of the decisionmaking process in the context of foreign policy decisions towards India by Presidents Clinton and Bush during the Kargil Conflict in 1998-1999 and the US-India Nuclear Agreement in 2005, respectively.

The first step is to understand the literature relevant to explain foreign policy change, the role of leaders, and advisers as well as US relations with India.

### **Understanding the Multiple Factors That Shape Policy Change**

Why does foreign policy change or remain the same? Ever since Mikhail Gorbachev transformed Soviet foreign policy, setting off tumultuous events leading to the end of the Cold War, scholars have grappled with the transformed nature of the international landscape and its attendant complexities (Allan and Goldman 1992, 44; Kegley 1994, 93; Lebow and Risse-Kappen 1995, 17). As Russian power declined and the United States seemed to have emerged victorious in the Cold War (Waltz 1993, 14), the stability of a bipolar system was lost too, creating new dilemmas, crises and opportunities necessitating US foreign policy to adapt. As we see in the literature, major changes in US foreign policy are often shaped by various factors both internal and external which influence the leadership (Rosati 1994, 28; Gustavsson 1999, 4; Hermann 1990, 13). Domestic factors such as congressional politics, economic issues, and interest groups affect the president's popularity and influence his policy approach (Walt 2005, 25). Since critical foreign

policies often define the presidency, the leadership of the president plays a vital role in decisionmaking leading to foreign policy change. Presidents as leaders have individual character, personalities, varying beliefs, experiences, and ideologies, all of which contribute to their particular worldview and style of foreign policy decisionmaking (Hermann 1990, 15; Renshon and Renshon 2008, 28; Young, Schafer and Walker 1999, 37). These varied and multiple factors make the process of continuity and change in foreign policy complex with several different potential approaches to its analysis.

A useful method with many variations is to look at change from the perspective of a unit located within the international system and construct multi-causal explanations drawn from different levels of analysis (Gustavsson 1999, 43). Charles Hermann (1990) and Kenneth Goldmann (1982,) argue that at the systemic level, external shock from changes in the global arena, such as the rise of terrorism, the increasing globalized economy and the need to balance China, forced a change in US foreign policy (Pant 2009, 32). John Holsti (1982, 90) also considers such external compulsions as an independent variable and a causal factor in the change in foreign policy, but after filtration through intervening variables at the nation-state and individual level of analysis.

At the nation-state level, domestic politics play a vital role in determining foreign policy (Hermann 1990, 34; Holsti 1982, 84). The US government is structured around “separated institutions sharing power” implying that while the president is generally the foremost actor in foreign policy, he has to gain cooperation from the Congress to execute his strategies (Neudstadt 1984, 76; Sicurelli and Fabrini 2009, 16; McCormick 2012, 8). Therefore, the president’s political relations with Congress often influence the process of foreign policy change. The struggle is often between the Congress, typically influenced by lobby groups and electoral interests, and the administration which is responsible for the overall nature of foreign policy within the international

system (Garrison 2005, 45). Internal pressures and politics may act as ‘stabilizers’ resisting change in foreign policy or push for transformation (Goldman 1982, 39). An apt example of this is the decision by Bush to invade Afghanistan after the September 11 terrorist attacks when the overwhelming domestic political sentiment gave him little choice but to use force (Greenstein 2008, 223). Other important factors at the state level are the vast government bureaucracies, which have their policies independent of political actors. Their influence manifests in competing agendas between different branches of the government, and bureaucrats who are capable of influencing policy by advocating, resisting or calibrating the degree of change (Hermann 1990, 17; Rosati 1994, 59). The effectiveness of policy implementation also depends on the individual president’s leadership abilities to overcome bureaucratic politics.

At the individual level, scholars agree that leaders play a critical role in making and potentially changing foreign policy (Hermann 1992, 36; Goldmann 1982, 12; Carlsnaes 1992, 28; Rosati 1994, 66). While prevailing structural and institutional conditions shape the context in which leaders make decisions (and thus affect the choices that a leader makes), their individual personality, values and perceptions shape how they see the opportunities and constraints that these conditions provide to them (Holsti 1982, 25; Carlsnae 1992, 351; Rosati 2007, 73). This makes for compelling comparisons of the roles of different presidents in the foreign policy process and their individual leadership in decisionmaking. Thus in each case of foreign policy change, while external factors play a significant role in foreign policy change, they tend to highlight, directly or indirectly, the importance of individual leadership.



## **Presidential Leadership in Foreign Policy – The Importance of the Individual and the Advisory Team**

Why study the role of key individuals and leadership in foreign policy decisionmaking generally and in the context of foreign policy change? Major changes in foreign policy are reflections of the interaction of circumstances and the leadership's policy response. Presidents by the virtue of their leadership positions are highly influential in decisionmaking albeit to varying degrees based on individual style and circumstances (Neustadt 1960, 33; Hermann et al. 2001, 65). In systems where leaders are authoritarian, they tend to be predominant and goal driven, but in more democratic regimes leaders tend to be more contextually driven and authority is distributed (Hermann et al. 2001, 56). For example, a leader such as Margaret Thatcher may consolidate authority in a crisis as she did during the Falklands War (Hermann et al. 2001, 56). Thus their individual style, interest, competence, and involvement, all contribute to the decisionmaking process (Hermann et al. 2001, 57). However, given the enormous complexities of global politics, the president is dependent on his advisors and personal staff for policy advice and implementation (Rosati 2007, 64). The nature of advisory systems and management arrangements, therefore, impact policy formulation (Neustadt 1960, 12; Helco 1999, 56).

As we will see, presidents initially set up a formal decision structure but in practice, the decision process is often informal and evolves based on the president's style and engagement with advisors.

### **Arranging The Foreign Policy Process: Formal Decision Structures**

Policy decisions are shaped by the formal manner in which presidents obtain counsel and advice from their advisory team. Hermann (2001, 17), Johnson Tanner (1974, 72) and George

(1998, 7) have classified advisory systems based on their organizational structure into three structures: formalistic, competitive, and collegial. Formalistic systems are highly structured networks that utilize rigid hierarchical arrangements for acquisition of information, as in the presidencies of Harry S. Truman and Richard Nixon. Presidents who use the competitive systems give overlapping responsibilities to advisers to elicit a wider range of policy options, thereby inducing rivalry. Presidents who have collegial systems promote team building amongst colleagues. While each has its advantages and is also affected by the president's style, Tanner Johnson (1974) recommends the collegial system as it "keeps the president at the center of his information network, but promotes co-operation and reduces conflict." Theodore Roosevelt was considered to have a collegial system which enabled him to receive advice from multiple advisors in a cooperative environment (Tanner 1974, 34). Such a system highlights the key role of the president and the role of his advisors in the decision process.

### **Arranging the Foreign Policy Process: Understanding the Informal Decision Process**

The actual decision process is an expression of presidential leadership in foreign policy. Leadership may be exercised by the president or other key individuals forming part of the decision structure. Thus each president's unique style and his advisory arrangements have significant impact on the decision process.

#### *Presidential Style*

A president's ability to manage his team is a reflection of his organizational capacity and ability to create an effective decision structure through institutional arrangements. A president's management style is a product of his sensitivity to political context and ways in which he processes

information and given “feelings of efficacy” (Greenstein, 2000; Johnson 1974; George, 1980; George and George, 1998). His style is important because “[t]he inherent limitations of their institutional powers forces presidents to use their interpersonal skills and arts of persuasion to carry out their policies” (Neustadt in Preston 2001, 84). Alexander George (1998, 19) highlights the president as an individual with his distinctive personality, cognitive style, and political acumen, all of which affect his performance. The style of leaders are reflections of their beliefs, worldview and political philosophy, that ultimately influence their policy choices (Barber 1992, 38; George and George 1998, 55; Hermann et al. 2001, 34). This aspect also finds reflection in their political goals and the foreign policy issues the president chooses to get involved. Since the foreign policy agenda is vast and complex, the president is likely to concentrate on issues which are of his interest and in his areas of competence. Thomas Preston (2001, 187) argues that presidents may be involved to varying degrees in policymaking based on the importance of the issue and its context. This may occur if the issues are important to the presidential agenda, enjoy public attention (Rosati 2007, 74), or create a crisis which requires presidential intervention (Mitchell 2005, 16). For example, after the disaster of Vietnam and the Oil Shock of 1973, Jimmy Carter was domestically focused and intent on rebuilding the economy. However, the Iran Hostage Conflict forced him to engage in foreign policy crisis management (Bohn 2015, 23). Similarly, while Clinton “[i]ntended to leave the day-to-day management of foreign policy—including dealing with the “ancient hatreds and new plagues” of the former Soviet sphere of influence—to senior members of his national security team”, nuclear disarmament and stability were high on his agenda resulting in his deep personal involvement (Milestones 1993- 2000, State Department). Issues of presidential interest and crises are therefore likely to rise in the presidential agenda and increase the level of

involvement of the president. In areas beyond his expertise, the president relies more on his advisory systems and staff, who play a crucial role.

### *The Importance of Advisors*

Since foreign affairs have grown in scope and intricacy, it has become increasingly difficult for one single actor within the administration to fashion policy effectively. Margret Hermann (1998, 27) and Richard Neudstadt (1990, 37) posit that apart from the individual characteristics of the president, his staff arrangements and functioning styles are relevant to policy formulation and outcomes. Often a key group of people consisting of personal staff, advisors, bureaucrats, and experts may be responsible for policymaking (Hermann and Hermann 1989, 12). Jean Garrison (2005, 17) posits that the measuring scale of the responsibility and the influence of advisors can depend on the degree of centralization of the advisory process, the nature of group dynamics, and the extent of involvement of the president. For example, President Richard Nixon had a highly centralized advisory system with a strict hierarchy which made National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger most important to the president. On the other hand, President Jimmy Carter had a more open system which enabled both Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski prominent policy voices (Garrison 2005, 19; Neustadt 1990, 23). In such cases the interaction patterns in the group, and the beliefs or agenda of the individuals involved are likely to affect decisionmaking.

Ryan Beasley (2001, 8) makes the case that the type of foreign policy decisions taken is likely to be a function of the nature of the decision group. He proposes that while external environmental compulsions and internal organizational issues do affect foreign policy decisionmaking, the decisionmaking processes the pressures and constraints from the domestic and

international environments and after that makes a decision. He also argues that the workings of the decision unit can affect foreign policy behavior by emphasizing, reinforcing or reducing domestic, international, or cultural limitations, and compulsions. Hermann (1989, 12) also emphasizes the nature of the group by proposing that whether it is individuals or groups, the pre-existing knowledge, beliefs, and style of those major players participating in the unit are likely to have a major impact on decisionmaking. Jean Garrison (1999, 77) characterizes the relationship between the president and his advisors as symbiotic. In many cases, advisors have their agenda and ambitions and hence are likely to manipulate the process and shape policies to suit themselves.

Presidents select advisors based on their style of information management. How presidents gather and process information, their information requirement, and processing capabilities; the adviser's competence and "orientation towards political conflict," all contribute to their inclusion and role (George, 1980, 22). Some presidents' style is to gather information, by hearing a range of opinions and advice, before making a decision. Such a president is more likely to adopt a collegial system and select advisers or induct specialists who could offer expert advice. Other presidents may have a clear understanding of the field and would, therefore, tend to select advisers who are supportive of his predispositions (George 1980, 44; Hermann and Preston 1994, 13). For example, George H. W. Bush was far more comfortable with foreign policy compared to Clinton and George G.W. Bush, and he selected advisers for conformity rather than advice. President Clinton was less experienced and interested in foreign policy and accordingly chose experts as advisers who would provide advice as well as take responsibility. A president's tolerance for political conflict also affects his selection and employment of staff. A leader who prefers open debate and disagreement tends to create a competitive management model (George 1980, 16). Other presidents who are less comfortable with conflict and divergence, promote teamwork or gatekeepers who control what

reaches the president. George (1980, 19) posits that this style affects the president's dealing with his advisers and his control over decisionmaking. A leader whose style minimizes conflict is likely to choose advisers who are familiar and loyal. Others who are tolerant of conflict gather advisers who are more competent policy advocates, even if there may be a high turnover due to personal conflicts (George 1980, 17; Hermann and Preston 1994, 29).

Creating a framework for analyzing presidential leadership including the role of advisers, enables the evaluation of Presidents Clinton and Bush who were the first two American presidents after the Cold War.

### **The Clinton and Bush Presidencies – Degrees of Contrast**

Why choose the Clinton and Bush presidencies to evaluate the role of the leadership in foreign policy change after the Cold War? The Clinton and Bush presidencies are ideal for assessing the changes in US foreign policy since they were faced with the immediate challenge and crises caused by the transformation of the international system after the demise of the Soviet Union (Cooper 1993, 67; Cockburn 1993, 16). The policy response of these presidents to new challenges such as terrorism, intrastate violence and the rise of emerging powers highlight the role of leaders in foreign policy change.

Clinton and Bush were different individuals with their distinct worldviews, presidential styles, and advisory systems, all of which contributed to continuity and change in US foreign policy. The presidential styles of Clinton and Bush were different hailing as they did from diverse backgrounds, personalities, experiences, and characteristics (Greenstein 2009, 34). The political philosophy and worldview of leaders bear deep analysis because of their impact on governance.

While no president's ideas are promptly translated into public policy, their position in the governing structure promotes their preferences in the foreign policy agenda (Siemers 2008, 55).

### **Clinton and Bush Worldviews: Internationalist Versus Imperialist**

Each president had a different ideological approach to foreign policy which influenced the issues that interested them. Clinton had a more multilateral, inclusive worldview than his predecessors, which led him to promote global cooperation and international organizations. His philosophy was that “[a] successor to the doctrine of containment must be a strategy of.... enlargement of the world’s free market economies...” (Haas 1997, 18). This concept eventually led to the adoption of his ‘Doctrine of Enlargement’ which emphasized a liberal, internationalist foreign policy approach in the post-Cold War context (Miller 1994, 32; Haas 1997, 17; Jewett and Tuertsy 1998, 16). While this doctrine foundered against the cold realities of international conflict, including in Somalia, Yugoslavia and Kosovo, Clinton’s vision to promote peace resulted in the reduction of nuclear arsenals. He supported deeper economic engagement, for example, the establishment of the World Trade Organization and greater engagements with emerging economies like India (Haas 1997, 23; Hyland 2001, 28).

President Bush, on the other hand, had a more traditional, conservative (even neoconservative) worldview combining American exceptionalism and unilateralism with an overtone of religiosity (Dulk and Rozell 2011, 23; Leffler 2004, 45; Oliver 2004, 11). Noted academics like Jonath Monten (2005, 14), argued that Bush’s vision could be best described as “national security liberalism” by which he sought to spread democracy using American military power. The terrorist attacks of September 11 were a watershed moment for the US, and Bush was

infused with a preponderant sense that peace and stability required the US to assert its primacy in world politics (Jarvis 2003, 36).

This philosophy found reflection in the ‘Bush Doctrine’ which adopted a far more aggressive and imperialist intent and advocated for “preemption,” which was defined as “preemptive and preventive action” (National Security Strategy of the US, September 2002). For Bush and his colleagues, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction in the hands of rogue states made preemption almost an imperative. The doctrine consisted of four elements: the importance of domestic factors in determining foreign policy; the willingness for unilateral action; the view that major threats could be defeated only by strong de-novo policies; and that the juncture after the September 11 terrorist attack was an opportune moment to transform global politics (Edmonds 2004, 22). Thus, the contrasting Clinton’s liberal Wilsonian view of the world and Bush’s ‘neo-con’ vision of world affairs offer an opportunity to compare and contrast the foreign policy leadership of these two presidents and how that was translated into their decisionmaking by their policy structures.

### **Similarities and Differences Informal Advisory Structures and Informal Decision Process**

Despite having very different personalities and ideologies, Clinton and Bush’s formal advisory structure and the decision process had many similarities both in their decisionmaking structures as well as in the decision process. There were notable differences too which ultimately manifested in their decisions.



### *Comparing the Formal Structures – Similar Facades*

Formally, Clinton retained his predecessor's formal NSC organization centered on the White House. This consisted of a three-tiered system with the Principal's Committee, the Deputies Committee and the interagency working group (Rosati 2007, 84). With his focus on economics as well increasing globalization, Clinton expanded the PC by adding the US ambassador to the UN, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Special Assistant to the President for Economic Affairs and the White House Chief of Staff (Rosati 2007, 84). The National Security Adviser in his second term, Sandy Berger, followed the Scowcroft model of functioning, acting as a mediatory honest broker promoting consensus. Below these committees were the interagency working groups which did most of the work regarding preparation of policy options and oversaw their implementation. These were organized into regional and functional basis and were supervised by assistant secretary level officers from Defense, Treasury, State, and CIA with a representative from the NSC (Rosati and Scott, 2007). Clinton however had a tendency to open up the advisory circle beyond the formal structure in his search for the best policy.

While Bush's NSC had a similar structure as Clinton's, it had some notable differences in functioning style due to the personalities involved. In his first term, Bush had a highly experienced team at the level of the principals, many drawn from his father's or other administrations such as Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz (Brown, 't Hart and Tindall 2009, 34; Woodward 2002, 12). These figures knew and respected one another and shared a neo-conservative ideology and strategic philosophies. The central exception was the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who was seen as an outsider. Powell preferred diplomatic engagement over intervention which brought him into conflict with the 'neocons.' National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice was considered to be neutral and the

president's true personal representative rather than an 'honest broker' which affected her ability to influence the interagency process (Mann 2004, 27; Garrison 2005, 33).

### *Comparing the Informal Decision Process: Collegial Clinton versus Formal Bush*

As we have seen, a president's ability to manage his team is a reflection of his organizational capacity and ability to create an effective decision structure through institutional arrangements. A president's management style is a product of his sensitivity to political context and ways in which he processes information and given "feelings of efficacy" (Greenstein, 2000; Johnson 1974; George, 1980; George and George, 1998). Clinton's management style could be described as "collegial with low centralization" (Burke, 2000; Hermann, 1994; Mitchell, 2005b, Preston, 2001). This kept him at the center of the decisionmaking process while "promoting cooperation and reducing conflict" (Tanner, 1974; Preston, 2001; Greenstein, 2004). Viewed through the lens of George's (1980, 22) model for presidents, Clinton collegial style was shaped by his voracious demand for information, lack of interest and competence in foreign policy, distaste for interpersonal conflict and extensive delegation (Burke 2000, 22; Hermann 1994, 96; Mitchell 2005, 23; Preston 2001, 189). He sought information from both formal and informal channels and loved debate and discussion amongst his advisers and experts. When Clinton was first elected, he adopted a corporate leadership style (Greenstein 2002, 89) in which he did not involve himself in the policy details and preferred subordinates to prepare positions for him to take. According to David Mitchell (2005), in such an arrangement advisors tend to become influential in the policy formulation and decisionmaking process.

Because President Clinton's played the role of facilitator, which is one of the styles described by Tanner Johnson (1972, 17), rather than a manager because his management style was

interactive and informal (Greenstein 1994). He preferred amity and cooperation and strongly promoted teamwork even while he promoted debate and discussion, (Mitchell 2005, 13; Preston 2001, 176). James King and James Riddlessperger (1996) postulate that Clinton used the ‘team approach’ in selecting his staff and organized them into policy-advisory teams in the four core areas covering foreign, domestic, economic and environmental policies. These teams were expected to implement policy based on his broad guidelines. The teams were built around key personalities who in the field of foreign policy were the Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor, Secretary of Defense and the ambassador to the UN (King and Riddlessperger 1996,17). Other important players or experts were included based on the context (Mitchell 2005, 16). Clinton’s team in his second term included Madeleine Albright as Secretary of State, Sandy Berger as the NSA, Stephen Cohen in Defense, George Tenet at the CIA, John Podesta, as the White House Chief of Staff. This group had little conflict and cooperated on most issues. However, Berger did not take ownership of the interagency process and combined with Clinton’s tendency to decentralize, resulted in weak management of the decision process (Worley 2015, 42).

Compared to Clinton’s collegial arrangements Bush had a more formal management style shaped by a limited desire for information, lack of experience in foreign affairs and distaste for conflict amongst advisers (Bumiller 2008, 18). Glenn P. Halsted (2008, 56) argues that Bush, the first MBA qualified president, was expected to be a ‘CEO president’ but adopted a style that “attempts to govern by stressing loyalty, tightly controlling the flow of information, and surrounding himself with an ‘iron triangle’ of aides.” He was known to be less curious, uninterested in details, wanting only the key facets of information to take a decision (Clay Johnson, Wayne Slater, Allbaugh, PBS interview, 2004). He depended on the staff to produce accurate and studied options which he then distilled in his mind and made a decision (Slater, PBS interview,

2004). He was not very experienced in foreign affairs having been a governor for much of his political career. After the September 11 terrorist attack, however, as James Lindsay (2011, 5) argues, Bush changed his focus from domestic policy to foreign affairs and became more involved in policymaking. Stephen Dyson (2010, 17) portrays Bush in his second term, as increasingly closed cognitively, stubborn and willing to take risks in foreign policy. In any number of policy issues, Bush preferred the consonance of views from a closed influential group of trusted advisers and long-time friends who in turn controlled access to the president. (Mitchell 2005, 13).

As Paul t'Hart, Karen Tindall and Christer Brown (2009, 35) explain, Bush's advisers, particularly the 'in group' of Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz, were especially influential and played a significant part in the decision process (e.g. in the formulation of the 'Bush Doctrine' after the trauma of the September 11 terrorist attacks<sup>1</sup>). There was an ideological split between the 'in' group and the 'out group' represented by Powell, which manifested in conflict which Bush did not appreciate or encourage. These disagreements got out of hand, at times, because Condoleezza Rice was unable to reign in these powerful bureaucratic actors.

One mutual interest both presidents and many of their advisers shared was in improving relations with India. Presidential interest and advocacy by advisers were prompted by India's increasing strategic and economic importance as well as recognition of India's robust if messy democracy (Ganguly 2003, 33). In the context of US-India relations, the end of the Cold War brought new opportunities to improve the relationship. With increasing attention from the leadership, US-India relations, which had been lukewarm for past forty years, were 'reset' thereby offering an opportunity to analyze the role of leadership in the decisionmaking process toward India.

## **US-India Relations: “Estranged Democracies”**

Why study US foreign policy towards India? As Stephen Haggard (2014, 34) notes one of the important features of the post-Cold War international system was the rise of countries like Brazil, India, and South Africa, with large populations, rapidly growing economies, increasing assertion in regional affairs, and increasing involvement in global affairs. Stephen Cohen (2001) and Sumit Ganguly (2003) argue that by the mid-1990s, the US viewed India, with the world's second largest population, twelfth largest economy (in 2000), a profound democratic tradition and a sizeable military, as an emerging power which needed to be courted. It would be a difficult endeavor given the historical differences between the two countries.

Historically the US and India had lukewarm relations for varying reasons. Some were systemic like opposing Cold War alignments, US support for Pakistan and US opposition to India's nuclear program. Domestic factors such as popular opposition towards the US in India and individual dynamics like Nixon's intense personal dislike for Indira Gandhi also contributed to the lack of warmth in ties (Ganguly 1990, 44). US economic and military assistance to Pakistan was always a sore point for India as Pakistan had used this largesse against India (Wright 2011, 5). American ambivalence on terrorism in Kashmir and support for the Taliban were other issues which hampered relations (Ahmed 2002, 20). The US leadership began to view India differently after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan because Pakistan was no longer 'needed' and India offered new possibilities (Kux 1992, 86).

After the end of Cold War, the US began to view India through the prism of its concerns such as globalization of the world's economy, balancing China, nuclear instability, and terrorism. India's economic reforms created a large, vibrant economy attractive to the US. India's healthy democracy was another attraction in a world beset by authoritarian regimes. The US and India

began to find common ground on terrorism after the bombings of US embassies in East Africa in 1998 (Riedel interview,2015). Nuclear differences remained over the status of India's nuclear program and its refusal to join the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. However, while sanctions were applied after India carried out nuclear tests in May 1998, they soon were rolled back (Talbot 2012, 84). In the Bush administration, the US also began to view India as a possible hedge against China (Gelboy and Higginbotham 2012, 37; Wang 2008, 14). This eventually contributed to the US offering India a deal on legitimizing its nuclear program and partnering in nuclear commerce.

At the domestic level, the increasing American stake in the Indian economy also contributed to the case for better ties. The increased presence of Indian Americans in economic and political spheres as well as their lobbying for India were other domestic compulsions driving change in bilateral relations (Janardhanan 2013, 6). Finally, individual presidents began to give India personal attention and importance. As Strobe Talbot (2005,34) argues, Clinton was "fascinated" by India and sought to improve relations with it through deepening economic ties. He even planned a visit in 1998 which was eventually canceled due to nuclear tests by India. A year later when India and Pakistan went to war in Kashmir, Clinton personally mediated and resolved the crisis in India's favor (Talbot 2005, 17; Riedel 2002, 12). This led to his long cherished and a highly successful visit to India in 2000 and a new chapter in bilateral ties.

Bush was equally keen to deepen the relationship given India's democracy and fast growing economy (Pant 2009, 22). After the September 11 terrorist attack, recognition of India's struggles with Islamic terrorism and whole-hearted cooperation further strengthened Bush's desire for a deeper relationship with India. This laid the foundation for the historic US-India Nuclear Agreement in 2005 which completely transformed the bilateral relationship (Ganguly 2008, 18; Mistry 2014, 18).

In this thesis, we will look at the Kargil Conflict in the Clinton administration and the US-India Nuclear Agreement in the Bush administration to further explore questions of why the US decided to change its policy towards India.

### **Framework of Inquiry: Presidents and Advisers in the Kargil Conflict and the US- India Nuclear Agreement**

Why study the Kargil Conflict and the US-India Nuclear Agreement? Looking at US decisionmaking towards India in these two issues is an opportunity to complete a comparative case study on the role of presidential leadership in the making of foreign policy. The focus on US policy toward India will be held constant, but looking at President Clinton and President George W. Bush allow us to compare the impact of different presidential styles and advisory structures/processes on the formulation and altering foreign policy. A brief look at the evolution of India policy in each administration provides useful background for the cases.

