

US and India eye the South Asia waters

COMMODORE MD. KHURSHED ALAM, *ndc, psc BN (Retd)*

INDIA was not seen by the US as an essential and cooperative part of solutions to major international problems. Rather, India was one of the problems, a nuclear renegade with policies threatening the entire non-proliferation regime and was rewarded with the nuclear sanction soon after its nuclear explosion in 1998 with India's reaction to this continual American carping of being defiant, seemingly having unbridgeable gap between the two sides on these nuclear issues. There was little diplomatic cooperation with virtually no military interaction. After decades of tense relation, India and the United States linked to pursue a durable defense partnership and common concerns in South Asian waters. The cooperation points out defense, trade, and technology as a vital component of the relationship because it helps to build ties among their defense establishments and industries and to develop interoperability among their armed forces. The separate efforts of India and the United States to enhance security in South Asian waters are indicative of the broad range of common interests the two nations share after decades of suspicion and hatred during and after the post cold war era.

For global safety and security both countries agreed to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries and stressed that terrorism is a global scourge that must be fought and rooted out from every part of the world. India has welcomed the increased cooperation with the United States in the defense area as this was evidenced by successful joint exercises, expanded defense cooperation and information sharing, and greater opportunities to jointly develop technologies and address security and humanitarian issues. They have also reaffirmed their commitment to the protection of the free flow of commerce and to the safety of navigation, and successfully concluded a Maritime Cooperation Framework to enhance security in the maritime domain, to prevent piracy and other transnational crimes at sea, carry out search and rescue operations, combat marine pollution, respond to natural disasters, address emergent threats and enhance cooperative capabilities; both sides are also working to finalize a Logistics Support Agreement. On the other hand US welcomed India's intention to join the Container Security Initiative aimed at making global maritime trade and infrastructure more secure and reducing the risk of shipping containers being used to conceal weapons of mass

destruction. Options also include the US sponsored Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI). Both countries have also reiterated their commitment to international efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their improved capabilities to respond to disaster situations. This new "framework" for defense cooperation calls for a range of cooperative efforts between the two nations including concerted efforts in trying to improve military relations with China, and maintaining an intensive focus on the Malacca Strait, a vital international trade route and 600-mile link between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. India and the United States each are reaching out to win new friends and allies in Asia.

Defense cooperation between the two countries is growing as they increase the size and complexity of their joint military exercises and explore the feasibility of increasing the sale of U.S. defense goods and services to India. The warming relations come amid fundamental changes in the foreign policy and defense strategies of each nation. India was for years a leader of the so-called Non Aligned Movement - rooted in anti-colonialism - that proclaimed political neutrality and resisted diplomatic alliance with the United States or the United Kingdom. In some ways, India was a satellite in the Soviet sphere of influence, in part because it relied heavily on the Soviet Union for military technology and weapons. Pakistan openly aligned with the United States during the Cold War and India approached Moscow after it was cold-shouldered by the United States in helping to modernize its military. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the rise of India's global trade - much of it with the United States, India recognized a need to broaden its alliances. There is a new crop of bureaucrats rising up in the Indian Foreign Service who view the United States as more of an ally rather than as someone who is hell-bent on containing India. After 9/11, the Bush administration looked out at the world from a different point of view. The United States created alliances with countries near Afghanistan, quickly repaired its strained military relationship with Pakistan and began to see India as a huge democracy with lots of potential.

