

‘Community of principle’ is the basis of multipolar world

by Mary Burdman

The concept of a “community of principle” among nations, is the underlying idea for the creation of a multipolar world, as discussed by French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine and Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh at a high-level international seminar on “India and France in Multipolar World,” in New Delhi on Feb. 16-17.

This was an official visit for Védrine, which included a meeting with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. The previous week, Brajesh Mishra, India’s Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and the National Security Adviser, had been in Paris meeting French President Jacques Chirac, after Mishra had participated in the annual Wehrkunde international security meeting in Munich (see *EIR*, Feb. 18, 2000).

At the Delhi seminar, Jaswant Singh called for a “concert of open societies,” supported by an “overlapping network of institutions among governments and civil societies,” to build a plural order in the world. He said that Indian and French leaders “have consistently chosen the broader and universal, over the narrow or parochial,” and hence are “uniquely placed to contribute” to a multipolar world.

Védrine, in his speech, stated that he wants to replace American preponderance in the world, with a system of many different “poles,” which “would not oppose each other, either individually or in groups, but rather, maintain mutual relations based on cooperation.” Multipolarity, he said, is not about creating new rival blocs, but rather, about building cooperative relations among leading powers. “What sort of progress have we made, if, at the end of the day, new blocs are set up, lending themselves to alliances and counter-alliances among the poles, in a situation fraught with long-term instability?” the French minister asked.

Védrine said that France, in a “quest for controlled and constructive multipolarity,” has embarked on discussions with many other nations, including the United States (“which is our friend and ally, but with which we are not aligned”), Russia (“to establish a long-term strategic Euro-Russian partnership”), China (“a global partnership”), and India (“a far-reaching strategic dialogue”), as well as Japan, Brazil, South Africa, and other nations.

“If a multipolar system is built, I am convinced that India will be and must be one of its poles,” Védrine said. He endorsed India’s right to be a permanent member of an expanded UN Security Council.

Countering the ‘flight-forward school’

The importance of the discussion between France and India, can only be understood in the context of the extremely unstable international situation. The plethora of highly dangerous flashpoints—financial, political, and military—in the world, is alarming a section of international policymakers, among the transatlantic elites as well as within developing nations.

The 1997-98 wave of financial disasters which swept Asia and Russia, and brought down the “premier” Long Term Capital Management hedge fund, fuelled the Anglo-American military attacks against Sudan and Iraq, and the NATO war against Yugoslavia in 1999. Now again, increasing financial turbulence is driving the “flight-forward school”—typified by former U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and his protégés in Washington, and by the circle around British Prime Minister Tony Blair—into provoking political and military conflicts wherever it would be to their advantage. Their top targets, are the “strategic triangle” countries of Russia, China, and India.

However, there is a second, more “realistic” grouping within the overall NATO/Western power-structure, especially in continental Europe, which fears that the flight-forward school’s antagonism to Russia and China is spinning out of control. While some among this faction may be attempting only to enlist the Russians into some form of crisis-management, others, however imperfectly, are seeking some kind of genuine solution to the world’s vast troubles.

As was demonstrated at the Munich Wehrkunde conference, and even more broadly at the tenth summit of the UN Conference on Trade and Development in Bangkok on Feb. 12-18, there are many national leaders from India, Malaysia, China, Africa, and Ibero-America, who are willing to state the truth about the perilous state of the world economy and its consequences, and to discuss alternatives to the madness

of free-market globalization.

A measure of the genuine quality of the French-Indian concept of a multipolar world, is that both foreign ministers made very clear, that while they oppose the overbearing U.S. weight in international relations, their policies are *not* anti-American. Rather, their blunt criticisms were simply, as Védérine said, speaking the truth. A more balanced world, Védérine said, was in the interests of the United States itself, and the United States remains a “central and major factor in international stability.” The “overly unipolar system is excessive, it is questionable, and it has negative implications, including for the United States.”

Singh, who referred to unease in France, Russia, China, and India, about American hegemony, also stated that all “these countries continue to enjoy important bilateral relationships with the U.S. . . . This is also an engagement they all value.”