President Clinton entered office focused on domestic politics, especially the economy which made India of secondary interest. During his time in office, however, he oversaw the beginning of a change in US policy toward India. This came about, in large part, due to a crisis he faced in his second term when in the spring of 1999, after successful peace talks between Pakistan and India, the Pakistani Army, in a surprise action, captured strategic territory in Indian Administered Kashmir, in the Kargil sector (Singh 2009, 78; Malik 2005, 33; Musharraf 2006, 254). India retaliated using its army and air force and the conflict threatened to spiral into a wider war, potentially involving nuclear weapons (Lavoy 2009, 67). The US, greatly alarmed at this prospect, mediated to stop the conflict and restore peace (Talbot 2005, 23; Riedel 2002, 7). While India and Pakistan both lobbied Washington for a favorable, negotiated settlement of the conflict,

the US ultimately took India's side reversing fifty years of past policy. The decisionmaking in the case was characterized by bureaucratic consensus and presidential involvement in the crisis phase of the issue.

In Bush's presidency, the US-India relationship deepened. At the international level, the two sides settled decades of nuclear disagreements through an agreement, which permitted India to undertake nuclear commerce. The agreement was central to the US efforts to build a strategic partnership with India (Mistry 2014, 12). To fulfill this relationship, India pressed the US to recognize its nuclear status and lift long-standing embargoes on India's civilian nuclear program and enter into nuclear cooperation with it. However, different sections of the US bureaucracy opposed nuclear cooperation with India based on nonproliferation and strategic concerns. The issue witnessed intense bureaucratic battles within the American bureaucracy as well as contentious bargaining with India. The decisionmaking process, in this case, was stretched over nearly four years with the involvement of individual actors, multiple agencies and characterized by bureaucratic infighting. (Mistry 2014, 15). Finally, at the beginning of Bush's second term, Bush announced "full civilian nuclear cooperation and trade with India" (The White House, 2005). Bush's more detached style was evident in which after laying down a vision of closer ties he delegated the issue to his advisers except to give critical policy decisions.

Given the importance of presidents and their advisers in foreign policy, this thesis takes a leader in context approach to explore the degree to which presidents and their closest advisers shape the decisionmaking process.



## **Research Questions and Analytical Framework**

As noted, while the subject of post-Cold War foreign policy and the US-India bilateral relations have been studied in detail, the decisionmaking process leading to change in US-India relations has received less focus. Some scholars focus on the importance of the systemic factors contributing to change in US foreign policy towards India (Mohite 1995, 46; Cohen 1999, 119; Bajpai 2000, 8; Ollapally 2005, 33; Ganguly 2006, 39; Pant and Joshi 2015, 14). Yet others highlight issues at domestic levels: the importance of nuclear matters in the relationship (Sheth 1999, 23; Talbott 2005, 56; Chari 2009, 21; Ganguly 2011, 21); and the re-orientation of India's economic and domestic policies as drivers for change in bilateral relations (Mehra 1995, 8; Barua 2006, 29; Schaffer 2002, 221; Rasgotra 2007, 68).

Analysis of the role of individual actors, especially presidents, in US foreign policy towards India is notably absent except for passing references in biographies (Woodward 2006, 33; Branch 2009, 27; Renshon 2015, 76; Mann 2015, 38), autobiographies (Clinton 2004, 165; Bush 2010, 245) or works covering other bilateral issues (Talbott 2012, 34; Singh 2009, 26). Studies on decisionmaking in US relations towards India especially of the dramatic shift in bilateral ties in the Clinton and Bush presidencies are scarce. They are restricted largely to a descriptive narrative by Bruce Riedel (2002) and a groupthink case study by Mark Schaffer and Scott Crichlow (2010). India increasingly played an important part in American strategic calculations from the Clinton era onwards and is an important cornerstone of US foreign policy, especially in Asia (Testimony to the Congress, Tellis, 2005). The subject of individual leadership in US foreign policy decisionmaking towards India is therefore an important subject both from the academic and policy perspective.

To fill this gap, the focus of research is the role of individual leadership and management of foreign policy (thus presidents and advisors). As Alexander George and Eric Stern (1998, 199) and Juliet Kaarbo and Ryan Beaseley (1999, 371) argue individual leadership styles and behaviour of leaders are essential to the study of foreign policy. Jean Garrison (2009, 6) explains how presidents organize their advisory arrangements to suit their individual styles and beliefs and select their advisers accordingly. Presidents Clinton and Bush were different people with different foreign policy visions, presidential styles and advisory arrangements, all of which affected the decision process. Comparing the decisionmaking process in the Clinton presidency during the Kargil Crisis and the Bush presidency in the signing of the US-India Nuclear Agreement refocuses attention on the importance of individual leaders and advisors in policy making.

This project takes a case study approach in order to evaluate the impact of the individual as a variable in the making of foreign policy in context with other complex intervening variables. The focus of each case is held constant by highlighting elite decisionmaking in US-India policy and particularly the role of the president and his advisers in how that policy has changed. The presidents vary based on the structure of their foreign policy process and advisory systems and how they use this system. This design allows the thesis to highlight the role of the leader and his advisers in context.

The following questions structure the analysis in each case chapter in order for us to explain the role of leaders and their advisers in the decisionmaking process in each administration.

1. How and why does foreign policy change?
2. What is the role of the leader, especially the president, in affecting change? When, how, and why do key advisers matter?

3. How and why did US foreign policy towards India change in the Clinton era? What was the role of the president and key advisers?

4. How and why did US foreign policy towards India change in the time of Bush? What was the role of the president and key advisers?

To answer these questions, the decision process is analyzed from the perspective of the president and his advisors in an inside-out look at the making of foreign policy. The leader in context approach, however, acknowledges the importance of other factors influencing foreign policy which offer opportunities and constraints for the making of foreign policy. Part of this analysis through three parameters: 1) looking at the president as the key decision unit and recognizing the way the international and domestic context shape presidential choices; 2) evaluating presidential leadership through the lenses of formal decision structures and informal decision process which are reflections of presidential style; and 3) identifying key advisors and their roles in the decision process. The case study framework allows us to evaluate the complex decision interactions in US-India policymaking.

### **Case Study Method and Research Design**

Alexander George and Andrew Bennett's (2005, 49) case study method with process tracing enables the investigator to take a holistic view over a period of time and to look at the multiple interactive factors that shape the decision process in foreign policy change (Yin 2009, 76). This allows us to explain the complex decision process and to explore the interaction between the president, his advisors, and other individuals/groups who influenced the decision to shift the approach toward India (Hawkins 2009, 22). It also permits the kind of in depth investigation that helps us explain the process of foreign policymaking. This research is designed as a comparative

case study to reveal the nature of decisionmaking process in the context of foreign policy change in the Clinton and Bush presidencies.

The cases of the Kargil War and the US-India Nuclear Agreement are ideal for analysis of the role of presidents and advisors in foreign policy decision making for several reasons. First, since both represent cases where the US policy towards India underwent major changes. Second, the interest and the involvement of the presidents can be ascertained from primary and secondary sources. Third, since the variations in presidential styles, world views and advisory systems offers the possibility to compare and contrast the decision process in two presidencies to understand the role of the leadership in foreign policy better.

The research employs a process tracing technique since “[c]ausality can be identified with greater certainty because of the time sequencing inherent in the process tracing that unravels the ways in which one small event triggers another and how the chain of events results in the overall whole” (Bennet and Checkel 2013, 34). The research uses this approach to investigate how core individuals including presidents and advisers at different junctures play a critical role in the decisionmaking leading to foreign policy change.

The period selected for tracing for the Kargil Conflict consists of Clinton’s second term from May 1998 to July 1999 as it encompasses the events related to the buildup and aftermath of decisionmaking. This consists of the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998, and their aftermath until April 1999; and the India-Pakistan war in Kargil from May to July 1999 (Kargil War). In the case of the US-India Nuclear Agreement, the period of Bush’s first term (2001-2004), and the first seven months of his second term are examined since the focus is on the decisionmaking leading to the announcement of the nuclear agreement in July 2005. This period is divided into three stages: from 2001 to 2002, when the nuclear agreement was conceived; from 2003 to 2004,

when the proposal for the agreement underwent the interagency process; and from January to July 2005, when the decision to go ahead with the agreement was finally taken.

In each case study, the president's foreign policy leadership is first examined regarding foreign policy vision and presidential style. The formal decision structure and informal decision process of each president are analyzed to understand the impact of style on decisionmaking. After that the role of presidents and advisors in each stage of the case study is evaluated to draw conclusions in the decision process. By comparing and contrasting the two case studies, the research will identify the role of leadership in US foreign policy decisionmaking towards India.

Since the research seeks to understand the nature of decisionmaking regarding India, it was essential to get individual, institutional and historical perspectives. Since many records are still classified, the majority of primary data was gathered through interviews with past stakeholders and experts to seek their views on foreign policy, decisionmaking and the nuclear issues. The researcher conducted more than thirty such interviews including with senior members of the Clinton and Bush administration such as the Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs in the Clinton administration, Thomas Pickering and Councilor for the State Department in the Bush administration from 2005 to 2007, Philip D. Zelikow. A list of interviewees is given in the references and sample questionnaires are attached in Appendices C and D. The researcher also interviewed key personalities in India including the ex-Army Chief, the ex-ambassadors to Pakistan and the United States at the time of the Kargil Crisis. The questionnaire varied in keeping with the nature of the appointment of the individual in the administration or the subject area expertise. The interviewees had the option to stay unidentified under the Chatham House rules, which helped them to feel more open to providing sensitive information and in-depth analysis. However, all of them chose to be identified. The researcher used snowball method of interviews

to see who else should be interviewed. In this approach by talking to one source, information on more potential sources is obtained and the process gets repeated, widening the interview pool. This was useful and led to some follow-up interviews.

As Bernard Russel suggests, during the semi-structured interviews, the researcher used open-ended questions that allowed the interviewees to reveal new information, and personal views and beliefs each time (2006, 19). Open-ended questions gave the participants the opportunity to discuss and express their opinions without being bound by a questionnaire or multiple choice questions. Interviews also allowed the researcher to understand the personal experiences of each and to understand their position more in depth, which benefitted the interview analysis process. Moreover, open-ended questions allowed identifying events and patterns that the interviewees considered significant thus expanding the breadth of the research without the interviewer posing a direct question.

Archival research was also carried out at the National Security Archives and the Congressional Library to supplement data from interviews. The declassified documents from the National Security Archives are especially useful in providing the historical background of US policy towards India on nuclear issues. The researcher also analyzed the data from secondary sources such as congressional hearings, policy briefs as well as journal and newspaper articles. Other sources such as books, newspapers, and periodicals; as well as interviews in the media were also reviewed to gather what happened, when and who were involved.

The fieldwork for seven weeks in Washington D.C was greatly facilitated by a Visiting Fellowship arranged by the Near East and South Asia Center (NESA) at the National Defense University, Fort McNair. The NESA gave invaluable support through sixteen letters of introduction to many of the concerned high-level personalities to arrange interviews as well as

office support. The stay in Washington DC also permitted the researcher to attend various talks and seminars in think-tanks like Brookings Institution, Carnegie Center, Atlantic Center, CSIS and the National Defense University to gain insights into US foreign policy. The seminar on July 7, 2015 held at the Carnegie Center for Peace to mark the tenth anniversary of the US-India Nuclear Agreement was especially informative as the NSAs of the Bush and Obama administrations as well other senior officials gave an insight into the rationale and process.

### **Organization of the Project**

In Chapter 1 the theoretical models explaining foreign policy change, decisionmaking, and levels of analysis have been discussed. This provides a framework for analyzing each administration's foreign policy towards India, the nature and degree of change of policy, the decisionmaking process and the role of the leadership. Chapter 2 explains the background of US-India relations with a focus on the impact of the nuclear issue up until the nuclear tests of 1998 and through the Bush administration. Chapters 3 and 4 concentrate on the analysis of the Clinton and Bush administrations through the framework of presidential leadership. In Chapter 5 the conclusions of the foreign policy making of the two administrations are compared.

## **CHAPTER 2: UNITED STATES – INDIA RELATIONS**

This chapter will look at the US-India ties with regard to the historical context of bilateral relations and the backgrounds of the Kargil Conflict and the US-India Nuclear Agreement. Relations between US and India had been problematic since the outbreak of the Cold War due to a conflict of interests on many issues. These included: the ideologically driven foreign policies of both countries, US military support for Pakistan and little incentive to the US for economic cooperation (Ganguly 1990, 39). Opportunities emerged for both countries to get closer, driven by economic globalization and the new era of multilateral engagement when the Cold War ended. However, the baggage of the past was difficult for both countries to overcome especially with respect to the American opposition to India's nuclear program. Finally, in President Bill Clinton's second term, the American intervention in the Kargil Conflict improved US-India relations. Thereafter President George W. Bush transformed the relationship by entering into a nuclear agreement with India. Thus in little more than half a decade US foreign policy towards India had undergone a major change.

This chapter will first trace the background of key issues in bilateral relations between the US and India up to the Cold War. Thereafter, relations in the Clinton and Bush presidencies are discussed with a focus on the backgrounds of the Kargil Crisis in 1999 and the US-India Nuclear Agreement signed in 2005.



## **Historical Relationship: Cold War Obstacles and Nuclear Differences**

Historically, the relations between the two countries were affected by three factors: Pakistan, India's nuclear program and the attitude of American presidents towards India. Strobe Talbott (2004, 7) notes that Cold War compulsions, differences on nuclear weapons, and the adversarial relations between India and Pakistan meant that "[I]ndia was a target of American ideological and geopolitical antagonism.... [due to] ...incompatible obsessions – India's with Pakistan and America's with the Soviet Union." While India claimed to be nonaligned, American support for Pakistan and actions against India's nuclear program drove India into a cautious embrace with the Soviet Union.

US economic and military assistance to Pakistan was another perennial sore point for India. While the US provided military aid to India during its war with China in 1962 and even dispatched the *USS Enterprise* to the Bay of Bengal (Kux 1994, 207), it thereafter exclusively favored Pakistan in this aspect. While Pakistan sought military hardware, ostensibly for use against anti-US forces like the Soviets in Afghanistan and against terrorism after the September 11 terrorist attack, the weapons usually ended up being used against India (Wright 2011, 28). The blind eye turned by the US to the use of American arms by Pakistan against India in the 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan conflicts; and President Nixon sending the US 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet to the Bay of Bengal in the 1971 to prevent the creation of Bangladesh, drove India into the arms of the Soviet Union rather than remain non-aligned (Kux 1994, 207).

The strategic divide between the US and India on Pakistan worsened in the 1980s when the US enlisted Pakistan to fight the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Pakistan was supported in its strategic rivalry with India by the US in return for its support for the American proxy war. First,

the US promised to supply F-16s, then one of the most advanced military aircraft, to Pakistan, threatening to upset the military balance in South Asia in 1982 (Talbot 2004, 18; Levy and Scott Clark, 2007). Second, it ignored Pakistan's use of terrorism as state policy by turning a blind eye to the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) diverting a sizeable quantity of military hardware to Sikh and Kashmiri terrorists in India (Ganguly and Fidler 2009, 103; Wright, 2011). Third, there was minimal US concern for India's fight against the Islamic jihadis, including those had been redeployed to Kashmir from Afghanistan by the ISI, who escalated the violence (Rajaratnam, 2005; Schaffer, 2009; Riedel, 2013). Indeed, there was even a degree of sympathy for the Kashmiri separatist movement within the American administration (Matt Daley interview, 2016).

Another obstacle in bilateral relations had been the traditional US view of India's nuclear program as a source of instability (Talbot 2004, 17). India tested its nuclear weapon in 1974 after it received no assurances about its security from Western powers when its rival China tested its nuclear weapon in 1964 (Kux 1994, 263). India considered the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) discriminatory as it legalized only the nuclear programs of the permanent members of the Security Council. Immediately after India tested, Pakistan vowed to follow suit and the US watched with dismay as a nuclear arms race developed on the subcontinent with Pakistan racing to build a bomb with Chinese assistance (Ganguly 1990, 119). The US applied sanctions against both India and Pakistan in the 1970s. However, Pakistan's key role in the US-led anti-Soviet guerrilla campaign in Afghanistan led to Reagan administration suppressing intelligence from the Congress on Pakistan's nuclear program (Levy and Scott-Clarke 2007, 48). This was done to protect Pakistan from sanctions under the Pressler Amendment of 1985 that punished states indulging in proliferation (Hersh, 1993; Ganguly & Peters ed 2009, 28). Tensions between India and Pakistan over the latter's support to terrorism in the Indian state of Punjab eventually led to escalating

tensions resulting in the nuclear instability crisis of 1989 and the first US mediation in South Asia ordered by President H.W. Bush (Hersh, 1993).

The approach to India of individual US presidents and some of their key advisors also had a major impact on bilateral relations. During the Cold War, presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy were supportive of India's developmental efforts while at the same time continued to support Pakistan militarily (Kux, 1992; Ganguly, 1990, Cohen, 1989). India's first five-year plan was funded by Eisenhower, as was the Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan (Kux 1994, 152). India's agricultural 'Green Revolution' that saved the country from starvation was funded by USAID. It was based on Kennedy's desire to deepen engagement with Asia's only real democracy at the time (Rakove, 2014; Selverstone, 2014). Kennedy also authorized the airlift of weapons and ammunition when India's war with China went disastrously (Ganguly, 2003; Kux 1994, 205). President Lyndon Johnson, who followed Kennedy, attempted to exert influence over India by manipulating US wheat exports when India was repeatedly struck by severe famine in 1965 and 1966. This eventually led to India expressing support for North Vietnam and the deterioration of US-India relations (Kux 1994, 255).

As the White House tapes reveal, Nixon and his Secretary of State were deeply against India for strategic reasons as well due to Nixon's intense personal dislike for India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (which was mutually shared) and Indians (Nixon Tapes; Kux 1994, 280; Mishra, 2013). Their open support for Pakistan in the 1971 war included supplying weapons; and sending the 7<sup>th</sup> fleet to the Bangladesh to pressurize India (Kux 1994,305). Kissinger even teamed up with China to open a second front against India that had just signed a 'friendship treaty' with the USSR (Kapur 2011, 66). This forced bilateral relations into the deep freeze as discussed earlier (Ganguly 1990, 112; Talbott 2004, 17). Sanctions applied by the US against India after its nuclear

test in 1974, earned long lasting public and political animosity in India despite Jimmy Carter's visit to India in 1978(Kux 1994, 374). Ronald Reagan was annoyed that New Delhi had not opposed the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. "[H]e pumped billions into Pakistan, gave it F-16s, winked while it went nuclear" in return for assistance to the Mujahideen" (Times of India, 6 June 2004). Despite these initial differences, US-India relations under Reagan gradually began to improve from the hostility of the 1970s with high level dialogues and talks of arms sales, however, but no concrete progress was made (Kux 1994, 416). As the Cold War ended and the United States emerged as the sole super power, India made tentative steps to improve relations. However, the involvement of George H.W. Bush in the Gulf War meant that India was not a focus of his administration even if American mediation headed off a possible India-Pakistan conflict in 1989. Bilateral relations remained moribund till Clinton was elected (Talbot 2004, 7; Cohen 2001, 287).

### **The End of the Cold War: Clinton's Opportunities and Challenges**

With the end of the Cold War, India's role in the world had changed at the international level. As an emerging power, India offered Clinton the opportunity to address US foreign policy issue high on his foreign policy agenda. These included increased multilateralism, globalization of the world's economy, nuclear instability, and terrorism (Steinberg 2003, 5). Clinton sought to enhance ties, but the Indian nuclear tests in 1998 became an obstacle in ties and further developed into a crisis in Kashmir. Eventually, these circumstances provided the basis for improved relations with India. This section recounts the background of US-India relations during the Clinton presidency from the nuclear tests to the war in Kargil. First, Clinton's engagement of India is

explained in the context of positive and negative drivers for the bilateral relations. Thereafter the detailed account of events in May 1998 and the war in Kargil in May 1999 is explained.

### **Clinton's Engagement of India – Promoting Democracy and Wooing Business**

Clinton's approach to India was a combination of continuity and change in American policy. He was himself was deeply fascinated by India's cultural diversity and history (Talbot, 2004, 23). Bruce Riedel, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs in the National Security Council from 1997 to 2001, argues:

Bill Clinton was eager to develop a better relationship with India from the beginning of his administration in 1993 and even more so in the second term because Bill Clinton, I think he recognized sooner than most, that US and India were potentially natural partners, and that India was going to be a key player in the 21st century. Both of those things now are conventional wisdom, everybody agrees. Agree with it or disagree with it, but Clinton early on recognized the importance of India and by the second term he wanted to do something about it. I mean there were lot of other issues on his foreign policy agenda, Middle East peace process, Iraq, Iran, Russia all of those were obvious to anybody and all those issues were going to be in his in basket whether he wanted them or not, [but] he wanted to put India in the basket largely out of his own geopolitical vision (Riedel interview, 2015).

Noted Canadian scholar Ramesh Thakur (1996, 13) identified six reasons for the thaw in US-India ties. First, the collapse of the USSR removed it as a “cornerstone of India's foreign and defense policy” and the US' global pre-eminence especially in the fields of economics and high technology incentivized India to mend its relations with the US. Second, with the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan, US utility for Pakistan was reduced while India's dominance in South Asia made it a more attractive strategic partner. Third, The US viewed a strong, democratic India as a stabilizing actor in the troubled South Asia region as well as the larger Indian Ocean Region and supported Indian interventions in Sri Lanka (1987) and the Maldives (1988). It viewed India's stability as essential to the well-being of South Asia and wanted to avoid the chaos of the Balkans. Fourth, the US and India discovered growing strategic convergence in their search for

global and regional security regarding avoiding an India-Pakistan war; secure borders, promotion of democracy and a market economy, countering fundamentalist religious and ethnic groups, and combating terrorism and drugs. Fifth, India's economic reforms vastly increased its attraction to American business both as a market as well as a source for low-cost services. This found particularly strong resonance with an economy focused Clinton. Finally, the US admired India's democracy and felt it could be upheld for other developing countries, many of which were slipping into authoritarianism, to follow.

In light of these strong positive drivers, President Clinton began his engagements with India by meeting Indian Prime Minister Narsimha Rao during his visit to the US on May 18, 1994, the first in nearly a decade. This was followed by visits to India by the Secretary of Defense William Perry and a major commercial outreach in 1995 by the Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, who was accompanied to his visit to Indian business hubs in New Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore by a team of twenty-five executives (Thakur 1996, 8). Talks between the Indian Army Chief General BC Joshi and the US Defense Secretary and the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1994 were signs of a tentative engagement in defense ties, the first after the 1962 India-China war. The visit by First Lady Hilary Clinton to South Asia in March 1995 was a sign of Clinton's personal interest and involvement in the sub-continent (New York Times, March 13, 1995). These growing ties built momentum to Clinton's desire to plan visit India in 1997 that would have been the first for a US president after Jimmy Carter in 1978 (Talbot 2004, 45).

The 1990s witnessed two phenomena that affected the domestic constituency in the US in respect to India: a massive increase in commercial engagement, and a rapidly increasing Indian diaspora which was well educated, wealthy and became increasingly politically and economically influential in the US (Janardhanan, 2013).

Before the transformation of the Indian economy began in the early 1990s, US- India trade stood at a modest \$5 billion in 1990. By 2005 it had increased to \$ 28 billion, not counting the \$ 7 billion in investments. Ashley Tellis (2013) argues that by the end of the 1990s, US industry, and the corporate sector were deeply interested in India as a market and for the provision of services. Clinton, with his economic focus, realized India's potential and began economic engagement with India that was further deepened by Bush.

The Indian diaspora played a key role in this engagement as their voices became increasingly heard. As George Perkovich (1999, 45) explains, by the end of the 1990s, Indians were the single 'wealthiest' minority and as the high-tech economy flourished, the "[d]isproportionate role of Indian Americans became the subject of media coverage and political awareness" thereby increasing their political leverage and importance (Perkovich 1999,45; Masud and Tung 2014, 21). The Indian diaspora's lobby gained bipartisan political support to influence US foreign policy towards India after it became powerful through organizations like the US- India Friendship Council (USIFC) and US-India Business Council (USIBC) as well legislative groupings like the India Caucus, the largest single nation caucus (Mistry 2014;114; Singh,2015). Clinton was sensitive to support from the Indian diaspora in part due to the political ramifications as well as getting influenced by the increasingly pro-India alignment of his advisers, such as the Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott.

However, while US foreign policy towards India was beginning to change in many aspects, the elephant in the room remained US objections to India's nuclear program. The US felt that India was preparing to carry out a nuclear test in 1995 and after extensive surveillance, The US Ambassador to India Frank Wisner conveyed American concerns to the Indian government (US Secret Cables, December 10, 1995). While the tests were not held eventually, the differences on

nuclear issues remained a major obstacle especially given Clinton's personal commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. Thus, when India carried out its nuclear tests in May 1998 and Pakistan followed it up a month later, Clinton was understandably furious (Talbot 2004, 52).

### **The Response to the Nuclear Tests: Failed Negotiations but Successful Engagement**

The immediate response of the US was to apply sanctions against India on May 13, 1998, as required by Section 102 of the Arms Export Control Act, otherwise known as the Glenn Amendment. (State Department press release, May 13, 1998). The immediate focus of the administration was on getting Pakistan not to test even while the sanctions were primarily designed to punish India politically, economically and militarily. The Americans offered the Pakistanis every incentive not to test (Inderfurth interview, 2015; Talbot, 2004). Clinton himself spoke to Nawaz Sharif and offered the release of the fighter aircraft as well as a prized visit to Washington (Talbot, 2004). However, Nawaz Sharif resisted Washington's efforts, and Pakistan carried out six nuclear tests at the end of May given the strong popular sentiment in the country to match India's nuclear tests as well as the confrontationist mood of the Pakistani military (Talbot 2004, 57; Perkovich, 2001; Riedel 2002, 4; Inderfurth interview, 2015). The administration decided to persuade both countries to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty having failed at preventing the test and extensive talks were held between a US team led by Strobe Talbot and the Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan separately.