Several top US and Indian defense officials like the Minister of defense, and Chief of the Naval Staff, Defense Secretary, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Commander of the US Pacific Fleet visited each others' countries. The result is the purchase deal of US Navy ship Trenton with its six H-3 Sea King transport helicopters and



an assortment of smaller boats, which was formally commissioned into the Indian Navy as INS Jalashva. It is expected to expand India's aspiring blue water navy to enable both troop movements and relief and rescue on both sides of the subcontinent. Trenton was commissioned in 1971 and has seen action in Lebanon and Somalia among other places, landing US troops and rescuing American citizens. The vessel was formally decommissioned from the US Navy, and a full complement of more than 300 Indian sailors and 27 officers led by Captain B S Ahluwalia (VSM) took over the ship in February 2007 under the deal called 'hot transfer'. The ship joined the Eastern Naval Command based at Visakhapatnam in April 2007. The navy purchased the ship for \$48.44 million, including helicopters and boats. Although the Indian Navy overcame a myriad of obstacles during the Tsunami disaster to bring off a stupendous relief act, the navy felt an acute need for an amphibious landing ship. That gaping hole in the Indian armada was filled to a large extent with the Trenton, a massive amphibious loading dock. The 17,000-ton vessel will be the second largest ship in the Indian Navy after the aircraft carrier Viraat, and the first American ship to join the Indian fleet. The ship is expected to serve in the Indian Navy for at least 15 more years. The

Trenton experience could also lead Indian Navy to consider other US purchases. The Indian Navy has long considered having at least three aircraft carriers in its fleet. With the Russian aircraft carrier Gorshkov joining as INS Viraat, there is some talk of having another carrier, particularly since Viraat itself, of 1945 vintage, is nearing the end of its life. Many in India are hoping that US Navy's two dozen nuclear-powered aircraft carriers - a dozen in service and a dozen in reserve with about 75,000-100,000 ton displacement could be inducted as replacement. Although they cost in the billions and are considered way above both India's requirement even if they came at the cut-rate price of Trenton. Meanwhile, the U.S. Pacific Fleet are also using its submarines and maritime patrol aircraft - some assigned from a U.S. base in Bahrain - to maintain surveillance in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

US Navy Chief, during his recent visit to India, met his counterpart and briefed him about their ambitious plan to build a 'Thousand Navy ship' (TSN) global maritime force which would include naval forces of Russia, China and India. The briefing also included the global response to the plan, its shape and proposed methodology of formulation to ensure interoperability amongst participating navies. The

concept is centered on sharing of information about maritime threats and situations. First, India would be a part of the US intelligence grid as such information sharing would neither impinge on India's sovereignty nor would it conflict with international law. India finds it an opportunity as it would provide with the politico diplomatic goodwill as India is unlikely to join PSI. In this effort the US wants India to take initiative to get the cooperation of Russia and China. Though US has stated that the 1000 ship navy would not be a thousand grey hulls flying the American Flag rather a voluntary global maritime network that ties together the collective capabilities of free nations, it has yet to get support from China. The cooperation between Indian navies with China, Russia and the US can be assessed from the fact that two guided missile destroyers just participated on a joint naval exercise with China's guided missile destroyers in Yellow Sea in 2007. The same day, India was carrying on in a trilateral naval exercise with the US and Japanese fleets in the Pacific Ocean. Thereafter, India and Russia are also conducting a joint naval exercise off the coast of Vladivostok in the Great Bay. Defense analysts in India are more than happy to veer around to be an active participant of the TSN through an international maritime cooperation agreement.

TSN may imply cooperation on a wider scale through enhancing interoperability; this could conceivably put up a road block in the way of India being party of the first order to a TSN navy project since existing allies of the US in the Asian region such as Japan, Australia and South Korea all have ships equipped with the Aegis combat system, giving them the ability to create a shared command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance network.

The Indian navy is also working toward a blue water capability to protect maritime interests in the Malacca strait and elsewhere and its latest doctrine documents also note aspirations toward littoral warfare, aircraft carriers, submarines and stealth warfare.

It is not clear why India is planning to build such a huge navy at an exorbitant cost to the nation without having a defined threat from any of 47 countries that share the rim of the Indian Ocean. With the direct backing of the US, it is not fathomable where this cooperation will lead to and how much bullying will have to be tolerated by the smaller navies, for that matter littorals of the region.

The author is a freelancer.

