

The Indo-US strategic alliance

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INDIA has reasons to celebrate the visit of President Bush—sealing of the landmark nuclear deal, technology transfer, doubling trade in three years, visa concessions and many more that could not be revealed. It is the turning point of Indo-US strategic relations comparable to the visit of President Richard Nixon to China in '72. In diplomacy there is nothing like free lunch. India is tied by common interest to this apparently free ride into the unfolding events of 21st century. It is now a willing partner of two-pronged US strategy – containment of the restive Muslim states and expanding China. A peep into history is relevant here.

Bolshevik Revolution in Czarist Russia had catapulted the Muslim belt into frontline states on the southern fringe of the Red Empire, as the NATO was on the European front in post-Second World War era. Towards that end the Muslims were medicated with a mixture of religion and monarchy to fight the 'godless' system. And where the patent drug failed, they were forced-fed with civil or military dictatorship. That was the strategy of containment against Red Army's threat towards warm waters of the Indian Ocean.

After the collapse of the USSR there was need to dilute the reaction of the hard drug that had been administered on the Muslims throughout the most eventful century of the human existence. Rise of fundamentalism in Iran is a case in point, while Taleban in Afghanistan, Hamas in Palestine

and the looming civil war in Iraq are the reactions to the unfair deals.

In the new strategic game plan India is the duel-purpose midway fortress. On one side is the restive Muslim belt on the confluence of the three continents from the shores of Atlantic to the peripheries of the Indian Ocean, simmering in ever-increasing ferocity; on the other side of the Himalayas is the giant China, about to rise. India today is bolstered as a 'China card' against China.

Democracy and market culture make India resilient that provides a cushion against possible conflict of interests between the two largest democracies. Friendship with the Muslim countries with the dictators and monarchs was an uneasy alliance of convenience – very temporary and paradoxical. With the godless Red Enemy gone, the odd alliances between 'cat and the mice' are falling apart. China with her 1.4 billion population and fast growing economy poses a formidable challenge to the West. India with a fast growing billion-plus population and shining economy is a potential match to the voluminous China. Despite democracy and market economy, international relations will continue to be guided by national interests than by moral imperatives.

No wonder the US president and Indian Prime Minister will have regular pilgrimage to savour each other's hospitality and pep talks in the future. When Dr. Manmohan Singh teased President Bush for not taking Laura (First Lady) to the romantic Taj Mahal, it is understood that happiness in India is expressed

by teasing in the opening salvo of the coming honeymoon. The visit also symbolises urgency of the election year politics that needs some success abroad for the beleaguered Republicans.

With the upgradation of political, economic and military strategy, nuclear deal with India was not thorny; that USA would offer advanced technology and options to India was an inevitable conclusion. But to satisfy the eager eyes of the non-proliferation regime on the wholesome concession is tricky matter. Segregation of civil and military facilities arbitrarily by India alone by 2014 is but skirting the boost of nuclear arsenal that American advanced technology will offer. India already possesses credible nuclear technology to produce electricity. Why else India needs American technology so frantically? And how else American can give under the table of the nuclear regime? But it cannot go without strings; Americans will need to call the shots at the right time. India has voted twice against Iran in nuclear controversy as a price and will continue to side with the USA in future controversies. Iranian nuclear controversy is the first litmus test for India to gain US favour.

How long will China be allowed to rise as a potential threat to the sole hyper power by selling goods and services to the Americans? Doubling two-way trade in three years is in fact diverting some trade from China towards India. American businesses are targeting on the billion plus Indians, specially honing on the three hundred million

middleclass. Increase in the budget allocation to 31% for education, 21% for health and a whopping 8.1 growth of GDP is simply irresistible to the corporate world.

The USA—ten thousand miles away—and neighbouring India with her matching bulk and ambition are expected to challenge China, if the right encouragement is provided through technology and trade. Readying India for 'the Clash of Ambition' is equally important like the so-called 'Clash of the Civilization'. India however, is likely to continue as a hesitant partner due to her demographic chemistry and Asiatic culture.