The decision to get India and Pakistan to sign the CTBT was based on five premises. First, this treaty would be seen as less discriminatory than the NPT that allowed only existing nuclear weapon states to retain nuclear weapons. Second, since the technical need for testing weapons was over, both states could find it easier to give up testing. Third; since both countries had achieved



the status of nuclear weapons states they had no further need for nuclear tests. Fourth, this could also be used to push the peace process in Kashmir. Finally, getting India and Pakistan on board would help the CTBT pass through Congress where Clinton's nemesis Senator Jesse Helms, the Leader of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee had already ridiculed the efficacy of the treaty (Talbot 2004,56; Perkovich, 2001; Inderfurth interview, 2015).

The message to India and Pakistan was conveyed through a P5 communique in June 1998 drafted by Robert Einhorn, the Assistant Secretary for Nonproliferation. India reacted to this statement cautiously and soon thereafter Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh conveyed to the US that India had decided to stop testing and was considering signing the CTBT (Talbot 2004,76). Pakistan, however, dithered on the issue with no coherent response and even approached China for support. Clinton knew from the outset that it would be difficult for the US to convince India and Pakistan on its own and therefore decided to elicit the support from the international community especially the traditional allies of the two countries.

International pressure was initially built upon India and Pakistan throughout the latter half of 1998 by every possible multilateral channel including the UN, NATO, the NATO - Russia Permanent Joint Council, the Euro – Atlantic Partnership, Organization of Islamic States, and the Gulf Cooperation Council to name a few (Talbot 2004, 53). However, as time passed, the international consensus on economic sanctions withered away due to India's and US domestic pressure on the administration to lift sanctions. This was a complete turnaround by the Congress.

After the tests, Clinton initially received support from the Congress for his actions against India as even traditionally pro-India members were outraged at India's nuclear tests. However, the lack of political consensus within the US was evident when Senator Jesse Helms derided the Clinton administration's efforts to build better relations with India and the CTBT (Talbot 2004,

53). When two Republican senators Charles Brownback and Charles Robb during a visit to India doubted the efficacy of the CTBT (VOA News report, June 28, 1998), the administration's case on the issue was weakened. The Congress' eventual refusal to ratify the CTBT can be attributed to the nuclear tests first by India, followed by Pakistan and contributed to it to be termed as the one of biggest foreign policy failures of the Clinton presidency (Washington Post, June 21, 1999). Also, as time passed pressure from agricultural and commercial groups led the Congress to form a special task force for removing sanctions against India to protect business interests and jobs. The sizeable Indian American Caucus and the Indian American diaspora also were an important domestic factor and their pressure to lift the sanctions affected the administration's policies.

By January 1999, the diminution of international and local support for sanctions consensus led the administration to review sanctions. With the Indian prime minister dramatically going to Pakistan and signing a peace agreement with Pakistan in February 1999, the tensions on the subcontinent seemed to be reducing which further eroded support for isolating India.

Thus, the US decisions on India had to be reviewed at the end of six months of sanctions and fourteen rounds of talks on the CTBT. Sanctions did not have the effect of pushing India and Pakistan much closer to signing the CTBT though India had made appropriate noises. The international consensus over the issue had weakened and the US administration was isolated on the matter. Over six months, Clinton's anger at the nuclear tests dissipated and was replaced by pragmatism bolstered by a desire to build a deeper relationship with India.

While the talks were unsuccessful on the CTBT, the strategic engagement contributed to both countries understanding each other's concerns clearly. This was particularly important for the US as India was still an unknown commodity for most of the administration, especially at the higher levels. A close personal rapport also developed between the interlocutors especially Deputy

Secretary of State Talbott and Foreign Minister Singh. This created an informal channel between the leadership of both countries that would prove useful when war erupted in the Kargil War that broke out in May 1999.

### **The War in Kargil and US Mediation: May – July 1999**

The US crystallized the reframing of US foreign policy towards India away from Pakistan during the Kargil War. The continued pressure by the US also contributed to the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan agreeing to talk peace (Lavoy 2009, 18; Talbott 2004, 172). Prime Minister AB Vajpayee of India made a well-publicized bus journey to the Pakistani city of Lahore in February 1999, where he and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, agreed to resolve bilateral issues peacefully (Chandra interview, 2015; Lavoy 2009, 18). The Pakistani Army made its strategic moves as it was less eager to engage India even while publicly supporting the prime minister (Haqqani interview, 2015). The Pakistani Army prepared to infiltrate and occupy strategic heights in Indian Kashmir even while the talks were underway (Parthasarathy interview, 2015; Haqqani interview, 2015). From these heights, they could interdict a strategic highway connecting the Kashmir and Ladakh regions and overturn Indian defenses in the Siachen sector (Musharraf, 2006; Lavoy 2009, 61; Malik, 2005). See a map of the region in Appendix D. The Pakistani goal was not to defeat India militarily, but to get it to the bargaining table and to reopen Kashmir (Parthasarathy interview, 2015; Nawaz interview, 2015). The generals assumed that the US wouldn't care (Clinton was in the middle of the Lewinsky affair) and they misunderstood the way in which India could mobilize its population (Cohen interview, 2015).

Since the heights above 15,000 feet were unoccupied in winter; the incursions were discovered by India only on May 4, 1999, causing an extreme sense of betrayal in India and shock

in Washington (Pickering interview, 2015; Inderfurth interview, 2015). India immediately reacted militarily and the violence escalated rapidly. See a chronology of events in Appendix E. Pakistan initially insisted that the infiltrators were Kashmiri mujahideen and that its regular forces were not involved (Riedel, 2013; Lavoy 2009, 233; Malik,2006). However, despite these assurances, as several American officials confirmed, it became quickly apparent from both satellite imagery and other intelligence that the infiltrators were largely regulars.<sup>2</sup> Indeed William B Milam, American Ambassador to Pakistan from 1998 to 2001, states that:

The Pakistani military held a briefing for all the Defense Attaches in May 1999 where they informed them that Pakistani Special Forces were deployed with the infiltrators. I was shocked, and when I asked the Secretary heading the Americas Division in the Pakistani Foreign Ministry, about this, he was equally shocked. (Milam interview, 2015).

A concerned US administration began to mediate between the two countries. The attempt by Pakistan to change boundaries was considered irresponsible and a dangerous precedent for intrastate conflict after the Cold War (Pickering interview, 2015; Inderfurth interview, 2015). Since it was very evident that Pakistan had initiated the conflict and had used regular forces, the aim of the mediation by the US was to get Pakistan to withdraw its forces to forestall widening of the conflict (Riedel interview, 2015; Talbott 2004, 162). The message to Pakistan was to withdraw unconditionally with no quid pro quos on the settlement of the larger dispute over Kashmir.

India, on the other hand, was being persuaded to avoid opening up a new front in Kashmir or elsewhere. Initially, Indian military action was restricted to the narrow sector of the incursion and consequently the progress of operations to recapture the occupied heights was slow. As a result, India began considering widening the hostilities to exploit its numerical superiority over Pakistan. As Chief of the Indian Army in 1997 – 2000, General V.P Malik recalls, “[b]y the middle

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Inderfurth, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for State for South and Central Asia (1997-2001); Lisa Curtis and Polly Nayak (ex CIA officials), interviews with author in June – July 2015.

of June we began weighing our other options” (Malik interview, 2015; Chandra interview, 2015). Pakistan, in turn, threatened to use its nuclear weapons to counter India’s conventional military superiority over Pakistan and the crisis threatened to escalate out of control (Musharraf, 2006; Lavoy 2009, 28; Riedel interview, 2015, Talbott 2004, 159).

The dangerous rhetoric and the potential nuclear instability created a crisis-like situation for the international community. A flurry of diplomatic engagement was undertaken with Pakistan personally by the president as well as senior officials; visits by senior military commanders; and the threat of punitive economic measures (Talbott 2004, 159). Finally, Indian military successes brought the Pakistani prime minister to Washington in panic. President Clinton mediated between the leadership of both countries and convinced Sharif to withdraw by leveraging Indian military gains, highlighting Pakistani culpability for the tension and the resulting nuclear instability and promises to mediate the Kashmir dispute that was the main Pakistani concern (Talbott 2004, 159; Riedel interview, 2015). Throughout the negotiations, the American leadership had kept their Indian counterparts apprised of the situation, thereby building trust. The American stance during the conflict regarding castigating Pakistan for its transgressions and siding with India as the injured party caused consternation in Islamabad and surprised elation in India. It also signified a turning point in American foreign policy towards India.

While irritants including sanctions and India’s nuclear program continued to niggle the relationship, the ice was truly broken and the stage set for President Bush to take the relationship further.

## **Taking It to the Next Level: Bush's Bold Nuclear Gambit**

President Bush transformed the nature of US-India by his single-minded pursuit of the nuclear agreement overcoming bureaucratic opposition to achieve his goal of a strategic relationship with India. The agreement was announced in July 2005 during the Indian Prime Minister's visit and was a surprise to most in the American administration since the decisionmaking had involved a small circle of key advisers led by the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (Perkovich, 2005; Kapur, 2007). While there were many opponents to the agreement, particularly from the nonproliferation lobby, the strategic leadership believed that the agreement would transform US-India relations. There were multiple causal factors at international, domestic and individual levels that led to the agreement crystallizing.

This section recounts the background of US-India relations during the Bush presidency leading up to the signing of the US-India Nuclear Accord in 2005. First, the American engagement of India is explained in the context of international, domestic and individual factors. Thereafter major events in the evolution of the nuclear agreement are highlighted.

## **Bush's Engagement of India: Democracy, China, Commerce and The Congress**

President Bush strongly desired to deepen the relationship that Clinton had built with India. He was eventually convinced by his advisers that to offer India a deal that recognized its nuclear program was the best way to deepen the relationship. This was because India had maintained that sanctions applied by the US against India after its nuclear tests in 1998 were the main obstacles to deeper relations (Tellis interview, 2016).

While the Clinton's visit to India in 2001 had strong symbolism and led to greater understanding between both countries, several differences remained between the US and India due

to the nuclear sanctions on India which remained in place. While economic sanctions had been partially eased by then, all other sanctions, especially on space and high technology, remained. When the new administration under President Bush assumed office, the Indians again pressed the US to lift sanctions and asked India to be recognized as a nuclear power under the Non Proliferation Treaty (Tellis interview, 2016). While this demand seemed overly bold given the US position on nuclear tests, the Indians sensed that it would find receptive ears in Bush (Pant, 2009).

The Bush administration from the outset did not consider India through the lens of nonproliferation and instead considered India as a natural and strategically (Pant, 2009). The key factors at international level that influenced the new administration's policy towards India were framed in its National Security Strategy (NSS) 2002 which emphasized the need for the US to have a strong relationship with India. President Bush stated in 2002:

We are the two largest democracies, committed to political freedom protected by representative government. India is moving toward greater economic freedom as well. We have a common interest in the free flow of commerce, including through the vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. Finally, we share an interest in fighting terrorism and in creating a strategically stable Asia (White House, July 2002).

This was both recognition of India as a potential power in its own right with the capacity to play a stabilizing role in the immediate neighbor as well as in the wider Asian region (Pant, 2009; Markey interview, 2016). The growth of China in economic and strategic terms, as well as increasing regional assertiveness, also boosted India's attraction as a balancing power in Asia (Mistry 2014, 9). India was particularly attractive to the new administration, which had made the promotion of democracy one of its international goals, because of the country's robust secular, plural democracy exemplified by a succession of free and fair elections in the previous half-decade. (Pant, 2009; NSS 2002).

After the September 11 terrorist attack, repeated, long standing Indian warnings on Islamic terrorism and its links Pakistan finally began to receive the attention of the American administration. When the US coopted Pakistan for the expediency of American counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, the US relationship with India did not suffer unlike earlier occasions when the US and Pakistan because of the understanding developed after the Kargil Conflict. At the domestic level, support for better US-India relations found bipartisan support due to the support for democracy and in the balance of power context with respect to China (Mistry 2014, 10). The American industry also pushed for normalization and expansion of relations with India as it found the sanctions and other restrictions to be major hindrances in the ease of doing business. The influence of the industry, as well as the increasing political assertiveness of the American Indian diaspora, resulted in widespread Congressional support for better relations with the administration to improve relations with India. Finally, at the individual level, Bush was keenly interested in India and even during his election campaign was said to have asked his foreign policy coaches as to why India had not received more importance in US foreign policy despite being the world's largest democracy (Pant, 2009). After the September 11 terrorist attack, recognition of India's struggles with Islamic terrorism and whole-hearted cooperation further strengthened Bush's desire for a deeper relationship with India (Markey interview, 2016; Mishra interview, 2016; Mistry 2009, 48).

The initial steps in this process were incremental as the administration sought to navigate its way to a deeper relationship by balancing Indian requests for easing of sanctions and high technology while seeking for India to increase nuclear safety. This effort did not yield much foundering on the rocks of US bureaucratic intransigence. The intermediate process, however, was important in furthering the understanding between the two sides and especially for the Americans to understand what India's preconditions were for committing to a strategic partnership.



The Bush administration undertook three sequential steps between 2001 and 2004 to improve relations.

First, it removed all post-1998 nuclear test sanctions on September 22, 2001, but only because the sanctions on Pakistan had to be lifted for cooperation in operations in Afghanistan (Pant, 2009; Markey interview, 2016). Subsequently based on the ambassador's engagement with the Indian leadership, the State Department accepted cooperation in high technology and space but not in civil nuclear cooperation. This was announced in a November 2001 Vision Statement between Bush and Vajpayee.

Second, it set up a High Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG) with India in November 2002, to facilitate the transfer of high technology to India without violating national and international nonproliferation regimes. India would ensure strong export control measures. It also accepted the possibility of limited civilian nuclear trade with India linked to stronger Indian export controls (Mistry 2014, 41). These measures while increasing American dual-use technology trade to \$ 90 million did not alter restriction on civilian nuclear trade or the kind of technology cooperation that India was seeking. After that the DOD promoted the sale of high-technology military equipment to India in the form of Fire finder radars that was the first American military sale to India in many years (Mistry 2014, 39). India accepted Rumsfeld's offer for missile defense cooperation and impressed upon his interest in civil nuclear cooperation. However, apart from this sale, not much was achieved due to resistance from the State Department bureaucracy who wanted India to reciprocate before lifting sanctions (Mistry 2014, 39).

The Bush administration conceived a "glide path" in 2004 to greater space cooperation and civilian nuclear cooperation to overcome the drawbacks of the HTCG, through the Next Step in Strategic Partnership (NSSP), announced in January 2004. The agenda reiterated that both states

were committed to civilian nuclear cooperation despite American legislative barriers and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) restrictions. This was a strong message to domestic audiences in both countries that they were committed to a strategic partnership (Mistry 2014, 40). The key facets of the NSSP were: permitted more high technology for civilian purposes with strict “firewalls” to prevent military use; robust export controls on industrial technology relevant to weapons of mass destruction; and greater transfer of high technology than permitted in the HCTG (Tellis interview, 2016; Mistry 2014, 42).

However, these incremental steps did not yield the desired breakthrough for four reasons. First, the State Department under Colin Powell and Richard Armitage would permit only a limited degree of cooperation on nuclear issues (Markey interview 2016, Mishra interview, 2014; Mistry 2014, 38). It also did not wish for the NPT treaty to be violated by civilian nuclear trade with India.

Second, taking a cue from their senior leadership, most of the mid and junior level bureaucracy in the State Department, especially the nonproliferation and arms control officials did not support the policy for greater nuclear and technological cooperation with India. This manifested in highly restrictive and strict interpretations of the NSSP resulting in little progress (Markey interview, 2016; Mistry 2014, 43). The bureaucracy also resented the manner in which an “exceptionalist” strategy was being used by the administration to push the case for India (Mistry 2014, 43; Tellis, 2005).

Third, progress on most technical and even commercial issues that India sought ran up against a sanction of some sort. As Councilor to the State Department from 2005 to 2007, Philip Zelikow, argues, “[t]he nuclear issue was at the core of a wide web of entanglements that the nuclear sanctions had created. All engagements were affected by it” (Zelikow interview, 2016).

Finally, the geopolitical situation was too volatile for a major change in the nuclear paradigms as India and Pakistan had once again nearly gone to war in 2001-02 (Tellis interview, 2016). Thus, bureaucratic obstructionism prevented the policy of the president from being implemented as he desired. The Indian National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra noted that the bureaucratic reluctance was stymying the scope and pace of cooperation and suggested to Rice and Bush that the policy needed to be driven top down (Mistry 2014). It was recognized that incremental steps would not lead to the strategic breakthrough in relations with India that President Bush was looking for.

### **The US-India Nuclear Agreement**

In President Bush's second term, the requirement of supplying F-16s to Pakistan revitalized the need to 'compensate' India and led to the revival of the idea of full spectrum civil nuclear cooperation. After a series of intense consultations, restricted to a small group of advisers, Bush took the decision to make the agreement. After some further last-minute negotiations with India, the agreement was finally signed on July 18, 2005 by President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The joint statement "[a]ffirmed to their resolve to transform the relationship between their two countries and establish a global partnership" (Joint Statement, 2005). It also outlined the terms of the nuclear agreement (Mistry 2014, 54): -

- The US committed to full civilian nuclear cooperation including import of nuclear fuel and nuclear reactors.
- India accepted reciprocal steps on proliferation, testing and trade in fissile material, as well as separation of civil and military facilities.

- Both sides agreed that India could be acknowledged and have the “same rights and obligations, as a de facto nuclear weapons state.”

In summary, the US decided to provide the full spectrum of civilian nuclear technology; recognized India’s nuclear weapons program and committed itself to assisting India in getting a waiver from the international regulations on proliferation. This was one of the most significant events in the US-India bilateral relations for the US had “cut the Gordian knot” of nuclear differences which was the main obstacles in bilateral ties. The agreement also had crucial global implications: the critical rules of an important global security regime was changed for one country. It also had an effect on the global balance of power in that it brought India very close to the five other NPT-recognized nuclear powers who were also permanent members of the UN Security Council. It also meant that the US “[h]ad to compromise one vital national interest – of upholding a fundamental rule in nuclear nonproliferation regime – to further another foreign policy objective: that of developing strategic relations with India” (Mistry 2014, 3). India certainly appreciated this effort and many doors opened up to Washington in New Delhi after the agreement.

This strategic achievement, as we will see, could only have been achieved by the personal involvement of the presidents and key advisers at critical junctures in the process. The project now looks at the case of President Clinton and the Kargil Crisis to understand the decisionmaking that set US-India relations on a new path.

### **CHAPTER 3: PRESIDENT CLINTON AND THE KARGIL CRISIS**

President Bill Clinton sought to improve relations with India when he became president since he visualized that its economic potential and democratic polity fitted well with his vision of a global liberal capitalist order. The Clinton administration's mediation in the Kargil Conflict for India was an expression of change in US foreign policy and a turning point in bilateral relations. As we will see, the process of the foreign policy change was a complex one involving many factors. Clinton's presidential style, interest and involvement, in particular, played a part as did the advice and engagement of certain trusted advisors. The US approach towards India varied in the two stages of the Kargil Conflict: from May 1998, to April 1999, the period after the nuclear tests; and from May to July 1999, the period of hostilities, referred to hereafter as the Kargil War. The bilateral relations dipped due to American anger over the nuclear tests by India to recover slowly during the engagement on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and finally improved manifold by the end of the Kargil War.

This chapter evaluates US decisionmaking during the Kargil Crisis to analyze the process of US foreign policy change towards India. First, Clinton's foreign policy leadership is assessed to identify his policy inclinations and preferred decision structure in action. After that, the decision process during the Kargil Crisis is analyzed in two stages to understand the role of the president and his advisors in the process of foreign policy change in each stage.

#### **Clinton's Foreign Policy Leadership – Consensual Stewardship**

Clinton's desire to make a more peaceful, safer and prosperous world guided his foreign policy. Two components of this vision were the reduction of the threat from nuclear weapons and

building a deeper relationship with India. The dichotomous compulsions of these two issues tested Clinton's leadership, especially when the threat of nuclear conflict appeared to be a possibility. Clinton's delegation of policy to trusted advisors, his pragmatism, mediation, and selective involvement at key junctures were key highlights during the Kargil Conflict.

### **Clinton's Foreign Policy Vision – Liberal Economic Engagement**

When Clinton initially came to office, American power seemed to be at its zenith, with the USSR having been decisively neutralized and America's dominance firmly established through a successful war in the Gulf. Europe appeared to be safe from the Soviets, and Pax Americana could prevail. This feeling was reflected in the mood of the American public who supported Clinton's economic focused agenda and promises of a peaceful global order. In Clinton's view, American foreign policy goals were the "pursuit of freedom, human rights and democracy;" achievement of international peace, the peaceful integration of Russia and China into the world system; security from transnational threats, and a global economic order (Dumbrell 2002, 19).

This internationalist view promoting global engagement resulted in the 'Doctrine of Enlargement,' which had four broad themes: 'economism', 'multilateralist engagement and democracy promotion,' 'selective engagement', and "military restructuring' (Dumbrell 2002, 20). Global nuclear security was another of Clinton's major foreign policy goals, including implementation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which he signed in 1996. However, Clinton also was aware of the limits of American power. Thomas Pickering, the US Ambassador to India from 1992-93 and the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs from 1997 to 2000,

argues:

And what was Clinton's foreign policy doctrine in general, well, it is hard to characterize, you know any President's doctrine in specific and general terms. I think that Clinton wanted to avoid conflict and develop good relations as broadly as he could around the world.... solve problems that would in effect impact on the security, stability and indeed the prosperity of the US which are high order issues of national interest....at the same time he recognized that we could not do everything (Pickering interview, 2015).

Clinton's doctrine, however, was never clearly enunciated and translated into specific, concrete policy initiatives. Instead, it was an overall broad, ambiguous guiding principle. This was in many ways a reflection of Clinton's presidential delegatory style and initial uninvolved involvement in foreign policy. However, as we shall see, in his second term, Clinton was far more interested, involved and certain aspects of his presidential leadership influenced the administration's decision process.

### **Presidential Style and Clinton's Advisory Process in the Second Term**

Clinton's style was characterized by his intelligence, strong desire for information from formal and informal sources; particular interests in issues; delegation to trusted advisors and seeking consensus on policy. His pragmatism and ability to compromise to build bridges, however, made him a good peacebuilder. Clinton's leadership evolved during his two presidencies as he gained from experience and this led to his significant involvement in the conduct of foreign policy in his second term when the Kargil Conflict erupted.

Clinton has been described by those who knew him as a highly intelligent man with a personal style that was "exuberant, informal, interactive, nonhierarchical, and indefatigable" (Watson 1993, 132). As Bruce Riedel states "[h]e (Clinton) is a very sharp person, he could do a crossword puzzle at the same time residing the meeting, that kind of very smart person, and I didn't say he did them, but he could do things like that" (interview, 2015). Clinton was cognitively

complex and sought information and views from multiple and before making decisions (Hermann 1994, 20; Preston 2001, 227). As a politician, he had learned to look beyond the self-serving reports that people often fed him (Hermann 1994, 21). Preston (2001, 177) described his biggest strength to be his “ability to see multiple perspectives and multiple shades of gray on issues, his probing curiosity, and his unrelenting search for ever more information...and his amazing sensitivity to the political environment.”

Clinton was also known to be a pragmatic leader who sought to achieve results through negotiation and compromise exploiting his talents in interpersonal relations in a convivial environment (Greenstein 2004, 184; Preston 2001, 231). As Greenstein (2004, 179) notes, Clinton had two distinctive leadership traits, which manifested under different conditions when he tried to implement his policy. Initially, the president was forceful, energetic filled with enthusiasm as well as impatient with those who did not share his vision. He would be more pragmatic, ready to compromise, subdued and focused on getting his policy through in the second mode, which emerged after he did not get his way. His pragmatism and ability to compromise to move ahead were evident in the Kargil Conflict, when despite the failure of India to sign up to the CTBT in 1998, he continued to engage India with the larger aim of building a strategic relationship.

As observed by David Marannis, Clinton’s biographer (2004, 34), “Clinton’s ability to empathize with others, his desire to become a peacemaker and bring diverse groups together, always struck me as better parts of his character.” John Gartner (2008, 18), who studied Clinton’s psychology as a president, adds another dimension by stating that he was “deeply driven to transform hostile relationships into positive ones” at the policy level.” Anthony Lake, his former National Security Advisor (1996,18), stated that Clinton’s foreign policy approach was the “diplomacy of healing.” These instincts helped him build a good rapport with the Prime Ministers



of Pakistan and India and mediate between them during the Kargil Conflict. Clinton's need to establish relations with people to be empathetic, and to seek their approval has been one his principal characteristics (Preston 2001, 235; Drew, 1994; Reich, 1997; Stephanopoulos 1999, 7).

Clinton was a natural bargainer (Preston 2001, 239). While this should have made him avoid debate and disagreement (George 1980, 14; Hermann and Preston 1994, 17), he encouraged open discussion though he strongly disliked open conflict among his advisers. Clinton's desire for information and desire to hear a broad range of opinions meant that he often selected advisers who could offer expert views on the subject at hand. He relied upon his broad informal network of advisers to reach beyond his formal inner circle. This network referred to as "Friends of Bill or FOB", consisted of "former politicians, prominent journalists, lobbyists and campaign advisers" (Preston 2001, 225). Clinton used them to gain information, views, and opinions independent of his formal advisory system. In the words of former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, Clinton "doesn't give a fig about formal lines of authority. He'll seek advice from anyone he wants to hear it from, for as long as he thinks he's getting what he needs" (Preston 2001, 225). We see this in the context of CTBT and the Kargil Conflict. For example, when selecting the chief American negotiator for the CTBT, an important appointment given Clinton's focus on the issue, he chose Stephen J Ledogar, who had served in two previous Republican administrations on nonproliferation issues, rather than picking a loyal acolyte (Watson 1993, 18).