The Hindu view of Islam: A critical review

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

A dialogue was held between Hinduism and Islam in Glasgow University, U.K. on 30th November 2006 wherein this author spoke on Muslim view of Hinduism and Prof. Chakravarthy Ram-Prasad who teaches Hinduism in U.K. spoke on "A Hindu View of Islam."

I must say Prof. Ram-Prasad's views of Islam are quite objective and rational. He is free of prejudices, which are prevalent among non-Muslims. His paper is quite scholarly and well documented. I had also heard him speak during the dialogue and whatever he said about Islam was agreeable. However, his treatment of the subject is more historical and political rather than theological. He also concentrates on Indian Islam rather than universal Islam.

Before we deal with this aspect of the problem, I must mention a very valid point Chakravarthy makes. He observes that the pan-Indian religious identities were created by British colonialists. He observes, "While there is controversy over whether a sense of religious identity already played a role in motivating social violence between communities in pre-colonial India; arguably, the fixation of monolithic identities through the construction of pan-Indian religious communities was carried out through the administrative rationale of British rule in India and communal violence thereafter was clearly part of this colonial fixation of identities."

This is not only a very valid observation but also is the key to understanding and solving communal problem. Construction of pan-Indian religious communities and identities was a colonial political project, which is being perpetrated by our political leaders in post-colonial, post-independence India. One has, therefore, not only to emphasise multiple identities and Indian lives but one also has to realise that the idea of pan-Indian religious communities is going to pose political problems.

But then Ram-Prasad also maintains, with some justification of course, that "...one realises that this British colonial project was by no means conjured out of thin air: after all, distinctions clearly existed between groups in Hindu society, and there were certainly pronounced distinctions between the commitments of the established streams of Islam and those of the multifarious Hindu traditions." But then he points out "The fixation of a single Hindu identity, as one that held across a myriad of traditions, and was held to trump all other forms of self-reference, looks to be a colonial construct; and I am arguing that it is that is relevant to the apparent naturalness of the Hindu-Muslim divide."

However, problem does not start only with the construction of a single Hindu identity as a colonial project, it also lies in the sense of 'civilizational divide', as Ram-Prasad puts it, created by the writings of a number of Muslim elite who had accompanied various armies that invaded the Hindu kingdoms of India or attended courts of Muslim rulers. But again use of words like 'Hindu kingdoms' and 'Muslim rulers' are somewhat problematic. This is again to fall prey to colonial construction of identities. No such identity as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' existed. There were different Buddhist, Rajput, Brahman dynasties which were invaded and those who invaded should not be bracketed within universal Muslim identity; they too belonged wither to Ghaznavid, Slave, Tughlaq or Khalji dynasties who were fighting against each other. Using words like 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' rule or 'Hindu and Muslim' period leads to supporting the colonial project.

Muslims themselves were divided not only among various invading dynasties but also among those who came from outside and those who were converted, again for myriad reasons to Islam. Those converted were despised by the ruling classes who came from outside. The latter looked down upon the indigenous Muslims. Also, the indigenous Muslims like Hasan Mewati, refused to side with invader like Babur and instead fought with Rana Sanga and thousands of Mewati Muslims (indigenously converted) fought along with the Rana and courted death.

Thus Indian social reality is extremely complex and defies any neat categorisation, however carefully made. The Pathans, whom the Moghuls had defeated never saw eye to eye with them and always sided with those who fought against Moghuls. Then also Rajput clans were fighting against each other and some Rajput rulers like Raja Mansingh sided with Moghuls whereas some others like Rana Pratap fought against them. And a Pathan like Hakim Khan Sur fought against Moghul army along with soldiers of Rana Pratap. Thus a Rajput fought a Rajput and a Muslim (Akbar) fought a Muslim (Hakim Khan Sur).