How to achieve a multipolar world

On the eve of his trip to India, Védérine had given an extensive interview to a leading Indian daily, *The Hindu*, which was published on Feb. 15. Asked about his concept of a multipolar world, Védérine replied that, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, “we have lived in a changed world, . . . where one power is predominant in all fields, and that is the United States. Because it is dominant in all these fields, I have said that the U.S. is a ‘hyper-power.’ This is not criticism, but just a statement of fact.

“We do feel this is not a healthy situation to be in. Indeed, the world is a diverse one. And we believe that maintaining and protecting diversity across the world is a crucial issue. . . .

“The U.S. is a great friend of ours. . . . But we do think that other countries have a right to exist as well,” Védérine told *The Hindu* Paris correspondent C. Raja Mohan. “It is also true that from the American point of view, too, a balanced situation would be better for them. . . . We believe in a world where there won’t be just one American pole. If we have other poles, in India, China, Russia, Europe, and maybe elsewhere, too, and if, obviously, these different poles cooperate and work together, it would be a better world.

“We have to maintain an effective multilateral context, and that is the United Nations, plus, a reformed UN Security Council. Multipolarity is about geopolitical balance, plus a way of taking into account the richness and diversity of the world.”

On his strategy to get to a multipolar world, Védérine said: “For the Americans, it entails accepting the idea of a true dialogue and cooperation with the others.” For India, “it would entail having a more global approach. The Chinese problem is different again. Russia will have to cope with the problems it is facing today before they can redefine their vision of international relations.” Europeans “have a global and comprehensive vision. . . . What we will have to overcome is the simultaneous challenges of expanding Europe

while reforming its institutions. Obviously, whenever we mention a multipolar world, it has an interest for us only if Europe is one of those poles.”

Védérine noted that while some Americans initially took umbrage at the phrase “hyper-power,” they subsequently “discovered that it was just a statement of fact,” and that U.S. analysts had previously used the same phrase. “When you look at what American leaders say when they talk about the U.S., it is very obvious that they adopt a very similar line of thinking,” he said.

At the New Delhi seminar, Védérine noted the additional problem, that interventionism for “human rights” is being used increasingly at the peril of national sovereignty, notably in Kosovo and East Timor. “The way in which Western countries sometimes impose [human rights] through threats, or use them for their purposes . . . may lead to suspicion and rejection, because at times they seem to have colonialist or power-mongering overtones.”

Indian response

Védérine’s interview was read with great interest in India. The timing is opportune. India had been in a state of political instability that left the country inward-looking for almost five years. The present Bharatiya Janata Party-led government under Prime Minister Vajpayee, however, is gripped with many developmental and financial shortcomings, but not that of political instability.

Indo-French relations, although developed over decades in the context of the Cold War and other political constraints, have always been cordial. France has long been one of the major providers of key technologies to India, including helping India develop its sodium-cooled nuclear breeder reactor technology, and providing the country with space satellites when Indian space research was in its nascent stage. In addition, France has also provided the Indian Air Force with Jaguar fighters, which are produced jointly by France and Britain. There is no doubt that more such mutually beneficial deals will be made in the future.

It is for these reasons, perhaps, that the French Foreign Minister’s trip was well-organized. In addition to the Brajesh Mishra visit to Paris, the Indo-French Forum met for the fourth time a couple of days before Védérine arrived. The forum, attended by scientists, intellectuals, educators, and businessmen of both countries, focussed on future cooperation in information technology and food processing. Jean François-Poncet, the French co-chairman, said that he hoped the two sides would “suggest practical steps” to the governments for follow-up.

A few days prior to that, Indian President K.R. Narayanan was invited to visit France in April.

Conflicts intrude

Despite the overall encouraging quality of the French-Indian political dialogue, very thorny problems emerged dur-

ing Védérine's visit. New Delhi was certainly most happy to hear an important member of the Group of Seven, the nuclear weapons club, and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, advocating that India play a role in a multipolar world. But, the happiness was tempered.

In his interview with *The Hindu*, Védérine had stated that France is "ready to increase our cooperation in the field of civilian nuclear technology. This would meet and satisfy a great need in India." However, he noted, "to be able to make progress in this field of cooperation, India has to show it is ready to go along with the international [nuclear non-proliferation] regimes."