Clinton's relatively open advisory system led to the creation of numerous ad-hoc "problem solving" groups in the form of task forces and special councils (Watson 1993, 22). In this system, Clinton relied on task forces that were staffed by his friends, political allies and his wife to deal with important policy issues. These task forces were meant to reduce interagency competition while providing the president with a wider spectrum of advice. He did this for two reasons. First,

the traditional governmental structures were no longer enough to address the vast complexity of issues with multiple facets. For example, reduction of Russian nuclear weapons was not merely a defense or proliferation issue, but also had environmental and economic aspects. Second, task forces could be tailor-made to address increasingly complex problems and could provide more direct feedback. In keeping with this style, Clinton immediately established a task force to deal with the nuclear explosions in 1998. This task force continued to function until the Kargil war.

The ad-hocism and multiplicity of information tended to overload the president with information (Preston 2001, 227). Also, it led to a wide variety and number of staff and advisors getting access to the president and meetings in which they were encouraged to express their views. (Campbell, 1996; Hermann and Preston, 1999). Clinton's ability to see "multiple shades of gray" and his high sensitivity to context meant that the decisionmaking process was more deliberative and less decisive (Preston 2001, 227; Renshon 1996, 18). His participation in meetings with the staff tended to complicate and delay the process due to his indirect and inquiring approach. (Campbell, 1996; Rockman 1996, 43; Hermann and Preston, 1999; Greenstein 2004, 185; Preston, 2001, 226; Sudefield, 2010). This system led to a degree of policy paralysis with no timely and definite policy decisions (Preston 2001, 227; Greenstein 2004, 190).

By his second term, Clinton had revamped his management style in foreign policy, replaced much of his team, and become more involved, all of which helped him tackle the Kargil Crisis in a more efficient manner. The picture that emerges is of an intelligent, conscientious, and knowledgeable leader driven by a new desire to achieve his foreign policy aims through consensus. He wanted advisors to work together and arrive at a best possible solution in an open but collegial process. This style manifested clearly during the Kargil War when his entire team agreed on the strategy to support India against Pakistan's transgressions.

His second term team included Madeleine Albright as Secretary of State, Sandy Berger as the National Security Adviser, Stephen Cohen as the Defense Secretary, George Tenet at the CIA, and John Podesta as the White House Chief of Staff. This team pulled together with the result that the decision process was far smoother than his first term. He also still relied on friends and experts for advice (Bert, 1997; Hermann and Preston, 1999; Gordon and Sciolino, 1998, Sigal, 1998). He turned to his friend Strobe Talbott to be the pointman when the situation in the Indian subcontinent turned volatile rather than use the senior figures and traditional channels to pursue his agenda.

The president's style and decision process played an important part in how the US approached the Kargil Conflict. The complex dynamics of US-India relations between the nuclear tests and the end of hostilities bore the indelible stamp of Clinton's presidential style. The next section analyses decisionmaking during the Kargil Conflict.

### **Case Study: Decisionmaking During the Kargil Conflict: Presidential Interest and Engagement by Advisors**

Two decision instances are examined from May 1998 to April 1999, which includes the period from the nuclear tests to the peace talks in Lahore, and May to July 1999, which covers the period of the India-Pakistan military conflict (Kargil War), to analyze the role of the president and that of advisers in the decision process leading to change in US policy towards India. The crisis is divided as such because two natural instances represent shifts in policy and the views of the president and his advisors towards India differ in each period. This was reflected in the shift in US foreign policy which changed from hostile annoyance after the nuclear tests in May 1998 to a cautious empathy after the Lahore talks in February 1999. By the end of the Kargil War in July 1999, US-India ties had changed to a warmer understanding due to the position the US adopted in

the war. The continuity and change in foreign policy is traced in each period by examining the salient events in that period, the important players and their stances and the decisionmaking process.

### **Tracing The Process – Stage I: The Aftermath of the Nuclear Tests: Presidential Leadership and the Role of One Key Advisor**

The trajectory of US- India relations moved from its nadir in May 1998, when India carried out its nuclear tests to a warmer understanding by April 1999 on the cusp of the conflict in Kargil. US policy towards India in this stage was shaped by the president's strong nonproliferation concerns but it was his advisors namely the Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, who played the key role in the decision process.

#### *Salient Events – Strategic Engagement leads to Empathy with India*

The initial response to the Indian tests was based on fear of nuclear instability and anger at the damage to the CTBT regime. The immediate focus of US policy was to persuade Pakistan from carrying out retaliatory nuclear tests. However, despite threats and inducements, and President's personal entreaty to the Pakistani Prime Minister, Pakistani domestic and military pressure was too great to resist and Pakistan went ahead with its tests at the end of August. The focus of US policy was modified to first, castigate both countries, especially India for carrying out nuclear tests and thereafter pressurize both countries into signing the CTBT. This policy manifested in the form of a sustained engagement over ten months between the US and India, as well as Pakistan on nuclear and strategic issues. While the US dialogue with Pakistan was not very productive, the engagement with India led to both countries developing a valuable understanding of each other's

strategic rationales and compulsions. The engagement was the first time that the US and India had undertaken a strategic dialogue and even if ultimately the CTBT talks failed due to other factors such as domestic opposition and weakening of the sanctions regime, the US leadership were able to build bridges with India (Pickering interview, 2015; Daley interview, 2016; Talbott 2004,78). This eventually resulted in the US finding it easier to align with India during the Kargil War as the major players in the US administration shifted their stances towards India from viewing it strictly through the lens of non-proliferation to that of a victim of Pakistan's perfidy. The change in views was strongest in the president himself, who set the tone for US policy after the nuclear tests.

#### *Important Players and Stances – The President Promulgates and Advisers Execute Policy*

The main players involved in the US response to the nuclear tests were President Clinton and Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott who headed the special task force created by Clinton after the nuclear tests. There was unanimity amongst the president and his advisers on the policy towards India and Pakistan after their nuclear tests. Clinton, his principals and the members of the task force created to deal with the crisis, who were drawn mainly from the Nonproliferation Bureau and the South Asia Bureau, agreed that the Indian nuclear tests had destabilized South Asia and that preventing further testing should be the main thrust of US policy towards India and Pakistan (Pickering interview, 2015; Tellis interview, 2015). The president played a major role initially in laying down the policy for sanctions and attempting to stop Pakistan from testing (Talbott 2004, 56). After the tests by Pakistan, Clinton's advisers led by Strobe Talbott engaged with India and Pakistan to persuade the two countries to sign the CTBT. Talbott, who played a critical role in the decision process, was the president's longtime friend and his selection conveyed a larger message

to India that the negotiator had the personal backing of the president and shared his views on India's need to resolve the dangerous situation it had created.

When India tested its nuclear devices in May 1998, President Clinton truly feared the possibility of a nuclear conflict and blamed India for the situation. Ashley Tellis, an American nuclear expert at the Carnegie Foundation, states:

In fact, there was a meeting that Clinton had called after the tests attended by four or five American academics. It was interesting to read the notes of the meeting where President Clinton is most concerned and keeps asking this question over and over again "Are these guys capable of using these weapons? "...because in that sense our knowledge of South Asia was very thin. So people thought the tests are a prelude to whole lot nastier things happening, and so the fear of 99 was "Oh my God! They have nuclear weapons ....and now they are like going to war! What the hell is going on?" ....and so the US was extremely sensitive to even the slightest whiff that nuclear weapons were involved .... whatever the character of the crisis and so we reacted instantly and my view is that this will be the norm in all future crisis (Tellis interview, 2015).

Clinton and his advisers felt that the tests had damaged their efforts to implement the global nonproliferation regime (Talbot 2004, 52; Perkovich 2001, 6). The tests were in complete contradiction to Clinton's vision of a more peaceful world free from nuclear instability and insecurity. Given the critical nature of the issue and how it undercut Clinton's strongly held beliefs and policies, India and the nuclear issue rose on the presidential agenda and generated a strong response. His approach of balance between coercion and encouragement, carried out by his advisers through extensive engagement particularly with the Indians.

Clinton was a born peacemaker and had a desire to resolve conflicts as the presidential and decision-making literature discusses (Preston 2001, 232). It is plausible that this predisposition, coupled with his desire to solve the India crisis, made him determined to take the opportunity to intervene through mediation and improve relations between the India and Pakistan and bring peace to South Asia (Talbot 2004, 78; Riedel 2002, 7; Pickering interview, 2015). He was disappointed at not being able to improve relations with India earlier in his administration, and the tests became

as an opportunity to rectify this through deeper engagement with India and Pakistan. He kept asking “[S]trobe, when are you getting me to India?” whenever Talbott reported on the progress on the ratification of the CTBT to Clinton (Riedel interview, 2015). Accordingly, he wanted South Asia to be “front and center” in American diplomacy and justified the “huge American political capital”. He also said, “I want to be the lead on this one...as the American people would viscerally support this.... due to the danger of nuclear war” (Talbott 2004, 79). Presidential interest in South Asia as a policy issue and initial involvement raised its importance and provided momentum to the foreign policy establishment’s efforts to recalibrate American relations with India.

While President Clinton clearly enunciated his policy on a nuclearized South Asia and continued to be involved, the outbreak of civil war in Kosovo and his personal crisis in the form of the Monica Lewinsky affair became major distractions and the Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, who was also his close friend, increasingly drove the initiative.

Clinton chose Talbott to lead this important policy because, apart from their friendship, Talbott had expertise in nuclear security and interest in India (Riedel interview, 2015; Daley interview, 2016). Talbott played an unusually prominent role, despite being relatively junior as a Deputy Secretary of State because he had the authority of the president and personal access to him. This relationship often resulted in informal decisionmaking outside the normal NSC process. All the sources confirm that the primacy of Strobe Talbott in the decision process. The selection initially was not automatic for some had proposed that Clinton appoint Sam Nunn, a senior “well regarded” former senator, as the president’s special envoy to India and Pakistan (Talbott 2004, 79). However, Talbott was able to convince the president that a high-profile envoy would not appeal to the Indians nor would he be fully amenable to control from the White House. This issue of a high-profile special envoy also came later when the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif

proposed ex-president Jimmy Carter as an envoy on Kashmir, and this caught the fancy of Albright. Talbott again managed to convince the leadership that higher the profile of the interlocutor, the greater the resistance of the Indians would be (Talbott 2004, 79). Thus, Talbott remained the pointsman on US negotiations on the CTBT from the outset.

Talbott led a multiagency task force undertook which assumed the prime responsibility for the engagement with India and Pakistan. The key members of the team apart from Talbott, included Robert Einhorn from Nonproliferation Bureau and Rick Inderfurth, Walter Anderson, and Matt Daley from the South Asia Bureau of the State Department (Camp interview, 2015; Talbott 2004, 92). Bruce Riedel from the NSC, his deputy Donald Camp, and Gary Samore, a nonproliferation specialist, also were part of the team. The member from the Treasury, Karen Mathieson advised on the economic effect of sanctions. Other experts from the intelligence agencies, Justice, Commerce, Energy, and Defense Departments as well as members of the State Department and the White House who dealt with Congress, were included (Talbott 2004, 92). A separate team of nonproliferation experts led by Einhorn also were formed for a short duration to negotiate the technical aspects of the CTBT but did not make much progress (Talbott 2004, 129). On occasion, military officers, like the CINC CENTCOM, General Anthony Zinni, were included to reach out to the highly powerful Pakistani Army. The division of responsibility among the main advisers was designed to address critical issues with Talbott focusing mainly on India, Pickering lending diplomatic weight in dealing with other G8 countries, and Einhorn attended to the technical aspects (Talbott 2004, 76). The task force engaged with the Indians and Pakistanis several times over a year long period. This process helped develop a functional relationship with India that contributed to the change in American foreign policy initiated by President Clinton. Clinton's clear policy directions and consensus amongst his advisers led to harmonious and



coordinated efforts to push the president's agenda with India (Daley interview, 2016). It represents an example of Clinton's management style in which he preferred task-oriented groupings to assist in the decision process.

### *The Decision Process – Anger to Empathy*

The decision process was characterized by President Clinton's shift from anger and disappointment at the nuclear tests to greater understanding of India's position that was largely driven Talbott's engagement with the Indians.

As Talbott (2004, 52) notes "Clinton said "[w]e're going to come down on those guys like a ton of bricks," as he opened a meeting in the Oval Office. Twenty-four hours had passed since the news of India's nuclear test had reached Washington but his anger at India's leaders was unabated." However, as the weeks passed Clinton changed his softer stance towards India by April 1999.

The initial views, convinced that the solution lay in better relations with India. Clinton state that India was the "the Rodney Dangerfield of great nations"—which was convinced that it was never got enough respect... But that's all the more reason we can't give up on trying. I'd like to find a way in on this one" (Talbott 2004, 78).

Clinton's long standing desire to improve relations with India were buttressed by the rapport and understanding that Talbott built with the Indian leadership, especially the Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and contributed to a decision process which the president led, was to marshaling international opinion against the tests and the strategy to get both India and Pakistan to ratify the CTBT. As Talbott (2004, 78) recalls his meeting at Camp David with Clinton, the president's initial posture towards India was tough stating, "India, having made itself part of the

problem of proliferation by testing, should now find ways of making itself part of the solution. Clinton's policy was clear, "First and foremost, that meant never testing again. The best way of providing such a pledge would be to join the CTBT" (Talbot 2004, 86). This was the policy that Clinton expected Strobe Talbot to implement.

Talbot was at the forefront of engagement throughout this period and was highly influential in the decision process given his proximity to the president and the perceived access this granted to foreign leaders (Riedel interview, 2015; Pickering interview, 2015; Daley interview, 2015). While the president, the Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser did lend weight to emphasize issues by 'working the phones' on occasions, it was Talbot and his team which implemented policy. The advisory process was organized into two tiers with the taskforce which negotiated with the Indians and Pakistanis led by Talbot, reporting to the principals, mainly the Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser (Pickering interview, 2015; Riedel interview, 2015). The task force consisted of a mixture of regionalists and functionalists from important departments and agencies of the U.S government that had been working on India and Pakistan for the past several years (Daley interview, 2016; Anderson interview, 2016).

Talbot's first task was when he led the delegation to Pakistan to try and keep the Pakistanis from testing. Apart from engaging with the foreign minister and diplomats he also met and tried to convince the prime minister, Nawaz Sharif to seek 'restraint and maturity.' While these efforts including a meeting with the Pakistani Army chief, ultimately did not prevent the Pakistanis from testing, Talbot's role as a major and empowered adviser was established. The limits of the powers of an adviser, however, became apparent Talbot could not guarantee Sharif a presidential visit to Pakistan by Clinton in return for not testing.

Pakistan's testing on May 28, 1998, further infuriated President Clinton. On June 3, 1998, a week after Pakistan exploded its nuclear weapons, he continued in the same vein calling the tests "self-defeating, wasteful and dangerous" and that they would make the people of India and Pakistan "poorer and less secure." He bore down harder on India than Pakistan, accusing the BJP government of betraying "the ideals of nonviolent democratic freedom and independence at the heart of Gandhi's struggle to end colonialism on the Indian subcontinent" (Talbot 2004, 74). During his visit to Beijing in July 1998, Clinton took upon himself to persuade the Chinese President Jiang Zemin, to include the issue in the joint statement. This proclaimed that "[n]otwithstanding their recent nuclear tests, India, and Pakistan do not have the status of nuclear weapons states in accordance with the NPT" and called for the US and China to work together to prevent nuclear proliferation in South Asia and to promote reconciliation between India and Pakistan (Sino-U.S. Presidential Joint Statement on South Asia Beijing, June 27, 1998). Given the fact that India's main justification for its nuclear tests was for security from China, this was a deliberate expression of Clinton's anger. Finally, the president made his much cherished and long-delayed visit to India planned for November 1998 pre-conditional to India's accession to the CTBT and other measures (Talbot 2004, 98) for which he turned to Talbot.

Talbot's next challenge after the Pakistani nuclear test was to persuade both countries to sign the CTBT. Over the next six months, Talbot met Indian and Pakistani counterparts many times in Washington, India, or Pakistan and on other international venues to negotiate. Apart from the negotiations, Talbot met the political leadership in both countries on several occasions. During these negotiations, the relationships built with the Pakistanis and Indians were very different. The Pakistanis led by Ayub Khan, the foreign minister or Shamshad Khan, their foreign secretary, who was known to be close to the Pakistani Army, were "surly, combative and argumentative" (Talbot

2004, 105; Riedel interview, 2015). Talbott recounts an instance where a Pakistani diplomat had to be physically restrained during an outburst towards the Americans (Talbott 2004, 105; Riedel, interview 2015). This resentment was driven by a perceived sense of injustice and anger against the ‘transactional attitude’ of the Americans towards Pakistan. At the personal level this led to Talbott disliking Pakistani negotiator, Shamshad Khan, quite intensely” (Anderson interview, 2016). This attitude contrasted greatly with the Indians, led by Jaswant Singh, with whom the Americans got along well even when the negotiations were tough and ultimately unsuccessful. As Walter Anderson, who worked in the Near East and South Asia (NESA) desk in the Office of Intelligence and Research during the Kargil Crisis, recalls, “a deep friendship developed between Talbott and Singh.

While the Indians negotiated skillfully and did not commit to any firm assurance to the CTBT (Naik interview, 2015; Talbott 2004, 130), Talbott’s efforts during eight rounds of dialogue still led to a sense of mutual understanding and respect between the countries as well and between Talbott and Singh. The Americans gained an inside view of India’s strategic motivations and political dynamics (Testimony to Congress by Karl Inderfurth, 1999). The Indians were able to gauge American policy positions as well as sense the interest in India both in the White House as well as in the Congress (Singh 2009, 243). Also, Talbott and Singh built a rapport based on mutual respect as well as reciprocated sympathy for their tasks. The personal relationship helped in smoothing over the several contentious issues and positions that each country took during the negotiations. It also became a channel for both countries to reach out to better understand each other at times of crisis.

This understanding was matched by a mellowing of Clinton’s position. He realized that the genie could not be put back in the bottle and that the situation would have to be dealt with by

looking forward (Riedel interview, 2015; Camp interview, 2015; Daley interview, 2015; Pickering interview, 2015). Clinton stated:

I hope the Indian government soon will realize that it can be a very great country in the 21st century without doing things like this.....It is just wrong. And they clearly don't need it to maintain their security, is-à-vis China, Pakistan, or anybody else. So I just think they made a terrible mistake. And I think that we, all of us, have a responsibility to say that, and to say that their best days are ahead of them, but they can't—they have to define the greatness of India in 21st century terms, not in terms that everybody else has already decided to reject country (White House press release, 17 November 1998).

This statement encapsulates the president's style of pragmatism when confronted with a nuclear policy impasse. By calling India "great" three times in the declaration condemning the test, Clinton indicated his personal attraction for India and his efforts at reconciliation even while conveying his anger at the tests.

Other issue also contributed to the alteration of the president's approach towards India. The discovery that the Osama Bin Laden-led Al Qaeda attacks on American embassies in East Africa on August 7, 1998, had been trained based in Pakistani intelligence training camps in Afghanistan was another issue which brought the president closer to India (Talbot 2004, 115; Riedel interview, 2015). While this resonated with what the Indians had conveyed earlier to the Americans, the Pakistani involvement and recalcitrant response to American calls for cooperation, infuriated Clinton (Talbot 2004, 167; Riedel interview, 2015; Anderson interview, 2016). The president's attention was also diverted in August 1998, with the eruption of the Monica Lewinsky affair (Talbot 2004, 115). At the same time, domestic opposition to the CTBT and sanctions in India, from the Congress and the Indian diaspora began to build and impacted decisionmaking (Perkovich interview, 2015; Anderson interview, 2016). Other countries with a major economic interest in India also began to push the US to be more pragmatic and review the sanctions regime against India (Talbot 2004, 127; Daley interview, 2016).

Thus, Clinton's ingrained predilection for India kept him focused on the country, but his innate pragmatism tempered his response to the nuclear tests when the circumstances changed. Clinton had started to try and understand India's actions which made it "easier for him to comprehend and even to forgive" (Talbot 2004, 68). While discussing the tests with Russian president Boris Yeltsin, he said "I think India has made a terrible mistake.... I also think India should get credit for fifty years of democracy. We need to help them see that they should not define greatness in a way that gives everyone else headaches" (Talbot 2004, 68). The balance Clinton maintained while promoting his competing interests of non-proliferation and ties with India exemplifies dilemmas that a president faces in foreign policy as well as Clinton's accommodative character. Clinton's natural predilection for making peace and conflict resolution also emerges clearly in his response and statements. President Clinton set the policy agenda towards India after the nuclear tests and influenced the decision process through his change in views towards India from anger to empathy.

The change was influenced to a large extent by his advisor Talbot, who by undertaking the main initiative of engaging India, exemplifies the critical role of advisers in foreign policy decisionmaking. This also meant that Clinton did not use his NSC structure in a formal manner for decisionmaking during this stage. His principal advisers were in the information loop, but relatively uninvolved in the India initiative. Talbot played an unusually prominent role in the process exemplifying the importance of presidential choices in foreign policy decisionmaking. His views on India's potential, personal engagement with India's foreign minister and his friendship with Clinton enabled him to influence the decision process. Talbot's engagement as well as shifting domestic and international opinion contributed to the change in American foreign policy towards

India. The employment of advisers and experts to drive critical foreign policy is an indicator of Clinton's flexibility and delegatory style as president.

The effect of this engagement between Talbott and Singh can be understood by a comment by noted Indian strategic thinker, C. Raja Mohan when Singh gave up the portfolio of External Affairs Minister in 2002:

The dialogue with the US, he (Jaswant Singh) created the basis for transforming the US – India relations. The cooperative relationship with the US, which is taken for granted today, was neither universally desired in New Delhi nor easy to accomplish, given the real hurdles that stood in the way of achieving a greater understanding between the U.S and India. Altering the template of the U.S – India relations in the Clinton era and giving it strategic content in the Bush administration will go down as the single biggest contribution of Mr. Singh (The Hindu 2002, 12).

This engagement and understanding between the US and Indian leadership played an important part in influencing US foreign policy towards India when the war in Kargil broke out in the summer of 1999. US foreign policy decisionmaking during this war is discussed in the next section.

### **Tracing The Process - The War in Kargil: The President Charts a New Path in US-India Relations**

When he sent Pakistani troops in April 1999 into Kargil to occupy a few heights, Musharraf never imagined how the operation would end three months later in a strategic catastrophe for Pakistan (Haqqani interview, 2015; Lavoy 2009, 74). The transgressions by Pakistan provided an opportunity for Clinton to realign American support from Pakistan to India. This changed the trajectory of US-India relations during the Kargil Conflict from a tentative empathy for each other understanding in April 1999 to a degree of friendship by the end of hostilities. This was because the US, under Clinton's influence, proved to India that it was no longer tied blindly to Pakistan

and desired a strategic friendship with India (Lavoy 2009, 355; Riedel interview, 2015; Pickering, interview 2015). This section traces the process of decisionmaking during this stage by examining the role of the president and his adviser during the war in Kargil from May to July 1999 and the resulting changes in American foreign policy.

*Salient Events – An Escalatory Nuclear Conflict and Successful American Mediation*

The Lahore Agreement which was signed between the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers on February 21, 1999 lulled the Americans into thinking that the tensions in the subcontinent after the nuclear tests were subsiding. The news of ‘mujahidin’ making incursions into Kashmir and confused Indian assessments whilst worrying did not cause undue alarm. The American leadership was angered when the violence escalated and the involvement of the Pakistani Army clearly emerged. Continued Pakistani denials did not sit well with the president or his advisers and made them supportive of the Indian response of the military and diplomatic offensive against Pakistan. However, by the beginning of June, slow military progress caused India to threaten horizontal escalation and Pakistan’s response which hinted at a nuclear response, began to worry the US. The US then embarked upon intense mediatory efforts both at the presidential and adviser levels. By mid-June the tide turned and as Indians began to make military gains, the Pakistanis increasingly sought a face saving way out. The US insisted on an unambiguous withdrawal of Pakistani forces and after the Chinese refused to support Pakistan, the latter succumbed to American pressure. A Pakistani delegation to the US came in early July and was persuaded by the American leadership to withdraw its forces unconditionally.



### *Important Players and Stances – The President Leads the Way*

President Clinton dominated the decision process in this stage and his personal involvement was the centerpiece of American diplomacy in resolving the crisis. Talbott as well as the taskforce provided the natural arrangement for engaging India and Pakistan and were deeply involved in supporting the president's initiatives on the conflict. Once again the president and his advisers were united in their response in that they felt that India needed to be supported largely because of Pakistan's role in initiating a dangerous crisis.

The transgression by Pakistan of accepted boundaries to change the status quo through the use of force struck at the norms of international peace and the very foundations of Clinton's imagination for a peaceful post-Cold War global order (Pickering interview, 2015; Talbott 2004, 159). With the recent history of nuclear tests by both the belligerents, the incursion by Pakistan into Kashmir and the resulting conflict seemed to confirm Clinton's worst fears that nuclear tests would lead to nuclear instability and he felt obligated to intervene. Another reason Clinton felt compelled to mediate between the two countries was the worry among decisionmakers that India and Pakistan did not have the experience in maintaining the stability between nuclear powers as the US, and the erstwhile USSR did (Camp interview, 2015; Lavoy 2009, 360). As Riedel confirmed:

You have to look at it from Clinton's perspective, here are two countries who just had made the nuclear weapons and that nightmare had to be on his mind, and then both sides started making statements in the media about the worst could happen.... neither Prime Minister Vajpayee nor Prime Minister Sharif had any interest in disaster. However, they themselves were caught in a cycle where there was no other way out. And by May and June, it looked like we were in that kind of a cycle...in retrospect, many Indians and Pakistanis have said that there was nothing to worry about... [but] at that time in 1999, the White House and the President had to worry about the worst possible case (Riedel interview, 2015).

The focus of American policy became to get Pakistan to withdraw its troops and prevent India from widening the conflict. Clinton's policy to support India was evident, as Pickering mentions:

There was no way we were going to stop India, we couldn't stop India from moving in a way militarily to reoccupy, but it was fairly clear that India wasn't going to go beyond....and so that provided a benchmark and a way to proceed and when Nawaz indicated... [that he wanted to negotiate] ... then we said okay, he is on his knees, we are not going to be able to pick him up, he is going to have to do that himself, but we can do a lot to push him in that direction (Pickering interview, 2015).