America has fortress Japan and outpost South Korea to deny Chinese expansion towards the Pacific. Energy hungry China's thrust logically will be towards the Middle East and Central Asia. India always claimed Indian Ocean as its lake, craftily protesting outside military presence in it. There is practically a void between the East of Suez (east coast of Africa) and west of Malacca Strait (Indonesian Archipelago). India has vigorously nursed the ambition for half a century to be the policeman of the littoral areas, but lacked resources and technology for the vast Indian Ocean that covers most of the exportable oil, sea lanes and nearly all Muslim states. The first objective of the grand design is not to allow China to cross Malacca Strait so that it remains energy dependent from the sources and the sea-lanes controlled by Indo-US military strength.

The vast reservoir of educated manpower from India will gradually

eliminate suspicious youths by partially replacing and mostly outsourcing jobs. Muslim youths in the western hemisphere are trailing behind, might not be as a policy, but certainly due to fear factor. Travel to the West for education and employment is shrinking. If it continues, the Muslims will get further marginalised and frustrated. You can't have two worlds in one global village. One major failure of the global war against extremists has been the lack of a comprehensive strategy to draw the Muslims closer. One can feel only the dirty side of this war.

When President Musharraf of Pakistan had to painstakingly explain his uniform in politics in the presence of President Bush we understand the short visit did not proceed very far from what else he could do to eliminate extremists from Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan. Pakistan will continue to receive economic and military assistance for the services provided. But to downgrade Pakistan as a client state will be misreading of geopolitics. Closer proximity of the landlocked Central Asian Republics, where American oil companies had already sunk nearly ten billion dollars, nervous Middle East, war in Afghanistan and Iraq, nuclear capability and largest population base in the Muslim Belt, demand that Pakistan needs careful handling. I suppose, the USA will continue to upgrade strategic friendship with India while still holding the hand of Pakistan.

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Russia-China strategic partnership

Strengthening energy diplomacy



BILLY I AHMED

THE visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to China from March 21-22 and his meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao for the fifth time in less than a year, is a further indication that Moscow and Beijing are moving closer to one another, a riposte to Washington's increasingly belligerent attitude toward the two countries.

Mr. Putin was accompanied by an unprecedented delegation of 1,000 officials and businessmen. He told Russian journalists: "A thousand people. And they all - would like to emphasise this - are engaged in something concrete. First of all, this bears witness to the fact that Russia and China have achieved a very high level of interaction which leads to further expanding our cooperation."

In Beijing, Mr. Putin attended the opening ceremony of China's "Year of Russia" - a series of cultural and business events to promote bilateral relations. Next year, the Russian government is planning its own "Year of China". A Sino-Russia economic forum was held in Beijing to strengthen bilateral trade, which grew 37.1 percent last year, largely due to China's expanding demand for Russian oil, raw materials and weapons.

The focal point of Mr Putin's trip was oil and gas. Of the 29 agreements signed, the most significant was a deal to build two gas pipelines from eastern and western Siberia to China by 2011 at a total cost of up to \$10 billion.

Russia has agreed to supply China with 60-80 billion cubic metres of gas annually, twice the China's

total consumption in 2004. This huge quantity of supply to China has already evoked concerns in Europe, which depends on Russia for 70 percent of its gas.

To the worried European market, Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov promised to fulfill existing contracts. "However, the future increases in gas supplies to Europe - in response to its growing demand - will be subject to arbitrage between China and European countries," he warned. The point is that as of 2011, not just Europe but also Asia will be dependent on Russia's gas.

Russia has the world's largest reserves of natural gas and is the second largest producer of oil. Currently, however, Russia supplies no gas and accounts for only 5 percent of Chinese imports of oil. The pipeline deal will assist China to achieve its target of doubling the proportion of gas in its total energy consumption by 2010. It may be mentioned that world's gas reserves are largely concentrated in three countries: Russia, Iran and Qatar.

