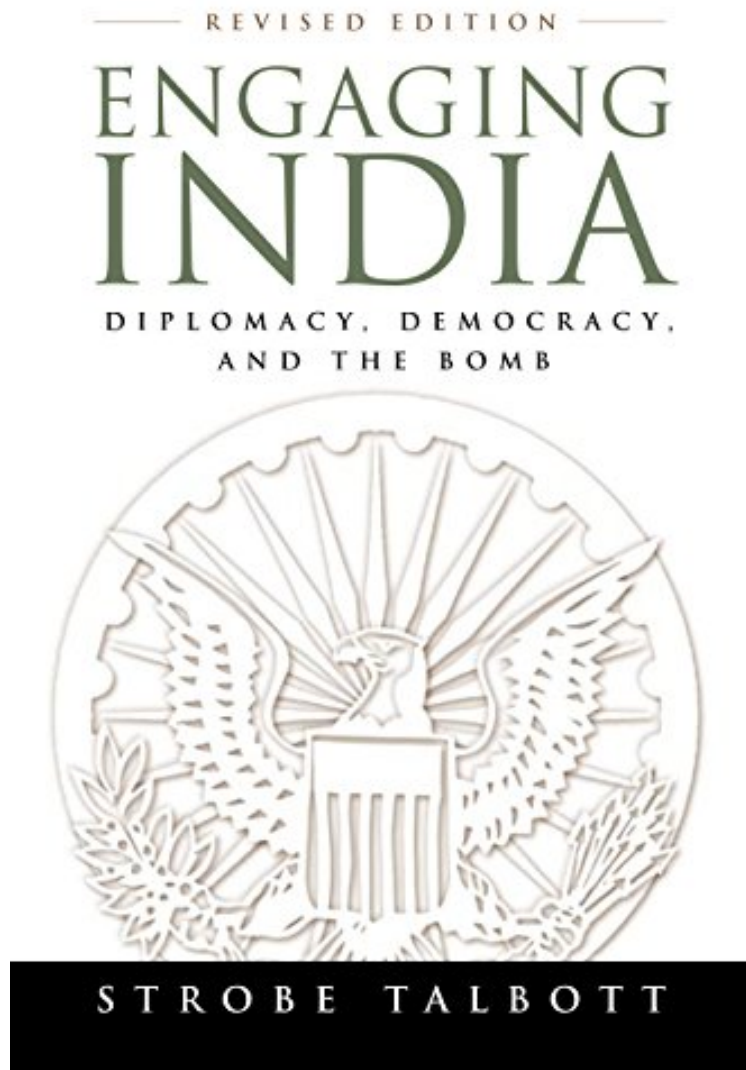


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Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb

Strobe Talbott

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Strobe Talbott : Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy, and the Bomb:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An insightful and revealing look into Indo-American relationshipBy ArjunStrobe Talbott has written a powerful account of the events that unfolded after India's shock atomic tests. The book is special in that it is not simply political accounting, but rather a personal diary on Strobe's dealings with India and Pakistan. He does not hide the personal friendship that developed between him and an Indian named Jaswant Singh (then the Minister of External Affairs) as they fought to understand each other. Honest and deliberate, the book provides a refreshing look at the mechanics of the Indian bomb program, democracy and the personal battles on both

sides that ushered in the current golden age of Indo-American relations. Apart from the tales of diplomacy, the book also provides a frightening account of how close South Asia's rivals were to nuclear holocaust on two separate occasions. Strobe paints a picture of stark contrast in his dealings with the Indians and Pakistanis. Two nations that for better or for worse were locked in a deadly nuclear embrace. 19 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Strobe and Jaswant's Excellent Adventure