The president and his advisers were in complete consensus on the policy. As Pickering recalls (interview, 2015), "[e]verybody was pretty much on board on what to do more or less. As I remember we were pretty harmonious on the view that India had to be supported." The unanimous conclusion of the advisers and the bureaucracy that Pakistan was the aggressor was a powerful factor in decisionmaking. Pakistani lies about the identity of the infiltrators also shook the faith of the American bureaucrats in their Pakistani counterparts with whom they traditionally had excellent relations (Daley interview, 2015; Anderson interview, 2015). This shift in the thinking of the regional bureaucracy strongly supported the president's desire for changing the foreign policy towards India. In fact, as a member of the Talbott-led, Thomas Daley recalls:

At the working level, a proposal for direct American military support for the Indians was considered. The idea was that American military force would create conditions for success for the Indians, thereby making it unnecessary for India to enlarge the conflict. This idea was never put up to the principals (Daley interview, 2016).

The fact that the bureaucracy, albeit at the functional level, even considered direct military action in support of India during a war with Pakistan indicates the level of support for India and the complete shift in the stances of the major US players from their historical alignment towards Pakistan. This transformation of views of the president and his advisers was clearly reflected in the decision process of US foreign policy during the conflict.

*The Decision Process – Consensus on Pakistani Transgression Crystallizes the Shift Towards India*

The decision process was dominated by the president's desire to make peace and prevent the vertical and horizontal escalation of the conflict as the tensions spiraled in the region. Pakistani culpability in initiating the conflict and lying about its involvement greatly influenced US decisionmaking and provided Clinton with an unexpected opportunity to re-align US policy towards India. The US approach was to coerce Pakistan by pressuring the Pakistani leadership, including the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistani Army Chief, Pervez Musharaff, to withdraw his forces. The US policy towards India was to persuade it from widening the conflict by displaying US support and engaging the Indian leadership at the highest levels.

At the end of May 1999 when it was clear that the Pakistanis were lying about the noninvolvement of their regulars in the operations, Clinton spoke to Sharif and told him in no uncertain terms that Pakistan was at fault (Talbot 2004, 159). He also talked to Vajpayee and apprised him of his discussions with the Pakistani leader and counseled for restraint. This engagement of India at the highest level and indication of American concern for India was instrumental in changing Indian attitudes. However, other academics such as Peter Lavoy (2009, 136) argue, that the responses were not immediately shaped due to Clinton's desire to improve relations with India but out of the genuine recognition that Pakistan was at fault and that the US was justified in supporting India. As Riedel reveals:

From the beginning, this was a clear case of Pakistani aggression and violation of the ceasefire and breach of the Line of Control and that we were going to stand with India.... there was a consensus between the White House and the State Department in particular with the South Asia desk that ...India was the party who was being attacked....but this was a pretty fundamental change. America was evenhanded on this case...I don't think at that time in June 1999 people were saying this is an opportunity to get out of the box ... you could argue that in retrospect (Riedel interview, 2015).

The flow of events caused the president to review American policy towards both countries (Pickering interview, 2015; Riedel interview, 2015). He spoke personally to both leaders and in mid-June 1999; he wrote a letter to each in which he pressed for Pakistani withdrawal and Indian restraint. This balanced American position was a great surprise to India and Pakistan as they had expected the opposite response (Riedel interview, 2015; Haqqani interview, 2015; Lavoy 2009, 134). As Riedel recalls “[I] mean the Indians were quite surprised when we made clear our position and the Pakistanis were surprised very much more” (interview, 2015). This balanced approach was the second sign, after Clinton’s earlier pragmatic response to India’s nuclear tests, of a shift in US policy towards India. By clearly recognizing that Pakistan was the aggressor in violation of international norms and supporting India, the president was unambiguously communicating his policy preferences to the decision makers (Talbot 2004, 159).

While the president continued to play an active and critical role in policy formulation and contact with other leaders, his advisers were involved in multiple levels of engagement with both countries (Riedel interview, 2015). Principals such as Albright and Berger were more involved and active, especially in communicating with their counterparts in India and Pakistan (Pickering interview, 2015). He also continued with the task force created earlier to act as a policy communication and implementation vehicle.

The task force previously established to handle the nuclear crisis was re-assigned to support American decisionmaking on Kargil (Riedel interview, 2015; Anderson interview 2015; Gill interview 2015). Pickering as the Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs was deeply involved and notes (interview, 2015) “[w]e met at the White House at the deputy’s committee level, fairly frequently and quite intensively over the days, but often passed information by secure phone when it became necessary to do it.” Also, there was a lower level working group consisting

of representatives from all concerned agencies which met at the State Department presided over by Karl Inderfurth (Gill interview, 2015; Inderfurth interview, 2015; Daley interview, 2016). This group shared inputs from their sources and coordinated actions of each agency. Inderfurth, after that, briefed the deputies and the principals with the synthesized inputs to facilitate decisionmaking. President Clinton, in a departure from his reputation for participating in policy debates, did not involve himself in the extensive discussions. As Pickering notes:

Most of the meetings as I remember the President did not come to meetings very often because partly at that stage he wanted to have people express their views really openly and then see himself how and what way they balance out...and so he made a lot of decisions on the basis of report from Sandy Berger about what had taken place at the meeting and also obviously what Sandy's advice was, but I didn't see big differences of opinion here (Pickering interview, 2015).

The president's most critical role in the crisis manifested when in early June the situation began to deteriorate as Indian preparations to expand the conflict generated nuclear rhetoric from Pakistan. Multiple US officials interviewed including former CIA staffers Lisa Curtis and Polly Nayak, confirmed that the American administration firmly believed its intelligence from multiple sources that both sides had begun the preliminary preparation of nuclear weapons (Curtis interview, 2015; Nayak interview, 2015; Riedel interview, 2015; Daley interview 2015). The president immediately undertook to talk to the Indian Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee and the Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif to reduce tensions. The US also sought international support for peacemaking, particularly from the Chinese who were known to be influential with the Pakistanis (Pickering interview, 2015). However, by mid-June, the Indians made significant military progress and suddenly the Pakistani situation began to look desperate, which heightened nuclear worries (Lavoy, 2009; Malik, 2006).

The president continued to be proactive, sending the CINC CENTCOM, General Anthony to negotiate a withdrawal of Pakistani forces with General Musharraf given the prominence of the

military in Pakistan. Musharaff cleverly deflected the decision to the Prime Minister because he while knew that Indian operational gains were making the Pakistani military situation untenable, he did not want to be responsible for ordering a retreat (Milam interview, 2015; Lavoy 2009, 249). A beleaguered Sharif approached China for support but American diplomacy had worked and China refused support (Lavoy 2009, 250). A desperate Sharif finally spoke to Clinton and invited himself to Washington. Clinton insisted that Sharif should only come if he were prepared to withdraw his forces, thereby setting the agenda for the negotiation (Talbot 2004, 160; Riedel 2002, 7; Lavoy 2009, 251). The president spoke to Vajpayee and apprised him of the proposed negotiation in keeping with his policy of engaging India,

Sharif arrived on July 4, 1999, and Clinton was “heading into what would be the single most important meeting with a foreign leader in his presidency” (Talbot 2004, 162). The president took the lead by laying down the strategy for the engagement, which was to use the intelligence on preparatory nuclear activity by the Pakistani military to “scare the hell out of Sharif.” Clinton also wanted to ensure that the negotiations did not result in Sharif’s ouster from power and as Talbot (2004, 163) emphasizes “keep the Indian audience in mind...when we were finally making headway...and allay their doubts, accumulated over fifty years.”

The president thus had a delicate task of balancing the foreign policy agenda of making peace and not jeopardizing newly made gains made on an issue he felt was personally critical. In the subsequent negotiations, the president displaying the full force of his persuasion and effectively driving his interests put his case to withdraw his troops to Sharif. When Sharif tried to bargain and make the withdrawal conditional on American intervention in Kashmir and Indian agreement for negotiation, Clinton forcefully denied the proposal calling it nuclear blackmail. He also masterfully convinced Sharif that his military was readying nuclear weapons and told him that he

would be responsible for a nuclear disaster. He threatened to announce that Pakistan was responsible for terrorism in the world including Kashmir and that the US would blame Pakistan for the Kargil Crisis (Talbot 2004, 167; Riedel interview, 2015). In between the negotiations during a break, Clinton reported the latest progress to Vajpayee, in keeping with his policy of engaging India. Finally, Sharif agreed to withdraw his troops in return for a ceasefire and Clinton's personal involvement in resolving the Kashmir issue.

The aftermath of the mediation by President Clinton was that he and the US gained the trust of India. Thus Clinton managed to achieve two of his most important foreign policy goals: prevent nuclear conflict and improve relations with India. The Kargil Crisis provided an opportunity for a long overdue reset of American relations towards India which Clinton seized by displaying a high degree of presidential leadership during the crisis and focus on his foreign policy agenda of improving relations with India. The personal interest and involvement of President Clinton built upon the positive relations with India created earlier by his advisor, Talbot, influenced the decisionmaking changed the course of US foreign policy towards India. The case exemplifies the importance of presidential leadership as well as the importance of key advisors in foreign policy change.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the importance of presidents and advisors in foreign policy decisionmaking. In the case of the Kargil Conflict, President Bill Clinton supported by the efforts of his key adviser, Strobe Talbot, dominated the decision process. Presidential predilection for India, a personal rapport established by his key adviser with the Indians and bureaucratic consonance to support India in the Kargil War were highlights of the decision process. The case

highlights how a complex interplay of factors at individual level including individual foreign policy vision, leadership, and involvement of the president and his advisors were instrumental in the realignment of US foreign policy towards India.

### *Structural and Domestic Factors - Creating the Context for Change*

Contextual factors such as the end of the Cold War changed India's position at the system level and created new opportunities and priorities for the US leadership in the foreign policy arena. As an emerging power, India offered President Clinton an opportunity to reform the foreign policy agenda to address global changes such as: increased international linkages, globalization of the world's economy, nuclear instability and terrorism. Most importantly India's strong democracy appealed to the US leadership as they surveyed the ruins of communism and authoritarianism in the underdeveloped world. India also appealed to the president's economic and strategic visions.

The US relationship with Pakistan had deteriorated by the time the nuclear tests took place, making it easier to realign US foreign policy towards India. Given the historical animosity between India and Pakistan, the US could improve its relations with India only when its relationship with Pakistan had deteriorated. In the Clinton era, the perceived reduction in Pakistan's strategic utility after the USSR withdrew from Afghanistan, its links to terrorism and its nuclear proliferation began to change the US views on its long standing partnership with Pakistan. Terrorism was a factor on which the US and India began to find common ground after the bombings of US embassies in East Africa in 1998 while relations with Pakistan had deteriorated. The involvement of the Pakistani Army with Osama Bin Laden and the reluctance of Sharif, no doubt under military duress, to cooperate with the Americans, shook the foundations of the US – Pakistan relationship. Carrying out the nuclear tests despite Clinton's personal appeals, invading Kashmir after



deceptively holding peace talks and brandishing nuclear weapons, were the last straws to break the back of the relationship. While there was a residual impression in all three countries that the US was aligned with Pakistan, the fact was that the US relationship with Pakistan had become hollowed out. The Kargil Conflict crystallized the flux in the triangular relations between the US, India and Pakistan and facilitated a realignment of US policy towards India.

At the domestic level, the Congress became at more interested, and at times a disruptive actor. The scale of economic relations between the two countries, especially in the field of information technology and services, meant that American industry had a significant stake in bilateral ties. The increasing weight of Indian Americans in the economy resulted in the Congress pressing for pro-India policies like the early lifting of sanctions after the nuclear test. The increased people-to-people exchanges and general awareness of India also made a case for supporting a change in US policy towards India. Finally, the steadily growing Indian American lobby began to wield influence in the Congress for India. The firm support in the Congress for better ties with India made it easier for the president to change his approach to India. While structural and domestic level factors favored a change in US policy towards India, it was the personal interest and involvement of the president and his key advisers that were key in provided the critical momentum for foreign policy change.

#### *President, Advisors, and Bureaucracies and Foreign Policy Change*

President Clinton's leadership style, especially his interest in India and his inherent tendency to make peace, was crucial to the outcome of US during the Kargil Conflict. Clinton's vision for deeper engagement with India influenced his approach and decisions both in the aftermath of the nuclear tests and during the Kargil war. His desire to have better relations with

India led him to adopt a softer stance than expected against India after the nuclear tests. He wanted to get over the friction of the tests and improve relations. During the Kargil Conflict, he clearly batted for India even if the Pakistani transgressions made it simple for him. When the Kargil Crisis developed into a nuclear-tinged crisis, it rose on the president's foreign policy agenda. The personal importance of the issues (e.g., India and nuclear weapons to the president) also ensured his involvement. The case of the Kargil Conflict indicates how leaders play an important role when foreign policy change has to be made, especially in a crisis.

The Kargil Conflict is also a case study on the important contributions that key advisers make to the process of foreign policy change. Advisers like Strobe Talbott played a vital role by engaging deeply with Jaswant Singh after the nuclear tests and creating an understanding and a level of trust between the two countries not matched before. This understanding was instrumental in the fashioning and execution of the American approach to the Kargil war leading to an eventual alignment with India. Clinton's advisers counted in the decisionmaking because they had the trust, authority and mandate of the president to act. Clinton had a delegatory style and relied on a few key advisers preparing sound policy and executing it efficiently. Clinton delegated the task of getting India and Pakistan to sign the CTBT to Talbott. While the CTBT was never signed, he created a far more valuable web of strategic relationships between the India and the US strengthened by strands of personal relationships. This network was critical in the fashioning of foreign policy during the Kargil Crisis. The experience also made Talbott more aligned to India, and he provided advice accordingly. The role played by Talbott during the Kargil Conflict highlights the central role of key advisers in the foreign policy decision process.

The importance of bureaucratic consonance was highlighted in the case of the Kargil Conflict. Notwithstanding the long term relations that the US had with Pakistan, the unity across

different bureaucracies in supporting India during the hostilities was striking. While Pakistan was clearly seen as the aggressor, its lies and denials on its incursions across the Line of Control removed any residual sympathy that the bureaucracy, that had been the ideological guardians of the long standing US policy on Pakistan, had left for that country. The fact that the lower level bureaucracy even discussed the employment of US military force in support of India is an indicator of the intensity of anger that the US establishment had developed towards Pakistan. The unanimous agreement amongst the bureaucracy and the main officials to support India in the Kargil War strengthened the president's hand as well facilitated the decisionmaking to realign US policy. It also highlights the influence of the bureaucracy in the foreign policy decision process.

Foreign policy change in the Kargil Conflict occurred when a crisis forced the crystallization of a slowly changing dynamic between the United States, Pakistan, and India. While structural and domestic factors favored a US policy realignment away from Pakistan towards India, Clinton's administration used the crisis to realign the United States with India marking a change in a US policy of the last four decades. This case highlights how crises often force leadership to accelerate foreign policy change.

The case also highlights the role of individuals in foreign policy transformation. Without Clinton's affinity for India and Talbott's positive engagement with Singh, US policy towards India is unlikely to have changed the way it did. Structural and domestic factors had over a period caused many interests of both countries to converge even if many important differences remained. However, it was because of individuals like Clinton and Talbott that when the opportunity emerged in the form of the Kargil Conflict that the change was effected. This validates the hypotheses that presidents and advisors are important actors in the decisionmaking leading to foreign policy change.

Chapter 4 examines the decisionmaking process of President George W. Bush, who was in many ways very different from President Clinton presidency during the US-India nuclear agreement.

## **CHAPTER 4: PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH AND THE NUCLEAR AGREEMENT**

The United States-India Nuclear Agreement signed on July 18, 2005, between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, was a major turning point in US foreign policy towards India. Bush's election foreign policy manifesto, crafted by Secretary Condoleezza Rice, visualized a prominent place for India in a new democratic world order (Kessler 2007, 50). Bush found a democratic, economically and militarily strong India appealing as an important strategic and security partner of the US (Rice 2011, 129). Accordingly, Bush sought to advance bilateral relations much beyond the positive breakthrough achieved by President William J. Clinton after the Kargil Conflict into a strategic partnership.

Bush's ambassador in New Delhi and his adviser came up with the proposal in late 2002 for a full spectrum nuclear agreement with India that meant overlooking its nuclear tests of 1998 that violated international nuclear norms. However, there was strong opposition to this proposal, initially within the bureaucracy, particularly the State Department, due to the wider implications of making an exception to the international nuclear regime as well as due to the wider disagreement over the strategic benefits to the US from such an agreement. After much internal debate, Bush's first term ended with an NSC meeting accepting full civilian nuclear cooperation with India as one of the options for US policy towards India's nuclear program. A small core group of advisers revitalized the proposal for a full spectrum nuclear agreement early in Bush's second term. They convinced the president that the acceptance of India's nuclear program was a platform for achieving his goal of a strategic relationship with India. While Bush was strongly supported in his vision by some of his advisers as well as in India, others especially the non-proliferation

bureaucracy ('P' bureau) in the State Department objected to it strongly. The terms of the agreement were also intensely contested with India and was dramatically finalized only minutes before its announcement on July 18, 2005. This variance among the leadership and bureaucratic infighting between different departments and bureaus with differing agendas characterized the contentious decisionmaking on the issue.

This chapter will evaluate the US decisionmaking process in the making of the nuclear agreement and throw light on US foreign policy change towards India during the Bush presidency. The analysis will focus on individuals including the president and the involved advisers to assess their contributions to the decision process. The first step is to review in detail Bush's leadership in foreign policy by evaluating his foreign policy vision, presidential style, and advisory system. After that, the decisionmaking leading to the nuclear agreement is analyzed to understand the role of the president and his advisors in the process of foreign policy change.

### **Bush's Foreign Policy Leadership – Delegation and Determination**

President George W. Bush's leadership in foreign policy in the US-India Nuclear Agreement was characterized by his determined pursuit of a strong strategic partnership with India even at the expense of compromise on long standing US policies on India and nuclear nonproliferation. Bush's foreign policy doctrine that was characterised by unilateralism and greatly influenced by the traumatic events of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks lent itself ideologically and practically to a deeper relationship with India. This philosophy combined with Bush's cognitive style, especially his limited need for information, empowerment of trusted advisers, and his characteristic determination in achieving his objectives, influenced the decision process on the nuclear agreement.

## **Bush's Foreign Policy Vision – Seeking American Primacy?**

Before the September 11 terror attacks, President Bush gave the impression that he was like his father, a “conventional realist committed to a grand strategy of selective engagement and critical of the open-ended nature of the Clinton doctrine and its indiscriminate use of military force in instances not involving vital national interests” (Owens 2008, 34). Hinting at China, Bush visualized the emergence of a powerful competitor similar to the Soviet Union during the Cold War and advocated military reform to address this threat. Terrorism framed President Bush's foreign policy vision and influenced the approach towards India after the September 11 terrorist attacks. It reaffirmed existing views of American exceptionalism and unilateralism with the proof of existential threats that were viscerally opposed to American values and ‘way of life’ (Dulk and Rozell 2011, 14; Leffler 2004 22; Oliver 2004, 26). Bush also was infused with a preponderant sense that peace and stability required the US to assert its primacy in world politics (Jarvis 2003, 13). The promotion of democracy became more urgent when the sources of terrorism were identified in totalitarian states like Iraq; theocracies like Afghanistan, and monarchies like Saudi Arabia. These beliefs manifested in the Bush Doctrine, that placed American security interests ahead of all other considerations and accordingly, advocated unilateral pre-emption to prevent all perceived threats (National Security Strategy of the US, September 2002). Bush's intent was clear, as he defended his policy of unilateralism in the first presidential debate of Fall 2004:

We've upheld the doctrine that said, if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist. ... In Iraq, we saw a threat, and we realized that after September 11th, we must take threats seriously before they fully materialize. Saddam Hussein now sits in a prison cell; America and the world are safer for it. ... The best way to protect this homeland is to stay on the offense (White House Archives).

The Bush Doctrine consisted of four elements: the importance of domestic factors in determining foreign policy; the willingness for unilateral action; the view that major threats could

be defeated only by strong de-novo policies; and that the juncture after the September 11 terrorist attacks was an opportune moment to transform global politics (Edmonds 2004, 6). Bush was firm and determined in his policy execution regardless of domestic or international opposition once he was clear about what had to be done. This trait was clearly reflected in his presidential style characterized by his willingness to make and stick by difficult decisions. Former White House Press Secretary for Bush, Scott McClellan's mentions, "[h]e is not one to delve deeply into all the possible policy options . . . before making a choice. Rather, he chooses based on his gut and his most deeply held convictions" (McClellan 2006, 5).

The next section will evaluate the decision structure established and the actual decision process in the Bush administration.

### **Bush's Presidential Style and Advisory Process – Gut Feelings, Resolve, and a Narrow but Empowered Decision Circle**

Bush' had a formal 'CEO' presidential style' with a high degree of centralization (Greenstein 2002, 165). Noted scholar Glenn P. Halsted (2008, 78) argues that Bush adopted a style that "attempts to govern by stressing loyalty, tightly controlling the flow of information, and surrounding himself with an 'iron triangle' of aides." Unlike Clinton, Bush was much less detail oriented, restricted his consulting group, and made decisions quickly. Once he made decisions, he stuck by them even when they proved to be suboptimal. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, Bush changed his focus from domestic policy to foreign affairs and also became more involved in policymaking.

Bush was cognitively simple in the sense that he did not seek more information than was essential (Greenstein 2002, 173). Unlike Clinton, he was known to be uninterested in details,



wanted only the key facets of information to make a decision (Johnson, Slater, Allbaugh, PBS interview, 2004). Clay Johnson, a longtime friend of Bush, recalls, “[h]e is not one to review a 200- or 300-page document on some key issue. That is not the best use of the president's time” (PBS Report, 2004). The Anti-Terror Coordinator in the Clinton and Bush administrations, Richard Clarke, reiterated this aspect:

He [Bush] himself says, "I do not do nuance." He is not interested in much discussion about details. He wants to know, "Where are we going, what's the bottom line, what's your recommendation, OK, let's go on." That is fine on some issues. However, on other issues, you really [have] to understand the nuance.... One of the first things we were told was, "Don't write many briefing papers. Don't make the briefing papers very long, because this president is not a reader.... To be told, "You know, he only really likes to get his information from a handful of people, and he likes to get it orally." That disturbed us, because we thought, "There's so much information. Some of this is subtle and nuanced. He really needs to be reading a lot of briefing books." To be told, "Well, he's not a reader, and he doesn't like to get briefing books," was a little disturbing...” (PBS Report, 2004).

Bush relied only on a small group of advisers and confidantes who gave him information at times to the detriment of decisionmaking unlike Clinton, who sought information from a wide variety of sources, (Greenstein 2002). As Clarke explains, “He does not reach out, typically, for many experts. He has a very narrow, regulated, highly regimented set of channels to get advice. He likes oral briefings, and he likes them from the national security adviser, Chief of Staff of the White House Andy Card, [and] the vice president. He is not into big meetings, and he is not into big briefing books” (PBS Report, 2004).

Powerful actors, especially the Vice President and Secretary of Defense dominated Bush’s foreign policy advisory system in the absence of a wider consultative process in the first term. Bush maintained the formal NSC structure on paper, but in action supplemented it with informal consultations with his trusted advisers (Rosati 2007, 117). Many of his advisers were ‘Vulcans’, a foreign policy advisory team put together in 1998 for his election campaign (Mann 2004, 23). They all went on to gain prominent positions in President Bush’s advisory circle in the first presidency.

They included figures like Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, National Security Adviser Stephen Headley, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage (Mann, 2004). These advisors were influential, had the ear of the president and knew each other well, even if they did not always agree.

While Bush's formal advisory structure was similar to Clinton in terms of a three-tier structure and for the NSA to play the role of an honest broker, a notable difference was the influence of the Vice President, who created a 'mini NSC' in his office and tried hard to chair the Principals Committee. When that failed, he included himself in it regardless (Rosati 2007, 121). Similarly, the Secretary of Defense also operated outside the formal NSC system on foreign policy issues and often undertook independent foreign policy initiatives (Rosati 2007, 117). The principal advisers at the time of the nuclear agreement were Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and National Security Advisers Condoleezza Rice (first term) replaced by Stephen Hadley. Secretary of State of Colin Powell was not part of the Bush's inner circle and accordingly was replaced by Rice in the second term.

President Bush's NSC process was not very effective due to three important factors. First, were the differences in ideology between the two groups with Rumsfeld and Cheney on one side, and Powell (and often Rice) on the other (Pfiffner, 2008) that exacerbated bureaucratic conflict. The first favored a proactive, assertive American role abroad while Powell was more pragmatic thereby setting the stage for policy conflict on many issues including Iraq, North Korea, and China amongst others (Daalder and Lindsay, 2003). This schism between the key advisers affected the choice of policy options as well as the behaviors of their respective organizations.

The rift percolated down to the mid and lower level officials. For example, Paul Wolfowitz, who was considered a Neoconservative and who argued for the forceful promotion of democracy and United States national interest, through all means including military, clashed with Richard Armitage (Powell's Deputy Secretary of State), who was a more traditional conservative (Pfiffner 2008, 49). Second, Rice was not very effective as a National Security Adviser on many issues as she emphasized her role as the president's confidante rather than an honest broker who mediated these differences, or as an influential advisor in her own right. This tendency led to poor management of the interagency process (Kessler and Ricks, 2007; Daalder and Dessler, 2009; Packer, 2005). Third, as shown, the president's reliance on informal discussions with his 'war cabinet' over the formal NSC process lead to the dilution of its effectiveness and relevance. The anomalies in structure and powerful advisers had an effect on the process of decisionmaking. Along with the president's limited need for information, delegatory style, and tendency to rely on a small closed circle, it narrowed the decision circle considerably.