For Beijing, the gas deal is clearly a boost after Moscow countermanded a 2003 agreement to build an oil pipeline to the northeastern Chinese city of Daqing. Russia decided instead to accept a Japanese proposal to build an East Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline to the Pacific port of Nakhodka to facilitate oil exports to Japan in particular. China's energy appetite is rated as the world's second largest consumer of oil, is keen to have Russian supplies. In Beijing, Mr. Putin declared that there was "no doubt" that an impetus from ESPO line to

Daqing would be built, but no timetable was given. At present, Russian oil is transported to China via an already overloaded rail system. Russia is expected to ship about 15 million tonnes of oil to China this year, nearly double last year's level.

With the US occupying Iraq and threatening Iran, it is clear to America's rivals in Europe and Asia that Washington is seeking control Middle Eastern oil and gas. Thus securing back-up supplies has become a crucial issue for European countries as well as China, Japan and India. Russia is an obvious option.

Reinforcing China as a market, Russia will be able to manipulate energy supplies even more effectively as a strategic weapon. Moscow has already used its position as gas supplier to threaten pro-Western regimes in Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia and indirectly warn France and Germany against putting too much political pressure on Russia.

At present, Russian and Chinese foreign policies broadly coincide. Both countries share concerns about Washington's aggressive policies - in particular the US-led occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and the US military presence in Central Asia. Moscow confronts hostile US-backed "colour revolutions" in former Soviet republics. Beijing is facing a barely disguised policy of US strategic containment through a network of allies, including Japan, South Korea, Australia and India.

Russia and China are not only forging a closer economic relationship but a strategic one as

well. With a continuing arms embargo imposed by the US and EU after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, China already relies on Russia as its single largest source of weapons and military technology, in turn revitalising Russia's dilapidated arms industry.

In a joint communiqué, Mr. Putin and Chinese President Hu spelled out their "shared interests," which reaffirmed the sovereignty of independent nations that is, opposition to US intervention in regions vital to Chinese and Russian interests. It called for a "political and diplomatic" solution of the Iranian nuclear standoff, in opposition to the US push for economic sanctions and military action against Tehran.

Consequently, the communiqué called for "a triangular cooperative mechanism" with India. The Bush administration has been seeking to establish India as a major strategic ally as part of its geopolitical plans, including encircling China. In response, China and Russia are trying to woo India away from the US. Last year they granted observer status to New Delhi for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) of Central Asian states. The meeting in Kazakhstan issued a statement calling for the US to set a deadline to shut down its military bases in Central Asia.

The Beijing joint communiqué also backed China against Taiwan, supporting Beijing's Anti-secession Law passed last year that authorises the use of military force against Taiwan if it declares formal independence. The communiqué declared that Taiwan was part of China's "internal affairs" and other countries should not interfere.

In an interview with the official Xinhua news agency before his trip, Putin pointedly criticised Washington's support for pro-US regimes in former Soviet republics such as Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. He said the US was trying to "forcibly export democracy and impose cultural standards and values".

Russia and China are also holding joint military exercises. Last year, the two countries held their first-ever combined war games "Peace Mission 2005" on the Chinese coast. Although not stated, the obvious target of their imaginary "mission" was Taiwan. Last month, Russia announced plans for the second joint exercises in the spring of 2007 in Russia's sensitive Southern Federal District or northern Caucasus, which includes Chechnya and is adjacent to Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine.

Washington is likely to react to this close relationship between Russia and China in an even pushier manner.

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India's military acquisition and militarisation of the Indian Ocean

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IT is common knowledge that India assesses its security concerns in the light of China's military strength and Pakistan defines its security as against India's position. In addition there is no common security perception in South Asia, rather some of the states in South Asia perceive security threats as arising from within the region.

India has intensified manufacturing missile capabilities not only as a defence strategy but also as symbol of power and prestige. Most significantly, India plans to acquire Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system from Israel and Russia as part of its efforts to neutralise missile capabilities of Pakistan.

India's nuclear protocol provides the guidelines of use of nuclear weapons. It is to deter the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons by any state or entity against India and its forces. The incorporation of the word "entity" is significant because it refers to non-state actors.