Among elite Muslim writings also one finds no homogeneity. As I have shown in my paper ("A Muslim View of Hinduism") some Ulama took what could be described as anti-Hindu view as if there was 'civilizational divide', others like Dara Shikoh, Mazhar Jan-I-Janan and several others took diametrically opposite view and came to the conclusion that Islam did not clash with Vedas and Upanishads, the indigenous scriptures. Dara Shikoh, particularly, showed complete harmony between the two religious scriptures.

The crucial divide was political, rather than theological. Those Ulama, who were part of ruling political establishments, tended to be hostile towards followers of indigenous religious traditions (as party of power politics and courting favour with rules) than those who grappled with religious differences outside charmed circle of political power. Dara Shikoh was studying 'Hindu' religion seriously as a non-political theological project and hence he found great similarities between the two.

Prof. Prasad also points out that "The British were not the only ones to read into these elite discourses the entire history of India as the violent clash of Islam with Hinduism, the utter rejection of every aspect of the latter's culture by the former and the essential even racial difference between Muslims and Hindus." He then continues, "In the 20th century, as the political movement to gain independence from Britain grew, the Muslim League organisation began to argue that if the principle of nationhood for Indians was to be granted, it would have to be applied equally to separate people, Hindus and Muslims." It is true that Muslim League almost agreed with the British reading of Indian history based on the assumption of 'clash of civilization'. Muslim League was clashing with the Hindus as a whole, (ignoring that a large number of Hindus led by Gandhi and Nehru stood for secular India) was a political project. Jinnah neither knew nor was interested in knowing fundamentals of Hindu religion (he hardly knew of Islam as well). Jinnah was fighting in political arena.

It will be wrong to assume that Muslim League was the only sinner. The Hindu communal forces were no less. Thus, as pointed out by Ram-Prasad, the emergence of a single unified Hindu identity derived from the colonial construction of a single Hindu 'religion' out of organically inter-related but infinitely diverse traditions, came close to the idea of India as a 'Hindu nation'. And for Leaguers too 'Hindu India' was more acceptable than secular India. Together they carried the cross of partition.

Coming to contemporary India, Ram-Prasad deals with communal situation. He feels that whatever performance of Hindutva forces in Parliament, the Hindu nationalist assertion of a natural Hindu majority has certainly taken root in urban India, even if voters are uncertain in their support of it at election time, when more fundamental questions of governance and even caste identity seem to supersede religion as factors.

Ram-Prasad also refers to bomb blasts and attacks by jihadi groups and even feels that these trans-national jihadi attacks are more in number and devastation than in Europe. This further compounds the situation though these attacks have not made real dent on Hindu-Muslim relations.

The author also deals with the socio-economic situation of Muslims in India and refers to recently published Sachar Committee report. However, Ram-Prasad feels though there is discrimination against Muslims at lower levels of government jobs, it is lack of education and merit which results in poorer representation of Muslims in higher echelons. But at the same time he admits lack of education is also partly result of economic situation and not necessarily lack of interest in modern education.

Thus on the whole it seems Prof. Prasad deals with the subject fairly objectively though one may differ from him in certain assertions here and there. Prof. Prasad, however, does not deal with, or is perhaps not equipped to deal with, the theological aspects of Hindu view of Islam. The Hindutva forces are attacking today certain theological aspects of Islam, like the concept of kufr and rejection of non-Muslims and also shari'ah laws. It would have been certainly more rewarding if Ram-Prasad had dealt with these theological aspects too. The title of his paper is "A Hindu View of Islam" but he deals with the Hindu view of Muslims.

Despite lack of this aspect in the paper it is a good paper on the subject and deals with the subject quite sensitively. Certainly his idea of colonial construction of single Hindu identity is quite useful and if understood properly, can dispel many myths being woven around the concept of single Hindu identity by the Hindutva forces in contemporary India and its harmful effects on secular foundation of Indian politics. The Muslim leaders also should not insist on such singular Muslim identity.

Courtesy: Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, Mumbai.