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, Bush's advisory process became less structured and more ad-hoc with informal meetings with confidantes being the norm rather than formal NSC meetings (Milbank and Graham 2001). The president became more involved in foreign policy decisionmaking as a "war president" (Pfiffner 2008, 43). Bush adopted a harder line and became more closed in his thinking as he became more engaged and hands on (Rosati, 2007, 118). James Pfiffner (2008, 26) argues that he kept tight control of information and disregarded many experts who disagreed with his policies. The first feature was exemplified when the Bush administration decided to suspend the Geneva Conventions for the US invasion of Iraq. Secretary of State Powell had strong objections to this policy considering the international ramifications of flouting an important international treaty and its effects on US troops (as illustrated by the Abu Ghraib torture

case). However, the decision was taken behind Powell's back by Cheney and Rumsfeld, and he was informed only after the announcement (Pfiffner 2008; 11; DeYoung, 2006). Bush often made policy decisions that went against the advice of the traditional bureaucracy and expert advisers. This disregard of professionals and specialists was on display when he ignored concerned voices from the military, the intelligence, and the foreign policy establishment about the decision to invade Iraq (Gordon, 2008; Pfiffner 2008, 6).

This relatively unstructured process was noted by many. John DiIulio, who managed faith-based initiatives in the first Bush presidency, said, “[t]here is no precedent in any modern White House for what is going on in this one: a complete lack of a policy apparatus” (Suskind 2004, 85). Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill reinforced the view, especially on domestic policy. He argued “[i]t was a broken process . . . or rather no process at all; there seemed to be no apparatus to assess policy and deliberate effectively, to create coherent governance” (Suskind 2004, 97). The problem was that Bush did not believe in very careful consultation and discussion. Jack Goldsmith, a Bush appointee as director of the Office of Legal Counsel characterized the Bush administration’s “concept of power” as entailing “minimal deliberation, unilateral action, and legalistic defense” (Pfiffner, 2008). The decisionmaking also had characteristics of groupthink since Bush also kept the decisionmaking group small, reducing his exposure to alternate views and expert opinions. Such was the case with Iraq” (McClellan 2008, 127).

Paul Pillar, National Intelligence Director for the Near East and South Asia from 2001 to 2005, mentions, “[t]he absence of any identifiable process for making the decision to go to war – at least no process visible at the time. . . There was no meeting, no policy options paper, no showdown in the Situation Room when the wisdom of going to war was debated or the decision to do so made” (Pillar 2007, 55).

The CIA Director George Tenet concurs: “There was never a serious debate that I know of within the administration about the imminence of the Iraqi threat,” or even a “significant discussion” about options for continuing to contain Iraq (Shane and Mazzetti 2007, 8).

In the second administration, the process became far more streamlined after Rumsfeld was replaced midway, Cheney lost sway, and Rice gained influence over both State and the NSC. President Bush’s acquisition of foreign policy experience seemed to make him more assertive adding to the changed the dynamics of policymaking (Rosati 2007, 121; Mazzetti, 2007). Stephen Dyson (2010) also portrays Bush as increasingly closed cognitively, stubborn, and willing to take risks in foreign policy. For example, Bush’s unpopular decision to undertake ‘the surge’ (an augmentation of US troops in Iraq in 2007 to quell the wave of Sunni unrest in the Anbar province) was one such decision. Bush took this decision in opposition to nearly all his advisors, the bureaucracy, the military and the Congress (Pfiffner 2008, 6).

Thus the picture that emerges is of a president who was clear as to what he wanted regarding foreign policy goals but made up his mind with limited information, and close consultation. He ignored or sidelined dissent when he was determined to get his way. Bush’s advisory arrangements were much more closed than his predecessors. He relied on close confidants rather than greater fertilization of ideas from a wider circle. A president whose style placed American primacy above international conventions pushed chosen policies with determination, was unafraid of making radical changes, had a narrow circle of advisers and employed a system which did not consult widely, turned out to be the agreement for entering into a nuclear agreement with India.

## **Case Study: Decisionmaking During the US-India Nuclear Agreement – Empowered and Entrepreneurial Advisers Overcome Bureaucratic Opposition**

The case of the US-India nuclear agreement exemplifies how key empowered advisers can change foreign policy utilizing the freedom of action and authority vested in them by the president. In this case, President Bush's ambassador in New Delhi, Robert Blackwill, and his adviser Ashley Tellis, came up with a revolutionary proposal to use the nuclear issue, which traditionally had been a major obstacle in bilateral ties, as a means to transform relations with India. The proposal caused considerable opposition and infighting amongst the different bureaucracies and agencies in the US administration. Thereafter another empowered adviser, the Secretary of State, took ownership of the issue and overcame opposition from the established bureaucracy through persuasion and persistence to get the agreement. Bush's strong personal desire to forge a strategic partnership with India, a view that was shared by most of the leadership, permitted the Secretary of State to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and implement change in policy. The case also highlights the nature of bureaucratic infighting among principal advisors and their staffs and how this shaped policy outcome.

The critical decisionmaking on the nuclear agreement took place in the period between 2001 and 2005 when US policy evolved through different stages from a strict nonproliferation posture to one that made an exception for India from the provisions of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The United States had applied sanctions against India after its nuclear test in 1998 as India was not permitted nuclear weapons under the NPT. These sanctions added to the ones in effect since India's first nuclear test in 1974, as well as rules of the NPT and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), prevented the US from entering into a deeper strategic engagement with India in many spheres. In the first stage, between 2001 and 2002, the US embassy in New Delhi, after

extensive engagement with the Indians, came up with a proposal (hereafter referred to as the Embassy Proposal) for the US to enter into a full spectrum nuclear agreement with India after obtaining an exception for India from the international nuclear regime. The Embassy Proposal conceived the nuclear engagement as a vehicle of transformation for US-India ties. In the second stage from 2003 to 2004, the proposal was evaluated through the interagency process that was marked by intense bureaucratic disputes. Due to these disputes and for other reasons we shall see, the Embassy Proposal was not adopted in President Bush's first term. However, it was accepted as a possible option, that itself marked the beginning of a change in US nonproliferation policy. In the third stage, from January 2005 to July 2005, President Bush made the critical decision to enter into a nuclear agreement with India based on the Embassy Proposal after a change in US policy was formally recommended by Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. After further negotiations, the agreement was signed in July 2005. Each stage of the decision process was characterized by differences of opinions, bureaucratic infighting, and maneuvers that affected the evolution of the agreement.

The decisionmaking in each stage is explained by laying out the notable events, describing the role of prominent individuals, factions, and their stances, and finally analyzing the decision process in each stage.

### **Tracing the Process – Stage I (2001 To 2002): Bureaucratic Entrepreneurship by The Embassy**

In this period, the team at the US embassy engaged extensively with the Indian leadership, and gained a deep understanding of Indian strategic compulsions. This led to the formulation of the groundbreaking Embassy Proposal for full spectrum civilian nuclear cooperation between the

US and India as a means to create a deeper strategic partnership. When Bush entered the office, India reached out to the new administration. In May 2001 Bush announced his controversial new strategic initiative, the National Missile Defense Program, that proposed to withdraw the US from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense Treaty (that promoted nuclear stability between the US and Russia). India was only one of the two countries, including its NATO allies, to support the US. (Blackwill interview, 2016; Tellis interview, 2016). Intrigued by this unexpected show of support, Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage visited India and found the Indians ready for deeper engagement.

The embassy under Blackwill followed up and engaged the Indians extensively, leading to an Indian request in October 2001 for nuclear fuel and removal of sanctions applied after the nuclear tests in 1998. While the fuel was refused, sanctions were removed in February 2002 and a High Technology Control Group (HTCG) was established to enable supply of strategic dual-use items to India within the limits of the sanctions (Mistry 2014, 39; Blackwill interview 2016). Track II engagement was initiated by the US and India, through the Aspen Group, to support the enhancement of ties, understand the areas of cooperation and identify the points of difference (Blackwill interview, 2016).

After extensive interaction with the Indians as well as the State Department, Blackwill and Tellis realized that the leadership in the State Department was unwilling to alter its stance on reducing sanctions on Indian nuclear and space programs and this policy was preventing the deepening of bilateral ties. The State Department's rigid attitude was evident when Powell during a visit to India turned down supply of nuclear fuel even after India made a major departure from its nuclear policy by offering to placing one or two nuclear reactors under international safeguards in return (Tellis interview, 2016).



The embassy continued to promote deeper ties through supporting increasing the scope and intensity of defense and technology cooperation. It also prepared a dual track approach to deepen strategic ties. While the first track proposed an incremental approach to improve bilateral ties, the second approach, the Embassy Proposal, envisaged a radical shift in US policy to improve ties with India. The latter proposal was presented in December 2002 to the Deputy National Security Adviser during his visit to New Delhi and he further introduced it to the leadership in Washington DC. This marked the first substantive step towards the US-India Nuclear Agreement of 2005.

#### *Key Players and Their Stances – An Activist Embassy versus the Conservative State Department*

The bureaucracy had varying positions on the nuclear agreement depending on ideological considerations, bureaucratic positions, interpersonal relations, and the stand of the leadership (Tellis interview, 2016; Markey interview, 2016). The differences over their ideological alignments among the senior advisers found reflection in their position on closer relations with India and the nuclear agreement. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Rice all favored closer ties with India (Tellis interview, 2016). While Bush and Rice approached the issue from the larger perspective seeing India as a potentially important strategic partner, Rumsfeld viewed India more as a balancer against China (Tellis interview, 2016). Powell and Armitage, on the other hand, went along with the entrenched views of the State Department, including the Undersecretary for South Asia, Christina Rocca, that discouraged any unilateral move for a nuclear agreement and suggested strictly reciprocal measures (Markey interview, 2016; Pant, 2009; Mistry 2014, 39).

The US ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill and his advisor, Ashley Tellis, were the key players at this early stage in the evolution of the agreement. Blackwill was a close friend of Bush and being one of the Vulcans, was part of his inner circle (Mann 2004, 24). Bush allotted critical

appointments to the Vulcans in the new administration, for example, Rice became the National Security Adviser, and Wolfowitz went as the Deputy Secretary of Defense. Blackwill was the only Vulcan nominated as an ambassador (Mann 2004, 252; Talbott 2004, 253). Blackwill was initially disappointed with his appointment but Bush assured him that he had been sent as ambassador to India as the president had “big things in mind for India” (Markey interview 2016; Boggs interview, 2016). Blackwill also had considerable influence with Rice as she had worked under him when Blackwill had hired Rice and Philip D. Zelikow (later Counsellor in the State Department) to work with him on the National Security Council of the George H.W. Bush administration in 1989 (Mann 2004, 204; Kessler 2007, 51). Thus, Blackwill had significant influence and access to the highest decisionmaking circles, which included the president and the national security adviser, making him a genuinely empowered and influential advisor capable of creating change in US-India relations.

Blackwill, while not an India hand, had foreign policy experience from his prior service in the State Department as well as in academia at Harvard. He came to India in July 2001 with a mind free from preconceptions and the baggage of past confrontation fostered by the ‘India hands.’ He had an agenda to transform relations and was unafraid to push hard for what he saw as his mission from the president. He believed that he “reported only to the White House.” And refused to implement policy directions from the State Department. This soon led him to have intense differences with the State Department, especially with Armitage, and with the South Asia Bureau. As Blackwill himself recounts:

During the first years of the Bush presidency, I vividly recall receiving routine instructions from the State Department which contained all the counterproductive language of the Clinton administration’s approach to India’s nuclear program.... These nagging nannies were alive and well in the labyrinth of the State Department. I, of course, did not implement those instructions. It took me many months and calls to finally cut the head of this snake back home” (Blackwill interview, 2016; Kessler 2007, 51).

As Ashley Tellis, his chief adviser, who accompanied him to New Delhi, recalls, “[I] was dealing with State as Rocca [Christina Rocca, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia] was not [on] speaking terms with Blackwill... in part because she was an acolyte of Richard Armitage” (Tellis interview, 2016). Political Counselor at the US Embassy in 2001, Robert Boggs confirms this, “Armitage disliked Blackwill intensely...hence, any proposals from him were not considered favorably” (Boggs interview, 2016). Thus, Blackwill was a proactive and influential ambassador who had the motivation, drive, and authority to change foreign policy. He knew what he wanted and was unafraid to pursue his goals even if it antagonized the leadership in State Department since he had direct access to the president and the NSA.

Ashley Tellis, an Indian-American and an accomplished expert in the US-India relations, was an essential supporting figure who actually implemented Blackwill’s policies. Boggs terms him as, “[A] surrogate for Blackwill whose social skills were, to put it mildly, lacking. He was in many ways the pointsman in engaging the Indian bureaucracy, especially the National Security Adviser in New Delhi, as well as with the State Department” (Boggs interview, 2016). Boggs further reveals, “[A]shley had extraordinary access to the Indian National Security Adviser as well as in Washington and with his expertise on the subject, Ashley became the chief ideologue for the nuclear agreement.” He was able to translate Bush’s vision and Blackwill’s ambition into a coherent policy instrument that laid the foundation of the policy that was finally adopted.

There was little love lost between the two factions at the embassy as Boggs, who represented the traditional ‘India hands’ opined on Blackwill’s initiatives to change relations with India:

Blackwill’s approach was not based on strategic vision, but on personal ambition and a partisan agenda...he had told Bush and Rice that he would ‘deliver India’ as part of Bush’s [presidential] legacy...He imagined himself as a foreign policy visionary...he told me several times that he had come to “transform US – India relations and take it to levels never

reached before” .... He considered himself a historical figure who, based on his close association with senior BJP [India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party] leaders and by transforming relations.... would have a long tenure in India. In fact, he had a highly cerebral and theoretical approach .... with no understanding for India or empathy.... very unlike [Richard] Celeste, the previous ambassador, who was an expert on India and ran the embassy very well. He [Blackwill], however, had close links to the White House and the NSC and was influential... (Boggs interview, 2016).

Neither was Boggs, South Asia veteran, very optimistic about the proposal for the nuclear agreement. He represented the views of many traditionalists in the regional South Asia Bureau:

It was a fallacy that India would not negotiate without the removal of sanctions...we were already cooperating on many issues.... It was a highly simplistic and misplaced view which was prevalent among in the administration that by giving India a nuclear agreement, it would suddenly be terribly grateful and align strategically with the US...it was a bad agreement for us, and we should not have done it... moreover, that is the way many people in Washington felt... (Boggs interview, 2016).

The views and the stances of various actors played an important part in the decisionmaking process that was marked by Blackwill’s drive to push the agenda for change through the Embassy Proposal. The next section explains the evolution of this proposal in the First Stage.

### *The Decision Process – The Embassy Leads the Way*

The salient feature of the US decision process in this stage was characterized by the single minded drive by Robert Blackwill and his team to elevate the US-India relations to a new level much against the opposition of the State Department. The position of the State Department was made clear by the Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage when was asked by the Indian press at the end of his visit to New Delhi in May 2001 about lifting sanctions and India’s nuclear program. He stuck rigidly to the stated US position that sanctions would be lifted only if India gave up its nuclear weapons program (Press Conference, State Department, 20 May 2001).

After Armitage’s engagement with the Indians in May 2001, Robert Blackwill and Ashley Tellis pursued their agenda to transform US-India relations by systematically undertaking several

measures to change the nature and scope of the relationship. First, Blackwill promulgated his vision for the relationship including the nuclear issue. In a speech to the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) in September 2001, he announced that the US “seeks an unprecedented partnership with India.” He went on to outline his idea that was a full partnership and promised not to “harangue India about its nuclear program” (Blackwill interview, 2016; Tellis interview, 2016). Tellis began to shape US policy on the nuclear issue when he published in a RAND report in late 2001 titled “India's Emerging Nuclear Posture between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal.” This report explained and justified India’s rationale for its nuclear weapons program and was also a message to the Indians that a fresh look at the nuclear issue was possible (Tellis interview, 2016).

Second, Blackwill and Tellis engaged the Indian deeply to understand their strategic motivations and compulsions. They realized that the Indians were amenable to deeper cooperation but were very keen for transfer of high technology and the lifting of sanctions on India’s nuclear and space programs. As a result of this engagement in October 2001, Brajesh Mishra, the Indian National Security Adviser approached the embassy with an ambitious proposal that included the lifting of sanctions and the supply of critical fuel to India’s largest nuclear power plant at Tarapore (Tellis interview, 2016). Blackwill strongly supported this request and proposed changes in the US policy towards India’s nuclear program based on this interaction, but Secretary of State, Colin Powell turned it down despite a major campaign by the embassy (Mistry 2014, 39; Kessler 2007, 51). It became apparent to the duo at the embassy that sanctions stood in the way of major progress with India (Tellis interview, 2016). This episode characterizes the vagaries in the policy making as different advisers to the president, each with their own agendas and beliefs sought to influence the decision process.

Third, based on their engagement with the Indians, the embassy team then came up with a three-pronged strategy to accelerate progress on the expansion of ties: remove sanctions; increase technical and military cooperation, and establish a strategic engagement with India.

Accordingly, the Under Secretary for Export Control in the Commerce Department, Kenneth Foster, was invited to New Delhi by Blackwill, briefed on the adverse impact of sanctions on relations with India and the need to lift them. His persuasion worked and in early 2002, sanctions on 148 out of 152 items were removed (Blackwill interview, 2016; Tellis interview, 2016). To enhance technology exchange, the High Technology Control Group (HTCG) was established by late 2002 after several meetings between the Indian NSA, Mishra, Rice and Headley, based on the efforts of Blackwill and Tellis (Mistry 2014, 39; Tellis interview 2016).

To establish a foundation for a wider engagement between the two countries, Blackwill and Tellis set out to familiarize important actors in the US about India. One step was an initiative by the embassy and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) to get the Aspen Institute to introduce the US – India Strategic Dialogue with meetings in October 2001, January 2002 and August 2002 (Blackwill interview, 2016). This Track II diplomacy involved in the first session, doyens of US foreign policy such as Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft, Joseph Nye and influential Indian personalities such as the industrialist Ratan Tata, and Naresh Chandra, the past Indian ambassador to the US. The interaction aimed at getting to know each other's compulsions and goals better as well as spread the case for improved relations in both countries (Aspen Strategy Group Report, 2016). Blackwill also pushed India's case by getting relevant officials to India. As *The Hindu* reported “[i]n Blackwill's tenure as ambassador almost 100 members of the Cabinet and senior officials have visited India; [saw] the lifting of economic sanctions and at least six training exercises [were held] between the military forces of India and the U.S.” (April 23, 2003).

This initiative is indicative of the influence and power that an adviser who was close to the president, such as Blackwill, could wield in the conduct of foreign policy.

However, despite these tremendous efforts for deeper engagement by Blackwill, there was little change in the official stance on the nuclear issue. This was evident from Powell's rigid refusals to supply fuel to the Indian reactor at Tarapore in exchange for India permitting inspections. India expected some reciprocity from the US for this major change in its stance, however, as Tellis recounts, "[n]othing more was heard from the State Department or Powell on the issue." (Tellis interview, 2016). The bureaucratic resistance from the bureaucracy opposed to the nuclear agreement, mainly the 'P' Bureau, was very strong.

Blackwill did not allow this setback to affect his larger campaign to improve US-India ties. This key adviser's determination to implement the president's vision remained undiminished as he prepared a more flexible strategy adopting a twin-track approach.

One track, referred to hereafter the Incremental Approach sought to continue to improve the relationship through incremental steps using the HTCG and the Next Step in Strategic Partnership (NSSP). This process, in summary, involved India gradually implementing stricter nuclear safeguards in return for the US reciprocally permitting nuclear commerce and inclusion in the international nuclear order. It was hoped that this would gradually lead to the improvement of bilateral ties. The Incremental Approach matched the cautious, calibrated policy advocated by the Nonproliferation and South Asian Bureaus in the State Department.

The second track, conceived by Blackwill and Tellis, was through the Embassy Proposal that aimed to "[b]reach the ironclad policy of the past thirty years that the US would not have anything to do with India's nuclear program" (Tellis interview, 2016). This was a major transformative idea that sought to employ full spectrum US-India civil nuclear cooperation as a

means to establish a strategic relationship. The Embassy Proposal implied American acceptance of India's status as a nuclear power outside the NPT; forgave it for its nuclear tests and undercut longstanding US nonproliferation policy. Blackwill and Tellis hoped to push the proposal through "friendly channels (NSC and DOD)" (Tellis interview, 2016). Blackwill seized the opportunity to push his agenda to the leadership in Washington when Steve Hadley, the Deputy National Security Adviser visited New Delhi in December 2002. Based on Blackwill's instructions, Tellis presented the Embassy Proposal to Hadley. The proposal intrigued Hadley and as Tellis (interview, 2016) recalls "he signed off on a telegram to Washington on the proposal that then started the interagency process of evaluation for the next two years." Thus by the time Blackwill and Tellis left the embassy in mid-2003 to move to the NSC in Washington, they had managed to introduce the concept of accepting India's nuclear program and full civil nuclear cooperation with India, into the decisionmaking circle. Their success in influencing the discourse on India's nuclear program exemplifies the influence that empowered advisers have over the process of foreign policy change through the adoption of their ideas.

The next section covers the period when the Embassy Proposal was evaluated through the interagency process that lasted until the end of Bush's first term.

### **Tracing the Process - 2003 to 2004: Bureaucratic Infighting in Washington**

This period saw intense debate within the US government on the Embassy Proposal and the gradual realization that the incremental steps of the HTCG and the NSSP would not lead to a breakthrough. Towards the end, the US accepted the Embassy Proposal as one of the six viable policy options towards India's nuclear program.



### *Salient Events*

The president was briefed on the Embassy Proposal for full spectrum nuclear cooperation in early 2003, and thereafter the proposal was evaluated through the interagency process (Tellis interview, 2016). This led to intense bureaucratic infighting and debate. At the same time the Incremental Approach did not make the expected progress since the HTCG, which was operational in the period, was hindered by bureaucratic friction (Mistry 2014, 39; Tellis interview, 2016). The NSSP that was established in January 2004, however, led to the resolution of many contentious ties and created greater sympathy for India in the administration. In September 2004, an NSC meeting was held that formalized the various options for US nuclear policy towards India, including one based on the Embassy Proposal. The stage for a transformative policy change had been established despite further progress being halted by elections in both countries at the end of 2004. The period witnessed different lobbies pushing their respective agendas, as discussed in the next section.

### *Key Players and Their Stances – Bureaucratic Infighting and Obstruction*

The interagency process saw the politics of the different proposal anti-proposal factions, play out. The main differences were within the bureaus of the State Department itself as the other departments were generally for the agreement.

As Ashley Tellis and Daniel Markey (interviews, 2016) explain, the State Department was divided into three groups on the issue of nuclear cooperation with India. The Nonproliferation Bureau also known as the ‘P’ Bureau, was the most vigorous opponent of any concession to India. It considered that any nuclear exception made for India would weaken the overall international nonproliferation regime and contravene long-standing US policy. This position was firmly held

when John Bolton was the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs, and John Wolf was the Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation. Bolton was a strong personality and was known to be firm and stubborn in his views (Tellis interview, 2016). He was considered an obstructionist in the interagency process, who often opposed even the president's interests (Washington Post, June 20, 2005). He was the token 'neocon' in Powell's department and did not support him, often siding in turf battles with his hardline associates like Rumsfeld and Cheney (Rice 2011, 158). However, on the issue of a waiver for India's nuclear program, Bolton supported Powell's views and was a committed opponent, stymying the move for a broader relationship through a relaxation of US nonproliferation policies.

The South Asia Bureau under Christina Rocca was tepid in its support for the agreement for many reasons. First, many members of the Bureau, the traditional 'India hands' did not support the agreement because they were intellectually opposed to it for strategic reasons based on the baggage of the past (Tellis interview 2016; Boggs interview 2016). They did not believe that India deserved the benefits of the agreement nor would it automatically translate into strategic gains for the US (Boggs interview, 2016). Second, whenever a discussion on the issue did take place, the South Asia Bureau also did not have the technical expertise to counter the technical and legal arguments of the Nonproliferation Bureau (Markey interview 2016). Finally, there was a clash of personalities since Blackwill was not on speaking terms with Rocca, who was close to Armitage, whom himself detested Blackwill (Tellis interview, 2016). Some also saw her as being pro-Pakistan and therefore not for an agreement that would strengthen India (Tellis interview, 2016).

The strongest proponent within the State Department initially was Richard Haass, who headed the Director of Policy Planning Staff till 2003. He firmly believed in the case for a strategic

friendship with India as well. He repeatedly fought the case for the nuclear agreement with the ‘P’ bureau till he left in 2003 (Markey interview, 2016 and Tellis interview, 2016).

Ultimately, however, all decisions landed at Powell’s desk, and he chose to side with the ‘P’ Bureau that negated any major concession to India on its nuclear program every time (Markey interview, 2016). Powell supported an incremental approach stating, “[w]e also have to protect certain red lines that we have with respect to proliferation” (Kessler 2007, 51). However, as Ashley Tellis explains:

It was not that Powell was personally against the agreement... indeed, he used to say “at some stage we will have to do it.” Powell had bigger and more immediate priorities ... Iraq, Afghanistan and he was not willing to antagonize China at this stage. Moreover, he was very close to Armitage, who was dead against the agreement... he [Armitage] felt it was a mad idea, not in the least because it had come from Blackwill... he was intellectually opposed to it (Tellis interview, 2016).

Both Powell and Armitage were possibly more sensitive to the implications of altering the nuclear regime in the region because both had been closely involved in the mediation between India and Pakistan during the Twin Peaks Conflict (attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001). Thus the leadership of the State Department opposed any major change in US policy towards India’s nuclear program due to ideological grounds as well as personality clashes.

Given the scope of relations with India, other departments also had their positions on the agreement. The Defense Department under Rumsfeld was definitely for the agreement as it sought to build a deeper defense relationship with India. While the Pentagon usually aligned with the nonproliferation lobby keeping Iran and North Korea in mind, they were for an agreement with India, with an eye on China (Tellis interview, 2016; Kessler 2007, 57). However, as Tellis mentions, “[E]ven while Rumsfeld was for the deal, the issue was a major foreign policy decision to be undertaken by the State Department and not his account.” The Commerce Department

supported the agreement from the viewpoint of sales of nuclear reactors but was unwilling to support any change in export controls without a major policy change (Tellis interview, 2016).

The National Security Council staff was supportive of the nuclear agreement. Both Rice and Hadley were close to Blackwill and hence listened to his proposals and supported his ideas. In fact, Counselor to the Secretary of State Philip D. Zelikow, who had helped Rice prepare the National Security Strategy of 2002 (Kessler 2007, 51), highlighted the scope for a broader partnership and a more accommodating US approach towards India's nuclear program:

Differences remain, including over the development of India's nuclear and missile programs, and the pace of economic reforms. But while in the past these concerns may have dominated our thinking about India, today we start with a view of India as a growing world power with which we have common strategic interests (National Security Strategy of US 2002).