By Izaak VanGalen

Strobe Talbot's memoir begins in 1998 when the Vajpayee Government in India shocked the world by conducting the Pokran II nuclear tests. The State Department - Talbot's employer - learned about the tests from CNN, and the CIA learned about them from the State Department. (The CIA used to know things.) The foreign service officer in charge of the State Department's bureau of intelligence and research wryly remarked, "It looks like we're all having a bad government day." Talbot was the Clinton's Administration's resident expert on Russian-affairs, but after the tests (Pakistan followed with nuclear tests two weeks later), he was immediately reassigned as the point person and crisis manager for South Asia. His assignment was to persuade India to limit the development and deployment of their nuclear weapons; this included the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Talbot and his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh met fourteen times over the last two and half years of the Clinton administration. This extended dialog between Talbot and Singh ended with Talbot's failure to persuade India to accept any restraints on its nuclear weapons program - which came as no surprise to either Talbot or Singh. The dialog - the engagement of India - brought many unintended benefits. Treaties such as the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the (CTBT) are, from an Indian perspective, discriminatory and condescending against everyone except the original five nuclear powers. The nuclear option was seen by the Vajpayee Government, and especially by the right-leaning nationalists of the Bharatiya Janata Party, as not only a realistic defense policy, but also a tool for achieving great power status. They never had any intention of signing the CTBT. Talbot, for his part, was dealing with a weak hand because the Republican senators in the US were also unwilling to endorse the treaty. What became valuable was the engagement itself in that it altered the direction of US-Indian relations from one of mutual estrangement to one of trust and cooperation. This was illustrated during the 1999 invasion by Pakistan of the Kargil area of Kashmir. As President Clinton was holding talks with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan to halt the invasion, he was at the same time consulting Vajpayee and seeking his advice. This so impressed the Indian side that it paved the way for Clinton's historic visit in 2000. One of the fascinating things about this book is the personality of Jaswant Singh. Singh hails from Rajasthan where his intimate experience with Islamic extremism pushed him toward the BJP's staunch Hindu idealogy. He had presciently warned Talbot that America did not fully appreciate the dangers of radical Islam. And regarding Pakistan, Singh was opposed to the very idea of Pakistan; the partition that took place more than fifty years ago had been a huge mistake. He noted with characteristic flair that, "Kashmir should be understood as an objectification of Pakistan's predicament as a lost soul among nations, an ersatz country whose founders' only legacy was a permanent reminder of what a tragic mistake partition had been." In the end, Talbot's own views on Islamic extremism and Pakistan had come closer to Singh's. "Engaging India" is a fascinating account of the behind-the-scenes diplomacy that led to the improvement of US-Indian relations after fifty years of mistust. With India's growing economic and military power the Bush Administration has wisely decided to shelve the nuclear dispute and opt for military and strategic cooperation. We can only hope that it continues to be an excellent adventure.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A Passage to India Is Always a Passage to More Than India

By Etienne RPA senior scientist, who later on went on to become president of India, once praised the author for having established the diplomatic equivalent of "impedance matching", loosely defined as "the practice of attempting to make the output impedance of a source equal to the input impedance of the load to which it is ultimately connected, usually in order to maximise the power transfer and minimise reflections from the load", while "impedance, measured in ohms, is the vector sum of the resistance and the reactance." I am not sure that this definition aptly describes the US-Indian strategic dialogue that Strobe Talbot and his Indian counterpart Jaswant Singh conducted during the two years and a half that followed the atomic test of May 11, 1998. Arguably, the author's own characterization of this dialogue as a kind of engagement, implying both conciliation and contest, provides a better description of what happened during those repeated interactions conducted on behalf of two governments grappling with geopolitical challenges. The goals pursued by Washington in the negotiation were spelled out very early in the process and drew additional strength from their endorsement by the UN security council. First on the list of steps the US wanted India to take was its signature on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and its promise never to test a nuclear device again. Second was Indian cooperation in negotiating a treaty that would end the production of fissile material (weapons-grade plutonium and highly enriched uranium). Another condition was to refrain from putting nuclear warheads on their missiles or bombers and to exercise "strategic restraint" in the deployment of ballistic missiles. The fourth benchmark was not to export equipment, materials, or technology that could help other countries acquire nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles on their own. A fifth step called on India and Pakistan to resume dialogue to address the root causes of tension between them, including Kashmir.

Engaging India blends three different stories. The first is a behind-the-scenes narrative of a diplomatic negotiation between two individuals who came from very different backgrounds but came to respect, trust and appreciate each other. Although Jaswant Singh, a diplomat soldier hailing from Rajasthan, was soon elevated to the position of minister for external affairs and thus outranked the deputy

secretary of state, the dialogue continued as before without much consideration for protocol. The fact that Strobe Talbott was known as an old friend of Bill Clinton and was rumored to have direct access to the President added some mystique to the negotiation that he conducted intermittently during two years, among other demanding assignments. Certainly the officials from Pakistan, with whom he conducted a parallel discussion process, did not enjoy the same latitude from their prime minister, who himself lived under a constant threat of a military coup (he was ultimately overthrown by general Pervez Musharraf in October 1999). The second story records the main events that affected the US-Indian relationship, starting with the nuclear test at Pokhran and culminating with President Clinton's visit to India in March 2000. The Indians conducted their test knowing that it would provoke American castigation but also hoping that it might force the United States to pay them serious, sustained, and respectful attention of a kind they felt they had never received before. In a way they were right: although America's approach to the subcontinent has historically been marked by a 'tilt' toward Pakistan, Washington came to recognize India as a strategic partner in its own right or, to use the diplomats' lingo, as "a major regional power with the potential of becoming a global one as well". Certainly Clinton's visit to New Delhi, the first by an American president in twenty-two years, provided a high mark in this process. His speech before the Supreme Legislature, quoted extensively by the author, is indeed a piece of anthology. On a third level, Talbott's memoir constitutes a "Passage to India" which, as Walt Whitman noted, is always a "Passage to more than India". Through his engagement with one government official, we have a glimpse to the functioning of a nation that takes pride in its independence and the ancientness of its civilization. Gods are never far from the picture: India's medium-range missile Agni is named for the Hindu god of fire, and a scientist who saw the desert rise after the Pokhran nuclear test remarked, "I can now believe stories of Lord Krishna lifting a hill." In this, he was only echoing Robert Oppenheimer's expression of awe when, witnessing the world's first successful test of an atomic bomb in New Mexico, he recalled a line from the Bhagavad-Gita in which the warrior Arjuna had a vision of a thousand suns raised by Krishna to lead him into battle.