EEC to EU: Half a century of regional cooperation

NAZMUL HASAN AZAM

1957 is considered the official birth of today's European Union (EU) when a treaty was signed in Rome by the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to form European Economic Community (EEC). The EEC treaty provided for the gradual elimination of import duties and quotas on all trade between member nations and for the institution of a common external tariff. Member nations agreed to implement common policies regarding transportation, agriculture, and social insurance, and to permit the free movement of people and financial resources within the boundaries of the community. In fact, the process to enhance cooperation among European states started earlier. In the early 19th century Napoleon encompassed most of the European continent. During World War II, Hitler nearly succeeded in uniting Europe under Nazi domination. But all these efforts failed because they relied on forcibly subjugating other nations rather than fostering cooperation among European countries.

Post World War II aspirations for a European supranational organization had both political and economic motives. The political motive was based on the conviction that only a supranational organization could eliminate the threat of war between and among European countries. Some supporters of European political unity further believed that if the nations of Europe were to resume a dominant role in world affairs, they had to speak with one voice. The Benelux Customs Union was an early example of a supranational economic organization and is considered the very first initiative of today's EU. This union was formed in 1948 and provided for a free-trade area composed of Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The union grew from the recognition that the economies of the separate states were individually too small to be competitive in the global market.

The first major step toward European integration took place in 1950. At that time French foreign minister Robert

Schuman proposed the integration of the French and German coal and steel industries and invited other European nations to participate. The initial step for integration was the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 by Germany, France, Italy and Benelux countries. Schuman's motive was as much political as economic. The signatories agreed to deny the capability to use this industrial power for narrowly defined national interests.

Now 27 independent European states are the member of this regional organization, while only six countries were the founder member of the EU. Today about two third of the population of the whole of Europe are citizens of EU member countries. European Economic Commission (EEC) became European Community (EC) in 1967, incorporating two other organizations, ECSC and Euratom, of those six nations along with it. But within past three years, 12 new states have been incorporated as EU member. Romania and Bulgaria are the last two members whose per capita income is less than \$10,000.

EU is now the largest trading block in the world. Some other non-EU countries are also seeking the membership of the EU. These are Turkey, Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. If it is assumed that all the European countries would be a member of the EU sooner or later and that Russia, thus, becomes a member of EU, then the continent of Europe would become the United States of Europe and hence would play a more significant role in international politics as a supranational organization.