However, the NSC was not a line department, and Rice was the President's confidante rather than a driver of foreign policy. Rice could not push the issue beyond a point when Powell was against it in Bush's first term (Tellis interview, 2016).

Thus, the key decisionmaking actors, from the principals' level to the Washington bureaucracies to the embassy at New Delhi, were divided over entering into a strategic relationship with India while compromising on nuclear nonproliferation. The next section discusses how this tension and conflict played out in the decisionmaking process.

### *The Decision Process – Bureaucratic Stymying of the Incremental Approach and Infighting over the Embassy Proposal*

Bureaucratic resistance to both, the incremental and the transformative Embassy Proposal marked the period from 2003 to the end of Bush's first term in December 2004. The decision process in this period reveals the complex interplay within the leadership and the power of

interested bureaucratic factions in protecting their interests. While the president was interested in pushing his agenda, the opposition from one of his principal advisers, among other reasons, prevented him from achieving his goal in his first term. However, the engagement between the two countries as well as internal debate eventually helped crystallize US policy that aided decisionmaking in the next stage.

Bureaucratic resistance from the State Department influenced the decision process on both the approaches in several ways. First, it affected the success of the Incremental Approach that initially involved the implementation of the High Technology Coordination Group and later the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership. Lower level officials of the nonproliferation bureaucracy identified the benchmarks and negotiated with the Indians in conjunction with the South Asia desk bureaucrats (Mistry 2014, 41). However, since both Powell and Armitage, were not overly inclined towards a closer nuclear relationship with India, the officials went by the strictest interpretation of rules (Markey interview, 2016). Only limited progress was made leading the Indian National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra to complain to Rice and Bush that bureaucratic reluctance was stymying the scope and pace of cooperation and that the policy needed to be driven top down so that the lower bureaucracy did not impede the progress (Mistry 2014, 40). It also did not help that India had taken two years to enact an export control bill that still failed to meet its nonproliferation commitments fully due domestic political opposition (Kessler 2007,52).

Second, the Embassy Proposal, which essentially called for the US to review its nonproliferation policy of the past thirty years, became mired in the interagency process. The lack of enthusiasm from the parent South Asia Bureau under Rocca as well as the strong opposition from the 'P' Bureau and the higher leadership in the State Department meant that it made slow progress. An example of this was when India completed passing its legislation on Weapons of

Mass Destruction, the advocates of the agreement within the administration were for the ending of the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership and movement to the nuclear agreement. However, the traditionalists led by Rocca and Armitage felt that the US had already shown great flexibility and therefore wanted further concessions to be based on the step-by-step progress as laid down in the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership. They along with the nonproliferation lobby felt that India should be asked to adhere to the full safeguards on nuclear weaponisation as enshrined in multiple conventions and treaties. This included complying with the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which laid down conventions on missile technology; the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which controlled trade in fissile material as well as the Australia Group, which controlled the shipment of chemical and biological weapon agents. It also meant complying with the Waessenar Arrangement, which controlled trade in arms and dual-use technology. Finally, it involved adherence to the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which aimed to stop the trade and trafficking of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, and related materials to and from states and non-state actors. These conventions, in sum, formed the bedrock of the highly restrictive global nonproliferation regime of the past four decades. India would have never agreed to such a binding and near impossible set of conditions. This exemplified the bureaucratic tactics used to stymie any wakening of the position of the State Department against the proponents of enhanced cooperation with India such as Bush, Rice, Blackwill and Haas.

The proponents of closer cooperation, including the president himself, did their best to remove or reduce bureaucratic obstacles whenever possible. For example, in the case of additional conditions for India to comply for a nuclear agreement as mentioned in the previous paragraph, Bush and Rice felt that asking India to adhere to these regulations, some of which it had opposed on ideological grounds, would take too long if at all India ever agreed to comply with them. They,

therefore, overruled it by accepting that India could meet its Next Steps in Strategic Partnership requirements through the MTCR and the NSG requirements (Mistry 2014, 43). This highlights the role of the president in involving himself in pursuing the goals of personal importance such as President Bush had of building a strategic relationship with India.

Gradually the engagement between the two countries intensified through the HTCG, the NSSP as well as convergence on terrorism and even to a degree on Iraq created understanding and amity.<sup>3</sup> This served to reduce the bureaucratic resistance and influenced the decisionmaking leadership to view the issue of nuclear relations with India more favorably.

The path forward seemed the incremental approach that depended on India and the US completing the NSSP. However, the progress on the NSSP had a positive impact on the Embassy Proposal as decisionmakers, such as President Bush and NSA Rice as well as much of the bureaucracy, began to view nuclear cooperation with India in a more positive light (Tellis interview, 2016). These actions progressively made it easier for the US to consider a nuclear agreement for several reasons. First, the High Technology Coordination Group and Next Steps in Strategic Partnership process made the Indian and American leadership less suspicious of each other's intentions and helped develop greater understanding. Second, the Indians undertook actions to strengthen their nonproliferation regimes by agreeing to consider new proliferation-resistant reactors and introducing the WMD export control bill in May 2005. This progress was effectively used by the advocates of the agreement to convince the skeptics that India was indeed committed to nonproliferation reducing bureaucratic opposition. Third, additional US concerns over the

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<sup>3</sup> Ashley Tellis reveals (Interview, 2016) that another issue that arose in 2003 was a proposal by the US for an Indian division to participate in the American invasion of Iraq. India's consideration of the proposal raised expectations in Washington that an agreement on nuclear issues may have been possible as quid pro quo. However, when the Indian government turned the proposal down later in the year, the reciprocal agreement for nuclear agreement lost some momentum in late 2003.

MTCR and NSG were resolved to the leadership's satisfaction. Both countries deemed by 2005 that the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership had been successfully concluded and that the US could permit full civilian nuclear cooperation with India, even if not exactly as laid down in the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership. Fourth, Indian actions helped the strategic leadership to overrule the nonproliferation bureaucracy eventually (Mistry 2014, 45).

It was in this setting that, as Tellis notes that a full NSC meeting was held in late September 2004 towards the end of Bush's first tenure. The meeting was the culmination of the interagency process on nuclear cooperation with India. It took stock of the progress of the High Technology Coordination Group, but the extended debate centered on the important issues raised in the Embassy Proposal initially raised in Tellis' presentation to Hadley in December 2002 (interview, 2016). The salient issues of the meeting were published in 2005 by Tellis in a Carnegie report titled, "India as a New Global Power".

As Tellis reveals (interview 2016), the US leadership arrived at four conclusions during the meeting based on the experience of the High Technology Coordination Group. Firstly, the leadership realized that India would not surrender its nuclear weapons program under any circumstances as long as its regional adversaries (China and Pakistan) possessed similar capabilities. The US view of these two countries was less than favorable and hence the leadership looked at India's case with sympathy. Secondly, those in the administration who felt that India's nuclear weapons did not threaten American security or interests won out. The administration, especially the strategic leadership, saw that supporting India could advance American interests in the region or even globally. Thirdly, the Bush and his inner circle themselves did not value international conventions such as the CTBT and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) that they felt restricted American freedom of operations, and therefore they identified with the Indian



positions on these issues (Mistry 2014, 45). This philosophy along with a “strong expectation of an eventual renewal of great-power competition, allowed both realist and neoconservative factions within the administration to take a more relaxed view of New Delhi’s emerging nuclear capabilities” (Tellis, 2005). Fourth, the leadership understood that “[t]he great availability of technologies and products associated with weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems that were present in India in both the public and private sectors posed a far more serious threat to American safety – were these resources to be leaked, whether deliberately or inadvertently, to hostile regimes or non-state actors—than New Delhi’s ownership of various nuclear assets” (Tellis, 2005). It became apparent to the leadership that from the viewpoint of American security advocated by Tellis, it was more important to make Indian export controls stricter rather than try to force India to roll back its nuclear program. The logical decision for Rice and Bush from these conclusions was that the US should concentrate on the security of India’s “tangible and intangible WMD capabilities” while seeking to accommodate India’s nuclear program within the existing international nonproliferation regime (Tellis interview, 2016). This helped overcome the arguments of the bureaucratic faction that had opposed expansion of relations with India by diluting the nuclear restrictions on India.

The meeting concluded with six possible end states for integrating India into the nonproliferation regime. They had varying levels of latitude given to India regarding safety, nuclear fuel supply, and technology as well as retention and accounting of fissile material. The maximal option was one in which “India is formally integrated into the NPT regime as a legitimate nuclear weapon state, with all the privileges thereof.” This option was based on the Embassy Proposal advocated by Blackwill and Tellis and that they had first presented to the Deputy National

Security Adviser Headley in 2002. Their stratagem had worked, and the ‘wall of nonproliferation on nuclear ties with India had been breached’ (Tellis interview, 2016).

Despite the reduction of bureaucratic resistance to closer nuclear ties, at the end of Bush’s first term in December 2004, the nuclear agreement remained unfulfilled for several reasons. First, given the political capital expended on the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the leadership was not ready to take the political risk of a controversial foreign policy issue, especially one that sought to amend iron-clad rules on nuclear proliferation that had stood for thirty years. Second, a nuclear agreement with one of the parties may not have been politically acceptable for the US since India and Pakistan had nearly gone to war that was marked by nuclear rhetoric in 2002. Third, the US administration assumed it had time to make the agreement. It believed that the BJP government under Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee would come back to power in the Indian elections to be held in early 2005, and therefore there would be little change in India’s stance. Finally, Secretary Powell with the full weight of the State Department behind him opposed any major agreement with India on the nuclear issue, (Tellis interview, 2016).

While the agreement did not crystallize in the first term based on the Embassy Proposal due to bureaucratic resistance, significant headway had been made in two spheres. First, the progress that India had done to fulfill the conditions of the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership created a more accepting opinion among the US leadership and bureaucracy towards the proposed nuclear agreement. Second, the formal adoption of an agenda by the US that accepted an option for nuclear relations with India signified a major change in nonproliferation policy of the past three decades.

The maturing of the decision process on US policy towards India's nuclear program by the end of Bush's first term enabled the leadership to progress the issue quickly in the next administration, as is covered in the next section.

### **Tracing the Process - January to July 2005: Rice Closes the Deal**

This period saw Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, assuming leadership of the issue and effectively pushing through the nuclear agreement with India. The president was personally greatly in favor of a strategic relationship with India as was Rice and she effectively used this consonance of views to introduce bold reform to the existing policy. By establishing her authority and neutralizing opposition to the nuclear agreement, Rice was able to ensure that the US-India Nuclear Agreement, which marked a major turning point in US-India relations, was announced in July 2005.

#### *Salient Events - A Sudden Transformation*

The critical highlights in this relatively short period mark indicate the leading role that Condoleezza Rice played in the decisionmaking leading to the dramatic shift in US policy towards India. The new administration assumed office in late January 2005 and moved quickly on the nuclear agreement. Condoleezza Rice, who had taken over the State Department, during her visit to India in March 2005, promised a major 'prize' to India when informing Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about the US decision to supply of F-16s to Pakistan. On her return from India, she formally proposed to Bush a change in US policy towards India through the nuclear agreement. President Bush approved the change in policy "as he had long wanted to intensify collaboration with India on a whole range of economic and security issues" (Mistry 2014,48).

From April to July 2005 negotiations were held with India over the terms and conditions. The nuclear agreement was finally announced during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to India on 18 July. The important actors and their roles are covered in the next section.

### *Key Players and Their Stances – Rice Emerges as the Main Player and Takes Control*

The key players in this period were President Bush, Rice and her close advisers restricting the decisionmaking to a limited circle. Rice consolidated her grip over the State Department by inducting her loyalists. She also ensured that the South Asia Bureau and the Nonproliferation Bureau was generally kept out of the decision process and were involved only in negotiation with India and implementation after the decision had been taken to proceed with the nuclear agreement.

President Bush was completely in agreement with Rice in making the nuclear agreement with India as a platform for achieving his goal of a strategic partnership. He fully supported her moves and pitched in when required to engage the Indian leadership on the issue. This unstinted backing by the president enabled Rice to drive the decision process with considerable authority.

Rice manifested as the prime player in the decision process by consolidating her hold over the State Department and ensuring support from the NSA. She established control over the State Department by appointing three of her old team to key positions: Robert B. Zoellick became the Deputy Secretary of State; Philip D. Zelikow took charge as the Counselor to Secretary of State, and Nicholas R. Burns occupied the key post of Undersecretary for Political Affairs. These individuals were very close to Rice and had been part of her team that spearheaded the reunification of Germany, sixteen years earlier in the George H. W. Bush administration (Kessler 2007, 30). Steve Headley, who had been appointed as the National Security Adviser, was unlikely to disagree beyond a certain point with his former superior with whom he had excellent and long-

standing relations. She also eliminated internal opposition to her policies by moving the head of the Nonproliferation Bureau, John Bolton as the US Ambassador to the UN in 2005.

The stances of the Nonproliferation Bureau and the South Asia Bureau were neutralized by Rice consciously expressing her strong preference for closer ties with India. In a department staffed mainly by career personnel, this effectively silenced opposition except for the most committed nonproliferation figures who also eventually fell in line (Markey interview, 2016). As Robert Boggs (interview, 2016) notes “[w]hile bureaus may have strong views...nobody was going to get in the way of the White House.” Tellis further amplifies by stating “[e]veryone was a team player...even Joseph at the ‘P’ Bureau played up once the decision had been taken. Everyone was loyal” (Tellis interview, 2016).

By establishing her influence over the foreign policy decisionmaking establishment, Rice was well placed to control the decision process. The next section discusses the decisionmaking in Bush’s second term leading up to the announcement of the nuclear agreement.

### *The Decision Process – Overcoming Bureaucratic Infighting and Obstruction: Rice Sees It Home*

Rice dominated the decision process leading up to the signing of the agreement through her proximity to President Bush, her crucial position as the Secretary of State and through bureaucratic tactics. Bush also played a vital if indirect role by fully supporting Rice in her efforts as well taking the crucial decision to go ahead with the nuclear agreement with India in a complete departure from existing US foreign policy.

President Bush contributed immensely to the transformation in US-India relations even if he was not intimately involved in the day to day process. His policy vision, commitment to a cause and willingness to stick by decisions contributed to policy change. The agreement was announced

because, as Daniel Markey reveals, “[y]ou had a president who did what nine out of ten other presidents would not and a totally dedicated set of advisers in Rice, Burns, and Tellis, who pushed through every obstacle even when the agreement seemed dead” (interview, 2016). The president set out a broad agenda, and his advisers pushed to fulfill the president’s vision. Bilateral issues are often linked to larger issues and in this case, Bush had to find a way to compensate India for the US supplying Pakistan with F-16s in return for the latter’s support in the War on Terror (Tellis interview 2016, Markey interview 2016, Zoellick interview 2016). Only the president could make this decision given the magnitude of change it meant for US policy and its effects on other vital US interests such as nuclear nonproliferation. Being an issue close to his heart, he was instrumental making key decisions reflecting presidential ownership of the policy decision. However, in keeping with his delegatory style and reflecting the conflict for attention in the presidential agenda, Bush was not involved in the day to day minutiae, leaving it to Rice to lead the decision process.

Rice emerged as the most powerful actor in the second term in the making of the nuclear agreement for four major reasons apart from her personal proximity to the president: first, she was as ideologically committed to improving relations with India as President Bush; second, she effectively secured her position as the Secretary of State; third, she ruthlessly neutralized internal opposition, and finally she dealt boldly with Indian opposition through personal intervention.

Rice wanted swift progress on building a strategic relationship with India from the outset of the second term and recognised that it would mean shedding some of the long held political shibboleths of US policy towards India. She, along with her team of Zelikow and Zoellick, wanted to bring India into the international nuclear system, overlook its violation of the NPT, even if that had limited India’s nuclear ambitions. Rice also wanted to delink India and Pakistan, “de-hyphenate the relationship” and engage with India in its own right (Kessler 2007, 53). She was

aware of the difficulties as she reveals in her autobiography, “[t]he interests of the United States and India were in substantial alignment. However, any change of this magnitude brings resistance. In Washington, the high priests of nonproliferation accused us of gutting the NPT, a treaty that had significantly limited the emergence of nuclear weapon states” (Rice 2016, 437). Other influential voices supported her such as Blackwill, who was now a lobbyist for India, suggesting to Zoellick, during the transition between Powell and Rice, that the US needed to push for a strategy that “ignored nuclear orthodoxy” (Kessler 2007, 51). Zelikow provided the rationale saying “[I]ndia had a solid record of nonproliferation. It was not like Pakistan...with A.Q. Khan or North Korea” (Zelikow interview, 2016). Thus the ideological basis for a reset in US-India relations was created by the time the trigger to initiate the process presented itself to Rice early in the second term in the form of arms sales to Pakistan. President Bush had agreed to provide Pakistan with F-16s in return for support for the US campaign in Afghanistan, in a secret meeting with Musharraf brokered by the State Department in December 2004 before Bush’s first term ended (Tellis interview, 2016). The State Department sought to take this forward early in the second term and the traditional pro-Pakistan leanings of officials in the South Asia Bureau were evident when this decision was sought to be announced when Rice was away on a foreign trip. Zoellick, who was officiating as Secretary of State in Rice’s absence, became aware of it and immediately cabled Rice and Headley, apprising them of the damage to relations with India if the issue was not handled more sensitively (Zoellick interview, 2016; Kessler 2007, 50). Rice immediately spoke to Bush and temporarily suspended the sales until the issue could be deliberated on further (Zoellick interview, 2016). Rice knew that if the relationship with India was to go ahead, the US had to find a way to compensate India with a sizeable strategic victory such as the nuclear

agreement. However, this would mean a major review of US policy towards India, something that Rice took the lead on (Zelikow interview, 2016).

Rice's ideological alignment with India was completed after she visited India and thereafter recommended a realignment of US foreign policy to the president. Rice gained a very favorable impression of India when she made during her maiden visit to India in March 2005 to inform the prime minister personally of the sale of the F 16s to Pakistan. To compensate India apart from proposing to raise the scale of defense cooperation to a new height, she also promised "something big on the nuclear issue" (Ashley interview, 2016). This suggestion made the Indians intrigued but ecstatic and led India to accept her invitation for the prime minister to visit the US in July. She was greatly impressed by India on this landmark visit, liked working with the Indians, admiring their diversity and competence (Kessler 55, 2007). As Zelikow, the Counselor of the State Department reveals (interview 2016) that, "[o]n the flight back from India, we sat together and she dictated the key points of how we were going to develop a strategic relationship with India." This memo to the president formally recommended a review of US policy towards India. It suggested that a "stronger India could better advance US strategic purposes" and that "civilian nuclear cooperation would not only enhance India's economic power but would simultaneously address other issues" (Zelikow, interview 2016; Mistry 2014, 47). Rice's memo also suggested "the administration should change India's place in the nuclear order and position India to become one of the US' "closest allies" and that the "[U]S goal is to help India become a major world power in the 21st century." (Zelikow interview, 2016; Tellis, 2005; Mistry 2014, 47). By reframing the policy issue as a matter of American national interest rather than from the rigid stance of nonproliferation, Rice strengthened its strategic logic, increased its appeal to the domestic policy and the initiative and facilitated its eventual acceptance. Rice, as a key empowered adviser, finally



had made the decision that US policy towards India needed to be overhauled. Agreeing completely with his trusted adviser's proposal, Bush decided in April 2005 to change the United States' traditional non-proliferation policy and extend full civilian nuclear cooperation with India.

Rice knew that she had to first overcome internal opposition and she adopted various bureaucratic tactics to reduce internal opposition to the nuclear agreement. First, she used secrecy to restrict information about the agreement. As Markey reveals, "Rice kept the circle small: Zelikow, Zoellick, and Tellis... the wider bureaucracy was not consulted as their positions were well known...it was only a question of making a decision." Thus Christina Rocca, despite heading the South Asia Bureau, was excluded from the discussions on the agreement (Markey interview, 2016). Even the Undersecretary of Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns, who joined in March 2005, was brought in to drive the ratification only after the decision had been made (Mistry, 2014; Kessler 2007, 57).

The second tactic was to move the agreement so quickly that the nonproliferation desk did not have adequate time to put up a coherent defense. By May 2005, Bolton had left the 'P' Bureau, that was weakened by unfilled vacancies following an unpopular reorganization. Thus, the junior nonproliferation officials, were only involved in some meetings in the inter-agency process and could not react fast or coherently enough to stop the agreement (Markey interview 2016; Kessler 2007, 57).

Third, Zelikow and Rice framed the nuclear agreement as the vehicle for a strategic shift in US policy on India rather than merely a rethinking on nuclear proliferation. This convinced some in the nonproliferation bureaucracy to view the strategic benefits to the US from the agreement over the dogmatic adherence to proliferation.

Finally, Rice suppressed dissent by simply overriding the stances of the lower bureaucracy outright. This measure was usually used to overcome the deadlock in negotiations, as Bush had made it clear that the contentious issues had to be resolved, and the “agreement had to happen” (Markey, interview 2016). For example, during the initial negotiations in May- June 2005, nonproliferation officials such as Acting Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, John C. Rood attempted to introduce new measures for increased monitoring. This immediately became contentious when the Indians completely ruled out any external interference over India’s nuclear program. Rice sidelined Rood’s objections to get the agreement announced as quickly as possible before further resistance developed from the bureaucracy and more importantly the Congress, that was still in the dark (Markey interview, 2014).

Rice also drove the initiative with the Indians and even personally rescued it when it threatened to unravel at the last minute due to Indian objections. The Americans pushed for an announcement when Prime Minister Singh visited Washington in mid-July because they wanted to see the agreement done and progress the relationship (Tellis interview, 2014). However, when they arrived on 16 July 2005 to prepare for the prime minister’s visit, Indian officials were not expecting the Americans to offer full spectrum civilian nuclear cooperation that required significant quid pro quo from India (Mistry 2014, 47). Bush and Rice wanted the agreement done, and the Americans pushed hard to resolve the major remaining obstacle to the agreement: separation of India’s military and civilian nuclear reactors (Zelikow interview, 2016; Mistry 2014, 34). While India’s strategic affairs bureaucracy finally agreed to the proposal after intense discussions, the representative of India’s Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), who arrived with

the prime minister on the last day, did not agree when informed of the conditions.<sup>4</sup> Despite intense and prolonged negotiations stretching through the night, there was no breakthrough.<sup>5</sup> Rice was extremely disappointed to be told on the night of July 17<sup>th</sup> by Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, who headed the US negotiators, that the no compromise had been reached despite the fact that India would benefit the most from the agreement (Rice 438, 2011; Kessler 59, 2007). She woke up at 5 AM on 18<sup>th</sup> July and wheedled the Indian Foreign Minister, Natwar Singh, into arranging a last minute meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh before he left for the White House. She met him at 8 a.m. and convinced him to renegotiate the agreement by saying:

Mr. Prime Minister, this is an agreement of a lifetime. You and the President Bush are about to put US-India relations on a fundamentally new footing. I know it is hard for you. It is hard for the President too. I did not come here to negotiate language – only to ask you to tell your officials to get this done. And let's get it done before you see the President (Rice 439, 2011).

The negotiations restarted and five hours later, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed the agreement that changed the dynamics of US – India relations forever.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the key roles played by a determined president and empowered advisors in foreign policy decisionmaking. In the case of the US-India Nuclear Deal, while President George W. Bush provided the policy vision and the authority for resetting US foreign policy towards India, it was key advisers such as Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, US

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<sup>4</sup> The Indian nuclear and space establishments historically mistrusted American intentions as they had to struggle very hard to develop their programs in the face of American sanctions and interference of the past three decades. The Indians invoked issues of sovereignty and the need to treat India as a nuclear power on par with existing NPT states (Mistry 2014; 83; Kessel 59, 2007; Zelikow interview, 2016). India would benefit the most from the agreement, but it seemed that it was always the United States that was pushing the issue (Kessler 59, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> The Indian political leadership was unwilling to make an agreement that would be unacceptable to the Indian Department of Atomic Energy for it would attract intense domestic criticism and result in a political vulnerability to the ruling political party. The focus of the dispute was about the usage of the word “voluntary” instead of “voluntarily” to describe safeguards, that had implications for the monitoring of future Indian nuclear reactors.

Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill and his Special Adviser, Ashley Tellis who drove the decision process. The case also highlighted the nature of bureaucratic wrangling and ideological dissonance in cases involving major foreign policy change and the necessity of determined leaders such as Bush and Rice to drive the process through.

### *External and Domestic Factors Shaping Opportunities for Foreign Policy Change*

Changes in the external environment at structural and domestic levels helped shape President Bush's foreign policy vision in favor of a transformation in US policy towards India. Bush's foreign policy vision that was based on US supremacy and the protection of American 'values'. Increasing US friction with China over economic, strategic and political issues, the Global War on Terror, and global trade were major issues in the international level in which Bush envisaged that India's support to the United States would be very useful. India's growing military and economic power as well as its strong democracy were appealing by themselves.

At the domestic level, the growing scale of economic relations between the two countries, and the increasing financial and political clout of the Indian-American diaspora meant that both the American industry as well as the Congress began to push for better bilateral relations. Thus a strong partnership with India fitted in well in the Bush Doctrine on foreign policy as well with domestic political considerations and created the necessary conditions for President Bush to rethink the US approach to India.

### *President, Advisors, and Bureaucracies and Foreign Policy Change*

While external factors played their part, President Bush's individual style as the president was critical in the transformation of US-India ties through the nuclear agreement. Bush very much

wanted to improve relations with India and he was firm in removing obstacles in its implementation. However, after spelling out his general policy vision, he delegated the process to his advisers. His low need for information, reliance on a trusted few advisers and a narrow decision making circle translated into considerable authority and freedom to his advisers to formulate and to a large extent execute policy. This encouraged his advisers such as the US Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill and the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice to chart bold, new steps in framing policy.