The Hindu observed that this is the furthest anyone in the West has gone in suggesting that if New Delhi signs the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), India could begin to benefit from nuclear technology transfers that have long been denied to it. France itself—in contrast to the non-signatory United States—has signed the CTBT. However, this was only after France had conducted a series of highly controversial nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1995-96.

Védérine repeated, when he reached New Delhi, that France is looking for "positive signals" from India, including signing the CTBT and accepting the controls for safeguards stipulated by the International Atomic Energy Agency. It is exactly this, that India, after conducting a mere two tests itself in 1996, after long years of restraint, is unwilling to accept.

In addition, Védérine, despite his express rejection of the United States as the "only pole," made clear that France would like to have the Americans mediate in Kashmir. Since independence in 1947, and the subsequent, still-unresolved crisis arose over the future of the states of Jammu and Kashmir, New Delhi has consistently held that this is a *bilateral* issue, which must, and can only, be resolved between India and Pakistan. While Islamabad has consistently tried to "internationalize" the issue, and demands international mediation, New Delhi has always rejected this.

Despite the fact that Prime Minister Vajpayee emphasized that India utterly rejects the first use of nuclear weapons, Védérine blamed India for raising the nuclear threat on the subcontinent.

On the issue of cross-border terrorism—a national security issue for India, especially since the Pakistani intrusions in Kashmir's Kargil region in the spring of 1999—Védérine was most careful. He said that France is not "involved in the problem," and does not want to take on the role of one of the partners. But, when the Indian media pointed out that, prior to his visit, Prime Minister Vajpayee was quoted in the French daily *Le Figaro* saying that France had to make a choice on whether it wanted to have a strategic dialogue with a democratic India or a military-ruled Pakistan, Védérine said that he was not aware of this statement, and that he would take it up with the Indian Prime Minister. Nothing has been heard about this since.

Weapons sales

Despite these problems, France is very eager to deepen its defense cooperation with India. Paris is making maximum efforts to sell the Alpha Jet Advanced Jet Trainer to the Indian Air Force. This is the reason why, three days before Védérine arrived, the French Foreign Ministry and Air Force brought the biggest-ever defense contingent to visit India for one week. France is finding it difficult to sell the Alpha Jet. The German Air Force, which bought the Alpha Jet, has discontinued its use. If India decides to buy it, it would require close to 60 of the jet trainers, and such a purchase would fulfill French hopes to revive the production facility.

The Védérine visit may open up other collaboration between Indian and French firms in the near future. Among the projects on the table, is the opening of a French cultural center in Mumbai (Bombay), a laser factory jointly financed by India and France, and an exhibition of Picasso's work in major Indian cities by the year 2002.

French firms are also looking to India to purchase their water purification and nuclear fission technologies. This potential remains curbed by France's strict adherence to the ban on the transfer of dual-use technology.

The tone set by Védérine's visit, should certainly be noted in Washington. On March 19, President Bill Clinton arrives in New Delhi, to make the first visit of an American President to India, the world's largest democracy, in more than 22 years. The next day, Clinton will go to Bangladesh, to make the first ever visit of a U.S. President to that democratic nation of more than 80 million people, and then return to India the same day, where he will remain until March 24. It remains unclear, and a controversial issue, whether Clinton will visit, or even stop over, in Pakistan.

This visit of the U.S. President comes amidst a dangerous atmosphere of escalating tension between India and Pakistan, over Kashmir especially. There is much reason to fear, that once the winter weather conditions end in the region, war between the two countries will become a possibility. While the nuclear-armed military leadership in Pakistan has gone on a confrontation course with India over Kashmir, India has remained determined to resist nuclear blackmail. At the same time, as Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes said at a New Delhi seminar on Jan. 24, India remains prepared to both fight and win limited wars, as it did in the Kargil conflict of spring 1999.

Clinton is making this visit very late in his administration, and the issues so far being mooted for discussion, include the CTBT and Kashmir. Clinton has stated, that he respects the Indian position, that Kashmir is a bilateral issue, and that it might be possible he could have constructive input into the fraught situation on the subcontinent. However, if he fails, the war danger would only be increased. The potential does exist, within a world situation approaching chaos, that such a conflict could get out of control, and even escalate toward nuclear war.