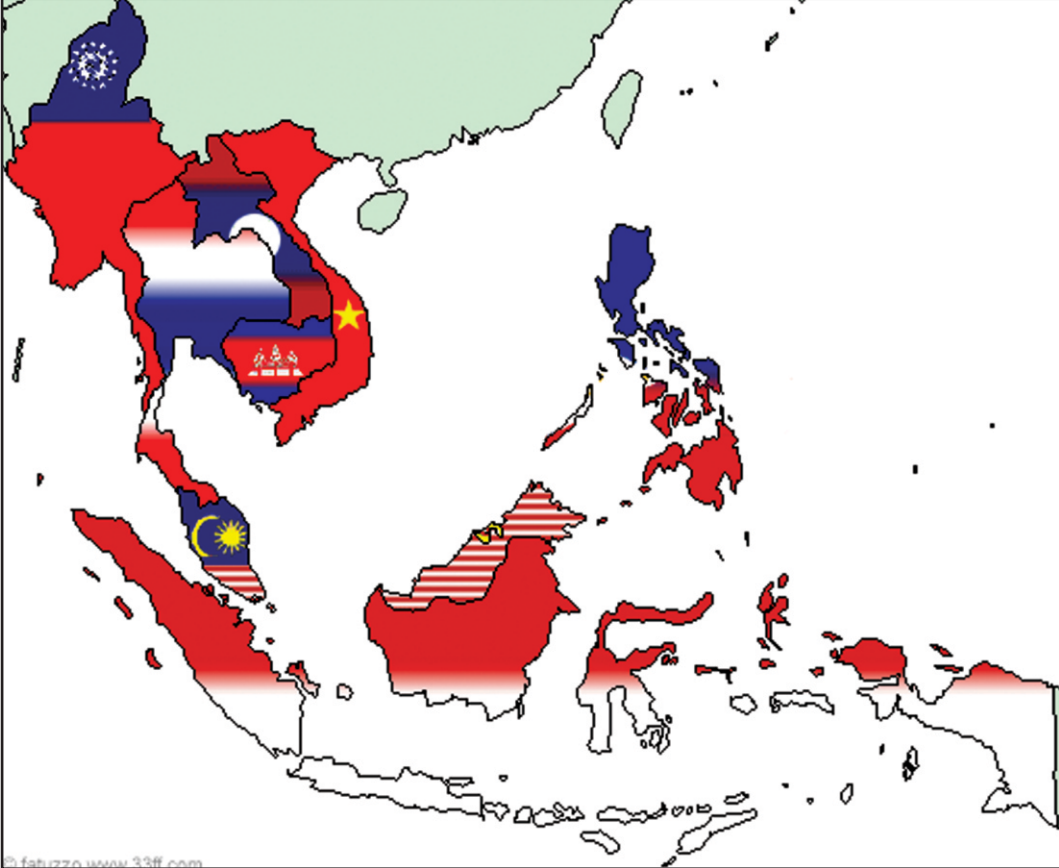
Until the end of the Cold War, countries were more concerned about their security in the international arena. The whole world was divided into two confronting blocks on the basis of two different ideologies; one was the capitalist block that was led under the leadership of United States and another was the communist block led under the leadership of former USSR. Therefore, countries were more interested

to form regional and trans-regional multilateral military alliance. Thus NATO, Warsaw Pact, CENTO, and SEATO had developed. Nevertheless, simultaneously, some economic organizations were also formed during the Cold War but they could not gain much success due to suspicion and anger that existed among member countries. End of the Cold War acted as a breakthrough for emergence of new trading and economic

path of cooperation. SAARC still lags far behind in comparison to EU and ASEAN. In fact SAARC is the largest regional organization that constitutes about 1.5 billion people. Therefore, this regional organization has a lot of potential.

ASEAN was established in 1967 to promote stability and economic growth in Southeast Asia. Though about 40 years have passed after the inception of the organization, it has been running only with ten members

EU. However, since 1999 ASEAN did not incorporate any new member. As the name of this organization is Association of South East Asian Nations, it can easily expand to the Eastern and Southern region of Asia. Firstly, it can consider and invite Japan, South Korea, Bangladesh and then China and India for membership. Bangladesh is earnestly seeking the membership of ASEAN. It has border with Myanmar who assumed membership of ASEAN in 1997. It also



blocks throughout the world. Along with existing multipurpose organizations new organizations started to emphasize more on economic cooperation rather than military cooperation.

To date, successes attained by EU are enough to make it a role model for other regional and sub-regional organizations. ASEAN already has gained considerable success following its own distinctive

since 1999. Now, therefore, ASEAN can easily adopt the policy of expansion and single currency like EU. It is true that the members of ASEAN are envisaging introducing single currency to conduct economic activities. But the matter of disappointment is that the current ASEAN leaders are less enthusiastic to expand the organization. Within last three years, EU has embraced 12 new member countries having inconsistent per capita income compared to other members of the

has close, friendly relation with Thailand and Malaysia who are the two influential founder member of ASEAN. Our apt diplomatic effort should be designed to gain the membership of this potential regional organization. Bangladesh has bilateral trade relation, more or less, with almost all member countries of ASEAN. Bangladesh is the reliable source of workforce of the member countries of ASEAN. If turbulent and undemocratic Myanmar can get ASEAN membership, then being

The author is a student of Masters, International Relations, Jahangirnagar University.