This did not mean that Bush was entirely uninvolved, in fact President Bush personally intervened at critical junctures to drive his policy goals. For example, he negated the bureaucracy's insistence on India adhering to the strictest nonproliferation regimes as a precondition for progressing from the Next Step in Strategic Partnership to a full spectrum nuclear agreement. Ultimately President Bush's bold leadership manifested in the presidential ownership of the decision to discard the United States' long standing nonproliferation policy and its conventional approach towards India despite enormous bureaucratic resistance. The case of the US-India Nuclear Agreement clearly illustrates the critical role of presidents in overcoming established policy and effecting foreign policy change.

The decisionmaking in the US-India Nuclear Agreement highlights the centrality of trusted advisers in the process of foreign policy change. Bush's advisers such as Condoleezza Rice, Robert Blackwill and Ashley Tellis played pivotal roles since they had the authority of the president, clarity of purpose, sufficient competence on the issue and were effective advocates.

Blackwill provided the connections and purpose while Tellis provided the conceptual brilliance and the advocacy. Blackwill was personally linked to the president and was driven to transform the relationship. He was doctrinally convinced and forceful in his pursuit of the goal of

a strategic partnership with India. Tellis was his perfect foil, intellectually brilliant, technically proficient in nuclear, strategic, military and South Asian issues and relentlessly persuasive. His de-novo policy suggestions supported by logical, well-reasoned arguments provided the underlying platform for review in US foreign policy. The relentless activism that Tellis and Blackwill conducted from Delhi as well as on return to Washington in 2003 after joining the NSC was critical to navigating the maze of the interagency process. In combination with Blackwill's determination, influence and access, they became formidable champions for the agreement.

The power of advisors was also evident when Rice became the Secretary of State, and she changed the position of the department very quickly. Rice took ownership of the issue and, helped in the conceptual process by Zelikow and Zoellick, made a strong case for the nuclear agreement as a vehicle for the larger transformation of US-India relations. Having created the necessary and sufficient conditions, she skillfully utilized her authority as well as influence over the president, to implement the change in foreign policy.

Advisors also have the power to impede decisions as Powell and Armitage did when they led the State Department and opposed the agreement. Unlike Rice and Blackwill, they were not looking to transform US relations with India and were more concerned with managing the situation in the region to support the US campaign in Afghanistan. They also had a different more calibrated view of bilateral ties between the US-India that led them to oppose any radical change in US policy toward India. This tussle reflects the importance of the differences in beliefs and stances amongst the members of the decision group and the effect on the decision process. Ultimately the nuclear agreement went ahead when Rice assumed leadership on the issue and sidelined these dissenting members were from the decision group. This case validates the hypotheses that advisors play a critical role in foreign policy change.

The high power of bureaucracies in decisionmaking in foreign policy, such as the nonproliferation lobby to obstruct and relatively lesser authority to execute was evident in the case. Different bureaucracies such as the South Asia Bureau, the Non Proliferation Bureau, the National Security Council and the Department of Defense to name a few, have differing agendas that they seek to protect. Thus, within the US administration, there were multiple views on the nuclear agreement that resulted in delay and indecision. Only sustained efforts by an empowered actor could overcome this opposition. The case also highlights the necessity of a champion for foreign policy change. While leaders may desire changes, the inertia of bureaucratic politics often prevents materialization of change. In this case, Blackwill and Tellis pushed the agenda in what the latter termed as a “guerilla struggle” and what Robert Boggs (interview 2016) termed as “purposeful, tenacious pursuit”. While the duo had pitched the agreement well, it took Rice to take ownership of the process and see it through the final stages.

The foreign policy transformation in the case of the Nuclear Agreement was spread over four years’ indicative of how major foreign policy change is often a highly complex and evolutionary process especially when the nature and terms of change faces significant opposition and requires major compromise of existing ideology.

The process of improving bilateral relations under the Bush administration, can be traced from Bush’s election campaign in 1998 to the nomination of Blackwill as ambassador to India in 2001 that was followed by his efforts to improve the relationship in 2002-03. Thereafter the issue was subject to intense interagency debate over two years till the option for a nuclear agreement was crystallized by the end of Bush’s term in December 2004. It took the trigger of arms sales to Pakistan for Rice to convert the option into the reality of a nuclear agreement by July 2005. The

case highlights how foreign policy transformation involving ideological change is a lengthy and complex process and the importance of trigger events to crystallize the re-alignment.

Indian opposition to the initial US terms and conditions were major factors that influenced the US decision process on the nuclear agreement and led to compromise. The United States initially tried an incremental path to improving relations with India by imposing strict non-proliferation conditions in return for major Indian concessions. This approach was unsuccessful as it required India to make too great a change from its position on nuclear issues in return for too little (from the Indian viewpoint). The United States realized that the transformative change that it was seeking would only be possible if India were given enough incentive to abandon its strongly held non-aligned posture and contribute to its material power. This eventually led to the leadership adopting the Embassy Proposal as the basis of the US-India Nuclear Agreement that transformed bilateral relations. In this case the US leadership decided to make concessions on one core interest, nonproliferation, in favor of another, the strategic partnership with India. This reflects how major foreign policy changes may often require significant bargaining and compromise that can only be undertaken by strong leadership.

The next chapter will draw conclusions on the foreign policy leadership of Clinton and Bush by comparing the decision process in the Kargil Conflict and the US-India Nuclear Agreement.



## **CHAPTER 5: COMPARING DECISIONMAKING ON INDIA IN THE CLINTON AND BUSH ADMINISTRATIONS**

In the slightly more than half a decade covered in this project, US-India relations transformed dramatically. It moved from the tepid hostility of the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, to a warm strategic handshake all the way through to a revolutionary nuclear deal. The focus on leaders and advisors, in context, allows us to make some conclusions regarding the decisionmaking leading to change in US foreign policy towards India.

As we have seen decisionmaking in foreign policy change is heavily influenced by the leadership of the president and his advisers. The leadership is influenced by contextual factors at varying levels of analysis such as structural and domestic factors. However, as this thesis shows, how these factors influence presidents to a large extent depend on how the president and his advisers filter these influences. This makes the foreign policy vision and style of the president important as well as other factors such as the roles played by important advisers. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were very different foreign policy leaders with distinct policy doctrines and varying presidential styles. Both acted decisively to build better relations with India displaying a high degree of presidential leadership in different ways. Both presidents changed US policy with India in the context of nuclear stability even though the circumstances were different. The Kargil Conflict was a comparatively short affair in which Clinton's adviser, Talbott played a key role in the aftermath of the nuclear tests and Clinton himself led the process during the military conflict. In contrast the nuclear agreement during Bush's tenure, which involved intense bureaucratic conflict, the decision process was spread over five years. While Bush laid down the overall policy goal, the process was driven his advisers like Blackwill and Rice. Notwithstanding the difference

in the two cases, it is possible to compare and contrast their decisionmaking process leading to foreign policy change.

By looking at contextual factors and the role of the leader and advisors, we can better explain change in US-India relations in the Clinton and Bush administrations.

### **Structural and Domestic Factors - Creating the Context for Change**

Structural factors provided the overall framework that made foreign policy change possible. The shifts in the international system after the end of the Cold War, the rise of China, terrorism, nuclear proliferation and instability, and the economic rise of India were crucial to creating the conditions for leaders like Clinton and Bush to change US foreign policy to meet the new challenges and opportunities. Structural factors by their very magnitude are highly complex, nuanced and subject to multiple interpretations by different people leading to debate and resistance. Therefore, their effects on decisionmaking while fundamental, are often not a sufficient explanation for foreign policy change. Instead, as we have seen it is how leaders overcome obstacles to implementing foreign policy change.

Thus, while Clinton wanted to deepen economic and strategic engagement with India, the latter's nuclear program made it difficult to generate the consensus required to implement a new policy. Similarly, while there was considerable support for better relations with India in the Bush administration, the dissonance over India's nuclear program as well as suitability as a strategic partner delayed the decision process leading to foreign policy change. While the nonproliferation bureaucracy and some in the regional bureaucracy felt that nuclear cooperation with India was unwarranted, the strategic affairs leadership including the president felt that transforming relations

with India was more important. This reiterates the importance of key leaders, especially presidents in foreign policy decisionmaking.

In the era of globalization, foreign policy had a major domestic impact and many issues were intermestic rather than purely international, and thus domestic compulsions had increasing influence on foreign policy change. Probably the most important of these factors in the case of US-India relations were the economic ties between the two countries. In the US-India relationship, leaders, and advisers, many of whom had corporate backgrounds or links, were influenced by the commercial and political ramifications of economic issues. Much of Clinton's primary interest in India was because it was a Big Emerging Market (BEM). The nuclear sanctions against India were diluted because of pressure from the corporate sector on both the Congress and the administration. Similarly, in the Bush administration the influence of the corporate sectors in both the United States and India were very visible in their pressure on their respective governments to establish a wider and deeper relationship. Business leaders on both sides wanted ties to expand. However, the nuclear sanctions and restrictions prevented both countries from exploiting their full potential for economic cooperation. These leaders pushed for the US to improve relations with India and this had significant political impact on the foreign policy leadership. Ultimately since both India and the United States were democracies, major policy change was difficult without the support of the legislature and the wider public. The president's political management style plays out to a large extent in how support is garnered to implement his policies as is covered in the next section.

### **Presidential Style, Advisors and Management of the US-India Policy**

This thesis shows that presidents and trusted advisors play the key role in shaping US polity toward India. From the literature, we know that presidents set the agenda based on their foreign

policy vision and goals in certain circumstances. Their communication of their aims and preferences with the help of their main supporters provides the parameters and objectives to their administration sets the stage to shape policy choices. Although Clinton and Bush had different policy visions: internationalist versus American primacy, both had the common foreign policy goal of improving relations with India albeit with slightly differing reasons. While both wanted better ties with India for economic reasons and since India was a democracy, Bush also saw India as a strategic partner to balance China in Asia and in the war against Islamic terrorism.

Both Bush and Clinton ensured their goal of better relations with India was achieved by personally intervening to exercise presidential leadership in keeping with their individual management styles. Clinton had a reputation for an open, collegial style and sought information from multiple sources. He was not initially interested in foreign policy, but his involvement grew over time. This style affected the decisionmaking process in many ways: Clinton's decisions had consensus but were late in coming and often ineffective as was evident in the failure to get India and Pakistan to sign the NPT. Bush, on the other hand, had a closed, hierarchical style and while he was uninterested in details, he was very clear about what he wanted to do and was unperturbed about challenging status quo. Bush's decisionmaking was faster, often because of a narrow decision circle and since he was prepared to thrust a policy through without developing full consensus, as in the case of the nuclear agreement.

Both presidents, however, showed the similar determination of purpose in pushing for their strategic goals and were willing to use their power to lower bureaucratic hurdles. Clinton displayed purpose when he pragmatically used India's nuclear tests for deeper engagement and aligned with India during the Kargil Conflict challenging US foreign policy of the past four decades. Bush showed determination and fortitude in the case of the nuclear agreement by incurring significant

political risk by overruling his bureaucracy and contravening international nonproliferation regimes. Bush's determination bore fruit in the form of the transformation in the US-India relations after the nuclear agreement.

Both cases showed how presidents circumvent obstacles to their policies by narrowing the decision circles and adopting an informal decision process as they gain foreign policy experience and trust in their advisers. This gambit enables leaders to make decisions and circumvent opposition which occurs if a wider circle of officials is involved. In the Kargil Crisis, the decisionmaking circle was relatively restricted to the president; NSA and Talbott with occasional inclusions of the principals because of their preoccupation with other important issues like the crisis in Kosovo. There was no formal NSC meeting held, and Clinton did not attend many meetings, preferring to get briefed by his staff especially Talbott. These meetings enabled decisions to be taken faster with less dissent. In the case of Bush, however, there were two stages: a wider consultative process which examined Tellis' proposals and fixed the agenda in September 2004; and after that a narrowly limited process in March – April 2005 when the actual decision to offer India the full nuclear agreement was decided. This reinforces Bush's style of leadership in which major decisions were undertaken in a narrow and closed circle of trusted and important advisers. This style of decisionmaking also highlights the criticality of individual advisers in foreign policy change.

Advisors played crucial roles in foreign policy decisionmaking both in the Kargil Conflict and in the making of the nuclear agreement, by their individual contributions to the decision process. Important advisors, such as the Secretary of State have a major bearing on decisionmaking given their central roles, authority, and influence. Other key individuals who may not be part of the structured advisory group, also play a major role in decisionmaking when they are empowered

by the president and enjoy his confidence. In the case of the Kargil Conflict, Strobe Talbott's friendship with Clinton provided him access, authority and influence in the decision process. This position greatly facilitated his engagement with the Indian leadership after the nuclear tests which eventually led to the development of a mutual understanding between the United States and India. The engagement was strengthened by a personal bonding between the Talbott and the Indian foreign minister, Jaswant Singh, which was invaluable when the two sides engaged each other during the Kargil Crisis. Talbott's bonding with Singh and his access to and influence over Clinton contributed to the change in US foreign policy towards India. In the case of the nuclear agreement, Robert Blackwill's links to President Bush and the National Security Adviser Rice, enabled him along with Ashley Tellis to undertake "bureaucratic entrepreneurship" in pursuit of the nuclear agreement (Tellis interview, 2016). The doctrinal acceptance of Tellis' ambitious path-breaking proposals to break the Gordian knot of India's nuclear program deadlock, is an indicator of how even a relatively junior official away from the political center at different points can influence decisions through ideas which support the overall foreign policy goals of the president. Rice, herself eventually drove the agreement to completion. After she assumed charge at State in the second term, her proximity to the president, his trust and authority in her, enabled her to assume leadership on the issue and remove all bureaucratic obstacles to the agreement.

The bureaucracy plays an influential role in foreign policy change by the virtue of its critical position in the decisionmaking structure. In the Kargil Conflict, the agreement amongst the bureaucracy in attributing the blame for the crisis on Pakistan and the need to support India, contributed greatly to the US realignment of its foreign policy in favor of India. Conversely bureaucrats also pose powerful obstructions to foreign policy change. In the Bush administration, the South Asia Bureau and the Nonproliferation Bureau were not in favor of major concessions to

India on nuclear issues. This led to the leadership of the State Department, namely the Secretary of State, Colin Powell and his deputy, Richard Armitage taking a stand against the agreement. The bureaucratic opposition eventually resulted in the agreement not getting finalized in Bush's first term even though changing existing US foreign policy to build a strategic relationship with India was one of the president's important foreign policy goals.

### **Explaining Continuity and Change in Foreign Policy**

The pace of foreign policy change differs as exemplified in the two cases. Policy change may occur when there is a crisis, such as in the Kargil Conflict, or change may evolve over a period of time as happened in the case of the US-India Nuclear Agreement. In both cases a trigger event may be required to set off the change in policy. In the case of the Kargil Conflict the need to take sides in a relatively short period and prevent a possible nuclear war forced the United States to drop its strategic ambiguity. Even while US-India relations were long overdue for a reset, it was the Kargil War which triggered a change in policy. The intensification of hostilities essentially acted as the trigger for the US to make the decision to align with India and prevent escalation.

In the case of the Nuclear Agreement, which involved the review of a long-term policies with major international and domestic ramifications, the process took a much longer time. Lack of an immediate urgency, bureaucratic infighting, the time consuming interagency process and need for ideological compromise resulted in a longer decision process. It must be noted, however, that while the initial decision process to arrive at the option of the Embassy Proposal stretched over two years and the actual decisionmaking to offer India the nuclear agreement was done in a relatively short period between March and April 2005. In this case too, despite clear presidential interest and

support, it was the proposed sale of F-16s to Pakistan which triggered the decision to offer India the nuclear agreement.

Foreign policy change can manifest as an evolutionary or revolutionary change depending on the nature of the process and its eventual outcome. In the case of the Kargil case, the change in United States policy was truly evolutionary despite the suddenness of the crisis, as the gradual deterioration of relations with Pakistan and the increasing convergence with India was crystallized in the realignment with India. On the other hand, despite the long drawn out process of the nuclear agreement including the intermediate steps of the NSSP and HTG, the nuclear agreement for full nuclear cooperation was a radical shift in American nonproliferation and India policy. It took determined individuals to make the difficult final decisions to force the change. As Markey (interview, 2016) notes “[w]ith any other president other than Bush and without Tellis and Blackwill, the agreement would never have happened.”

Continuity and change in foreign policy often result from the struggle between the efforts of the new administration to implement changes in foreign policy and the permanent bureaucracy to maintain the long-standing strategy. The political actors often seek to change policies along populist lines in keeping with their election manifestos while the permanent bureaucracy who are relatively unaffected by political issues and consider matters in the long term both past and future tend to favor status quo. In the case of Kargil, the fact that most of those who dealt with the issue had either recently joined the bureau or were not involved in the region at all and thus looked at the issue with a fresh mind assisted the change from a strict non-proliferation posture to engagement with India. Similarly, in the case of the nuclear agreement, the initiative to transform relations with India was a new political move, which evolved to respond to structural changes and



not a bureaucratic proposal. It required political appointees and supportive subject-matter-experts to turn the existing policy on its head through a de-novo approach.

A champion is needed for each cause to highlight it in Washington and pursue it across obstacles. Given the nature of bureaucratic opposition involved in foreign policy change, there is a requirement for an individual or a group of individuals to advocate for the policy. In the Kargil case, Talbott was such an advocate and his advice to align with India found a ready reception in Clinton, who was already so inclined. In the case of the nuclear agreement, Blackwill and Tellis were effective champions who persisted and succeeded in pushing the agenda to the notice of higher level policymakers. After that they continued, in Bush's first term, to advocate for the proposal during the interagency process, from the NSC where they had moved to from New Delhi. After adoption of the proposal in September 2004, Rice took the lead and was in the position to see it to completion.

### **Transformation in United States-India Relations: A Concert of Democracies?**

The transformation in US-India relations also highlights the high degree of ideological convergence developed over the half decade from 1999 to 2005. The Kargil Conflict was a turning point in bilateral relations and after the war it was clear that the United States no longer thought of India in adversarial terms even while disagreements over several major issues remained. The nuclear agreement led to a complete transformation in US-India ties and was an announcement that the US considered India as a strategic partner and part of its larger network of friends, allies and partners. For India, the agreement signified a major shift in its global status by abandoning its traditional non-aligned stance for greater alignment with the United States.

The recognition of India's position on critical sovereign issues helped the US recast its relationship with India. In the Kargil Crisis, by taking the position that the Line of Control was inviolable, the United States recognized and legitimized India's control over its part of Kashmir. While this has been the tacit understanding in the international community, the position of the United States re-affirmed India's position on the issue. Similarly, by making an exception for India from the prevailing nuclear proliferation regime and entering into civil nuclear cooperation, the United States, in fact, legitimized India's nuclear program and accepted India's long-standing stance for its inclusion in the global nuclear order. Thus, the United States foreign policy changes transformed the bilateral relationship because the US leadership changed its policy towards India. They accommodated India's core national interests resulting in a reciprocity which continues to manifest till today.

India's democratic credentials were an important element in American political and diplomatic calculations not only with both administrations but also with the Congress and the public. While it is true that India's democratic credentials were 're-discovered' after the end of the Cold War, it upholds the larger American philosophy of spreading democracy globally. Its strong, if raucous and chaotic, democratic political system along with federal structure struck an empathetic and supportive chord in the American political system. India was also a shining example that democracy could flourish outside the Western World. Its secular fabric, economic vibrancy based on a liberalized economy and massive English-speaking population all contributed to its natural appeal to the United States.

The need to balance China was a major factor in the United States engagement with India. By the end of Clinton's tenure, the United States relationship with China began to affect Washington's perception of India. The Clinton administration had wanted a "normal" relationship

with China. However, this stance came in the face of increased attacks on Clinton over engaging 'authoritarian' China despite its domestic oppression as well as its coercive attitude towards Taiwan during the 2000 elections (Cohen,2000). Immediately after Bush came to power, the 'Hainan incident' occurred which spoke to the Republican rhetoric of authoritarian Communist China as an adversary. When added to the ongoing disputes in the China-U.S. relationship over trade and political issues, democratic India's ideological attraction as an ally, greatly increased in the Bush administration.

Bilateral ties did not immediately flourish as expected after the as the US-India Nuclear Agreement was ratified in 2008 despite favorable structural and domestic incentives. President Barack Obama, who came to power immediately after the ratification of the agreement, tried to build on this new dynamic in bilateral relations when he announced his 'Pivot to Asia' in 2008. However, the lukewarm response from the Indian government, due to strong ideological reservations within India's ruling coalition over the pace of change in US-India relations, ensured that the initiative did not progress. It was only when Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014 and reached out immediately to President Barack Obama that the lost momentum in US-India relations was restored. Ultimately it requires individuals to lead in foreign policy change.

## APPENDIX A: KARGIL CONFLICT MAPS

Fig 1.1: Conflict Zone in Kashmir  
(Based on an interview with General V.P Malik, 2015)

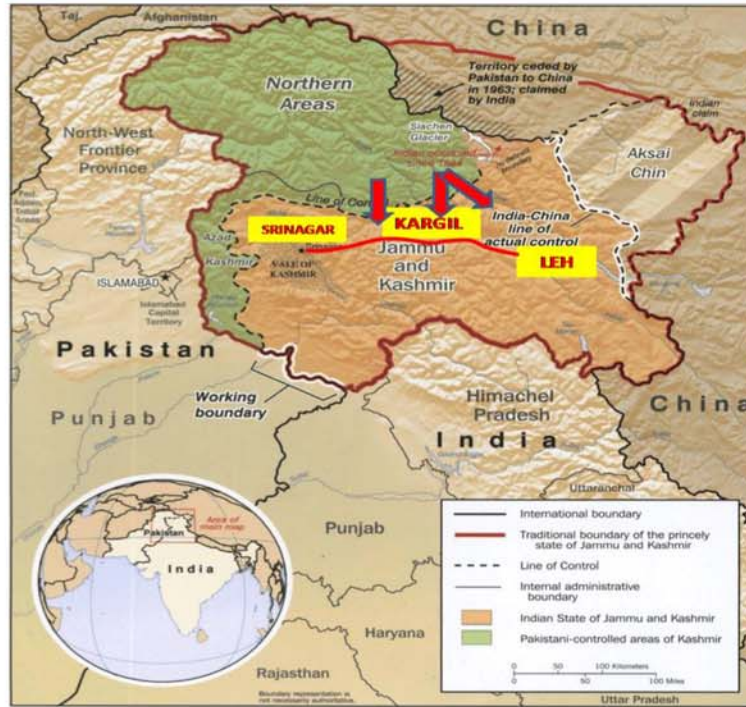


Figure 1.2: India's Threat of Expanded Area of Operations  
(Based on an interview with General V.P Malik, 2015)



**APPENDIX B: UNITED STATES- INDIA-PAKISTAN TIME LINE**

May1974	India conducts underground nuclear test at Pokhran, Rajasthan
December1988	India and Pakistan sign agreement prohibiting attack on each other's nuclear installations
June 1995	United States warns India from conducting a nuclear test
January1996	India tests Prithvi II, a missile capable of carrying nuclear weapons
April1998	Pakistan tests Ghauri missile, capable of reaching 937 miles
May 11,1998	India conducts three underground nuclear tests in Rajasthan
May 13,1998	India conducts two more underground nuclear tests to complete its nuclear test program
May 28,1998	Pakistan conducts its five underground nuclear tests for the first time
May1999	Conflict between India and Pakistan in Kargil in Kashmir
	<b><u>DETAILED TIMELINE</u></b>
May 26	Kashmir militants infiltrate Kashmir and India launches air attacks
May 29	Pakistan proposes ending foreign minister (Sartaj Aziz) to India to ease tensions
May31	India and Pakistan agree to hold talks over Kashmir
June5	India halts bombing to hand over Pakistani bodies
June 9	India continues airstrikes ahead of talks with Pakistan
June13	India and Pakistan end Kashmir talks without any agreements on how to end the conflict
June29	Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif returns from China as efforts to end conflict accelerate
July4	President Clinton urges India-Pakistan talks India captures key strategic peak Tiger Hill
July11	Kashmir pull-out takes effect as militants leave Indian Kashmir

## **APPENDIX C: GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE KARGIL CRISIS**

1. During the period 1998 – 1999, which organization /institution did you work for?
2. What were your position and your role in this organization/position?
3. What was the policy of the United States towards India and Pakistan at this time?
4. What were the main factors which dictated United States foreign policy towards each?
5. What effect did the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998 have on their relations with the United States?
6. What effect did the terrorist attacks on United States embassies in East Africa have on United States' relations with both countries?
7. What was the effect of the Pakistani operation in Kargil on the United States foreign policy establishment?
8. Do you feel that the United States changed its policy of alignment with Pakistan in favor of India?9. If so, why?
10. Who were the personnel involved in the foreign policy decision-making towards both countries?
11. What was the nature of the positions advocated within the United States government at this period? What positions and factions dominated in the framing of United States policy?
12. Who were the most influential players and what were their stands? Why did they advocate what they did?
13. What role did these individuals play in decision-making?
14. What was the involvement of the President in decision-making?
15. What position did he favor?

**APPENDIX D: GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON  
THE US-INDIA NUCLEAR AGREEMENT**

1. What was your official appointment between 2000 to 2008?
2. What was the state of US-India policy when George Bush took over?
3. What were the drivers of the relationship?
4. What did Bush want to do and why? How big a factor was China, economy, defense?
5. Who were the key actors in the US-India Nuclear Agreement?
6. What role did Rice play? What was her relationship with Bush?
7. What role did Blackwill play? What was his relationship with Bush?
8. How were his relations with State department, Rice and others?
9. What was your role?
10. What did the others like Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell and Armitage in the power circle feel about India?
11. Why was the nuclear agreement offered to India?
12. What was the thinking on nuclear issue and the approach to India?
13. How was the decisionmaking done? Who was involved and what were their contributions?
14. What role did Bush play and Rice?
15. Who opposed it and how were their objections overcome?
16. What was the attitude of the entrenched regional bureaus?
17. What was the attitude of the nonproliferation 'Ayatollahs'?
18. What tactics did each side use?

19. How was the decision to sign the agreement during Manmohan's visit finalized? What contributed to the decisionmaking?



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