

US-India The Way Forward



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Former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs **KARL F INDERFURTH** outlines ways the fizz can return to the India-US relationship.

As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh arrives in Washington for his second White House visit with President Obama, there are two competing narratives regarding the current state of US-India ties. One says the relationship has gone off the rails; the other says it is still on track.

My assessment is that both are partially correct and that Obama and Singh have an opportunity to dispel the first narrative, re-enforce the second, and put, in the words of a former Indian ambassador to the US, some of the 'earlier effervescence' back into the relationship. Over the past 13 years, under three US administrations and two Indian governments, the two countries have worked hard to build a strategic partnership for the 21st century, across the full spectrum of the relationship.

In the past year alone, there have been 44 senior meetings, most recently with visits to India by Vice President Joe Biden in July (the first VP to do so in three decades) and Secretary of State John Kerry in June, for the fourth annual US-India Strategic Dialogue. These meetings represent a huge step forward from the past. But we can and should do more. So, what can President Obama and Prime Minister Singh accomplish during their time together?

First, a reality check is in order. The two leaders should have a private one-on-one meeting to share with each other the domestic challenges they are facing — Obama most immediately with the Syria crisis and upcoming budget and debt ceiling battles with Congress; Singh with India's slumping economy and next year's national elections and the concomitant prospects for a 'lame duck' government.

These domestic considerations will understandably constrain the degree to which Washington and New Delhi will be able to focus on each other in the immediate months ahead. Neither should be surprised or take this amiss. That said, the two leaders should then roll up their sleeves, exert some political will to untangle some of the unfinished business that is holding the relationship back, and then ascend to thirty thousand feet to articulate several longer-term goals that will underscore the undeniable benefits to both countries of our strategic partnership. Here are three suggestions for them to consider:

Economic and trade relations: Here the unfinished business is a bilateral investment treaty.

Over a year ago the two sides agreed to 'expeditiously conclude' negotiations on an agreement. Still waiting.

We also need a long-term framework that would include a free trade agreement as an achievable goal. We should bring India into APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership discussions.

For its part, India needs to vigorously pursue and implement economic reforms and trade liberalization, of which they have heard a great deal recently from both our public and private sectors. They've got the message. They have one for us about proposed US immigration legislation.

Defense and security ties: The Defense Trade Initiative needs a push by both sides, which is why Deputy Secretary



Vice President Joe Biden and his wife Jill in New Delhi July 22. In the past year alone, there have been 44 senior meetings, most recently Biden's. While these meetings represent a huge step forward from the past, the US and India can and should do more.

ADNAN ABIDI/REUTERS

The Need for Effervescence

of Defense Ashton Carter recently traveled to New Delhi. This is not just about arms sales, but co-development and co-production projects and technology transfers.

In addition, the US and India should commence negotiations to renew their bilateral defense cooperation framework with a Comprehensive Security Compact by 2015.

Prime Minister Singh's comments about India's willingness to be a net provider of security in the Indo-Pacific region are significant in this regard.

Energy partnerships: At the top of the US-India unfinished business 'to do' list is implementation of the 2008 civil nuclear agreement.

When entered into five years ago, it was billed as the cornerstone of the burgeoning strategic partnership between the countries. Then it bogged down, which is unfortunate considering how much political capital was expended in both Washington and New Delhi.

Finalizing a commercial agreement between India's Nuclear Power Corporation and Westinghouse for a nuclear reactor in Gujarat could be the signal that things are back on track and moving forward.

Beyond nuclear, India's power needs are extraordinary; we can help in many ways, especially now that the way has been cleared for liquefied natural gas

(LNG) exports. Collaboration on clean energy and renewables should continue to forge ahead. The August 2 cover story in *India Abroad* on Vice President Biden's trip to New Delhi was entitled 'Biden's Nudge.' It included this quote from Indian Ambassador Nirupama Rao: "It was a well timed visit. We brought new focus not just on smaller issues, but on the larger picture of our partnership."

Let's hope the same will be said following Prime Minister Singh's visit to Washington and that the two leaders will have been able to put some of that 'effervescence' back into US-India ties.

An announcement by Obama that he intends to pay a second visit to India during his final term in office — he would be the first American President to do so — would also add some fizz!



Karl F Inderfurth is a former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs during the Clinton administration and currently holds the Wadhvani Chair in US-India Policy Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. His three-year appointment to this position concludes at the end of this year. The search for a successor chair holder is underway.