In this revised edition of the highly praised *Engaging India*, Strobe Talbott updates his bestselling diplomatic account of America's parallel negotiations with India and Pakistan over nuclear proliferation in the late 1990s. The update looks at recent nuclear dealings between India and the United States, including Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 2005 visit to America. Under the highly controversial agreement that emerged, the United States would give India access to U.S. nuclear technology and conventional weapons systems. In exchange, India would place its civilian nuclear program under international monitoring and continue the ban on nuclear testing. Praise for the hardback edition "A fascinating study of how diplomatic dialogue can slowly broaden to include subtle considerations of the domestic politics and foreign policies of both countries involved." *Foreign Affairs* "An important addition to the literature of modern diplomatic history." *Choice* "Detailed and revealing... an honest behind-the-scenes look at how countries make and defend policies.... A must-read for any student of diplomacy." *Outlook (India)* "A rapidly engrossing work and a welcome addition to modern world history shelves." *Reviewer's Bookwatch* "A highly engaging book; lucid, informative and at times, amusing." *International Affairs*

"Talbot gives diplomacy and the manner in which it should be reported a wholly new dimension." *M. V. Kamath, (ALSO PRINTED IN FREE PRESS JOURNAL, MUMBAI AND THE ORGANISER), The Sentinel (Guwahati), 10/30/2004* "[A] fascinating study of how diplomatic dialogue can slowly broaden to include subtle considerations of the domestic politics and foreign policies of the countries involved. Talbott considers the complications presented by China and Pakistan and reveals that Washington played an important role in averting a war over Kashmir that could have gone nuclear." *Lucian W. Pye, Foreign Affairs* "A true story with a positive message, *ENGAGING INDIA* is a rapidly engrossing work and a welcome addition to modern world history shelves." *John Burroughs, Midwest Book* "... a fascinating first-hand story of the diplomacy conducted between the United States and India after the nuclear tests." *The Statesman, 9/19/2004* "... what comes through in this engrossing work is the author's intellectual honesty and his unerring understanding of the Indian psyche." *M.V. Kamath, Organiser, 10/17/2004* "[A] serious, sometimes funny, often exasperating tale told very well.... Highly recommended." *John F. Riddick, Central Michigan University Library, Mt. Pleasant, Library Journal, 10/15/2004* "*ENGAGING INDIA* is a rapidly engrossing work and a welcome addition to modern world history shelves." *John Burroughs, er's Bookwatch, 10/1/2004* "Besides simply explaining the arcana on strategy and nuclear policy, this slim two hundred-odd page book is also an enjoyable read. -- If it is true that we need more understanding and communication in this world, then this memoir is a valuable contribution to that cause." *Sudheer Apte, DesiJournal, 8/20/2004* "His clearly written account is an important addition to the literature of modern diplomatic history." *R. Marlay, Arkansas State University, Choice, 3/1/2005* "*ENGAGING INDIA* is a highly engaging book; lucid, informative and at times, amusing." *Gareth Price, Asia Programme, Chatham House, International Affairs, 3/15/2005* "Those interested in questions pertaining to American foreign policy, the dispersion of nuclear weapons, and diplomatic negotiations should all find this work to be of more than passing interest. Talbott, a former journalist of some repute, writes with clarity, verve, and a remarkable attention to vivid

detail. His graceful and compelling prose, coupled with the insight that he provides in the complex negotiating process, should make *Engaging India* attractive to a much wider audience." mdash; Parameters, 4/1/2006"With humor, grace and insight, Strobe Talbott chronicles a fascinating journey of diplomacy to overcome decades of U.S.-Indian estrangement and achieve a foundation of trust on which to build a relationship in the 21st century." mdash;George Perkovich, Vice President for Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace"The book not only enlightens the reader on the ebbs and flows in the Indian-American bilateral relationship through both bad and improving times. It is a primer on the do's and don'ts of nuclear diplomacy." mdash;Richard G. Lugar, United States Senator"Strobe Talbott has written a gem of a diplomatic memoir. This ultimate insider account of American efforts to steer relations with and between India and Pakistan after their 1998 nuclear tests manages the hat trick of being candid, fair, and authoritative. The result is an **ENGAGING INDIA** that is truly engaging." mdash;Richard Haass, President, Council on Foreign Relations"Strobe provides both engaging first-person accounts and deep reflections. As a foreign policy aficionado, I found it a gripping read." mdash;Kishore Mahbubani, Author of *CAN ASIANS THINK?* and *BEYOND THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* (forthcoming)"A 'must read' book for anyone interested in how the United States deals with one of the decade's most important rising powers." mdash;Ambassador Teresita C. Schaffer, Director for South Asia, Center for Strategic and International Studies

About the AuthorStrobe Talbott is president of the Brookings Institution. He served as deputy secretary of state from 1994 to 2001. For twenty-one years prior to his service in government, he was correspondent and columnist for *Time* magazine. He has written nine books, including *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (Random House, 2002), a personal account of U.S. diplomacy toward Russia during the Clinton administration. One-Page Biography