Another provision of nuclear protocol states that India will not resort to the use of or threat of use of nuclear weapons against states, which do not possess nuclear weapons or are not aligned with nuclear weapon powers. This means a non-nuclear weapon state may be attacked with nuclear weapons if India perceives that it is aligned with nuclear weapon powers. This demonstrates that India's nuclear protocol has been stretched to its limit.

India is a regional power, fully backed by the Bush administration. It is the only power in Asia, which is able to counterweigh China's emerging power in Asia Pacific. The Bush administration unlike the Clinton administration considers China as "strategic a competitor", not as "strategic partner." That is why the Bush administration is keen to ensure that India can stand up to China's military strength. The recent nuclear deal between the US-India is an instance in point. Never before has the US relaxed its rules for a country that is not a party to the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Following the path of the US, Australia that has 40% of uranium, is seriously considering reversing its long-held policy and supply uranium to India. To keep the balance right, it is noted that recently during the visit of the Chinese Prime Minister, Australia signed an agreement with China to provide not only uranium but also facilitate China to explore some of the uranium mines in Australia.

New Acquisition

In a deal on 27 January of this year, India and Israel are to collaborate on the development of a next-generation Barak (Lightning) ship-borne area air-defence missile system. The joint development programme is reported to be around US\$330 million. It will be the first joint

weapons development between India and Israel. The missile system will combine mid-course guidance updates with active radar homing in the terminal phase.

It has been reported that India's Navy is seriously considering a UK offer of eight second-hand Royal Navy Sea Harrier F.A.2 fighters. The eight aircraft would operate as training platform to support Indian Navy Sea Harriers FRS.51 fleet. Rear Admiral Damle had visited the UK recently to inspect the Sea Harriers.

UK Minister of Defence Procurement Lord Drayson led a delegation to New Delhi at the beginning of February. He, reportedly, confirmed that the fighters' AIM-120 AMRAAM (Advanced Medium Range Air to Air Missile) capability would be removed from the aircraft before they were handed over to the Indian Navy. The aircraft would however retain their Ferranti ARI.50019 Blue Vixen radars.

The Indian Navy's 16 Sea Harrier Mk 51s are reportedly receiving their first limited upgrade, which is expected to be completed over the next 18 months. In addition, a second-hand 44,500 tonne Kiev class carrier is scheduled to enter Indian navy service in 2008-09.

The Indian Navy is poised for large-scale hardware acquisitions that include eight maritime reconnaissance aircraft, helicopters, submarines, frigates and two aircraft carriers by 2012 for an extended role in the Indian Ocean.

The new Israeli radars will replace the Blue Fox radars. Indian air force would receive its first batch of 66 BAE Hawk Mk 115 Y Advanced Jet trainers early in 2007 to plug the gap in training its fighter pilots. The Euro-fighter Typhoon would be running for the Indian air force's plan to acquire 126 multi-role combat aircraft alongside the US F-16 and F-18, France's Mirage 200-5 and Rafale, Russia's MiG-35 and Sweden's Gripen.

Such acquisition of 126 multi-role combat aircraft would significantly boost its military power at a cost of around US\$ 10 billion or more. Furthermore it has been reported that 20 locally designed Tejas light combat aircraft would be procured by 2008. The expansion of India's multi-role combat aircraft requirement is believed to be driven by requirement from Indian Navy for its use in the Indian Ocean.

Militarisation of the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean is gradually being militarised. India, Pakistan, Myanmar and Malaysia have been establishing military infrastructure projects that are intended for power projection. The littoral states are building new naval or air facilities or expanding or upgrading the existing ones. India's programme is the most ambitious one.

New Delhi has undertaken a number of naval and air construction projects at Kochi (Kerala) and Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a planned military reconnaissance center in the Maldives and a new facility in Sri Lanka. Pakistan with the financial assistance of China is constructing an ambitious naval facility at Gwadar (Balochistan)

Conclusion

Irrespective of its efforts of reconciliation of peace with China and Pakistan, India is building up its military strength and this is nothing unusual. As an emerging power, India wants to be counted and noticed by big powers. Nehru in his book "The Discovery of India" (1946) classed India as one of the four powers, the other three being the US, Russia and China. India is poised to achieve the dream of Nehru.

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