

India as a strategic partner – A German view

Key points prepared for the panel on “Limitations for the strategic partnership – India from the transatlantic perspective” at the 15th Transatlantic Roundtable of the Improving Responsiveness Program, 7-8 December 2006 / *Benjamin Schreier*

Benign” neglect for India’s strategic significance

- While having improved markedly over the past few years, the biggest obstacle to a real ‘strategic partnership’ with India is the still existing benign neglect for India’s strategic significance; particularly when compared with China. Specifically, the field of security and defence relations remains underdeveloped.
- Given India’s potential to even outpace China in the long-term perspective, and its desire and capacity to become a major power, the world’s largest democracy will become a major player in a new global security architecture. Consequently, German/ European cooperation with India should focus not only on fostering economic ties but even more on winning India over as an important partner in strategic areas.

Potential for building international order

- On paper, German/European and Indian have different concepts towards building international order. The European concept of “effective multilateralism” is incongruent with India’s emphasis on “multipolarity”, which includes classical elements of strategic thinking such as the balance of power or nuclear deterrence.
- In practice, great potential for strengthening international order based upon strong multilateral institutions exists. Both are sceptical with regard to a unipolar dominance. India in recent years has been a strong supporter of international trade organizations such as WTO and the G-20. With Germany, India conducted a joint campaign for a permanent Seat at the UN Security Council (G-4 initiative).
- German and European experts and politicians have pointed to India’s refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the U.S. - India Nuclear deal as evidence for India’s reluctance to abide to international norms. This single-issue perspective fails to consider India’s constructive role in strengthening other arms control regimes and in agreeing to international monitoring of its civilian nuclear sites.

New global security architecture: India and NATO?

- India will become a central player in a new global security architecture and will influence key issues such as energy security, transnational terrorism or protecting Sea Lanes of Communications. Nevertheless, cooperation in the area of security and defence remains underdeveloped.
- The process of globalised security will create new incentives for cooperation in security and defence. The credibility of India's great power status requires a stronger contribution to regional and global stability. Global threats and risks will require an increased German/European engagement outside European territory.
- The concept of NATO's global partnerships with democratic countries of the Asia-Pacific region is worth considering as a future model for stronger security ties with India. Presupposing enough flexibility, it entails benefits for both sides, and need not interfere with India's tradition of non-alignment, which is already in the process of changing.

Needed: a new German/ European "mindset" towards India

- There are more prospects for deeper ties in all fields of the strategic partnership than there are limits. What is required is a different German/ European mindset towards India. India will become a global power and will act accordingly, e.g. the pursuit of its national interests will be a priority and define the chances for cooperation. It will not come as a "petitioner" of European support and consent in global affairs. Conceptually, this requires Germans/Europeans to think even more beyond its Eurocentric focus in the realm of strategic issues.