

US-China dialogue: The big players meet

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THE relations between US, currently the most powerful country, and China, the world's emerging power, remain an enigma. While they cooperate with each other primarily because of their economic interests, political relations have been dogged with the American strategy of 'managing' the rise of China.

For the US, it means deepening relations with key Asian allies such as India, ASEAN and Japan. The plan is to prevent growing Chinese influence in the Asia Pacific region. China, on the other hand, finds the US strategy prickly because it tends to encircle China with US allies. To counter this perceived position, China is gradually increasing its sphere of influence with the ASEAN countries with trade and investment.

The bottom line is whether the US accepts China as strategic partner or strategic competitor. During Bush's era the US perceived China as "strategic competitor". From the Obama administration there is not yet definite indication that China has been considered as "strategic partner".

The China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED), the first of its kind, which opened in Washington on 27th July for two days, is to be viewed in light of the aforesaid scenario.

The new dialogue, to be held every year in alternate capitals, involves the US state department and Chinese foreign ministry and firmly underlines China's growing global footprint.

Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan and State Councillor Dai Bingguo participated in the opening ceremony in Ronald Reagan Building in downtown Washington, D.C.

According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry and the US State Department, Dai will co-chair the "Strategic Track" of the dialogue with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, while Wang will co-chair the "Economic Track" with US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, each as a special representative of their respective presidents.

The talks are a revamped version of a meeting launched by George W Bush that focused solely on economic issues. The dialogue mechanism was upgraded from the former Strategic Dialogue and biennial Strategic Economic Dialogue, which were initiated by the two heads of state in 2005 and 2006 respectively during Bush's era.

In what appeared to be a co-ordinated new slogan, both Obama and Hu Jintao said they sought a "positive, constructive, and comprehensive relationship."

Beijing sent 150 officials to Washington for dozens of meetings with their US counterparts, bringing much of the capital to a virtual standstill.

The Chinese are still sensitive about their inferior status and pushed hard for Obama to open the meeting, according to sources close to the admin-

istration, because "they are still looking for validation". But the hosts were happy to pay tribute to China's ascendance and were optimistic about its ability to act as a responsible member of the global community.

At the inaugural meeting US President Barack Obama clearly set the settings of future relationships between the two countries that will dominate the world during the 21st century.

Obama said the US and China will "shape the course of the 21st century" as he opened high-level talks in Washington.

To the satisfaction of the Chinese at talks designed to usher in a new era of friendship, "not confrontation", Obama said that the ties between the two powers were "as important as any bilateral relationship in the world".

"That reality must underpin our partnership. That is the responsibility we bear," he said at the first meeting of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue in Washington.

In recognition of the importance of the two-day summit it has been described by analysts in the US as the "G2", after the G8 and G20 gatherings.

Obama called on China to cooperate with the United States in efforts to denuclearize North Korea and urged the North to abide by its pledge of nuclear disarmament made under a six-party deal.

"Neither America nor China has an interest in a terrorist acquiring a bomb, or a nuclear arms race breaking out in East Asia," Obama said here. "That is why we must continue our collaboration to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and make it clear to North Korea that the path to security and respect can be travelled if they meet their obligations."

Obama's remarks came just hours after North Korea's Foreign Ministry issued a statement earlier in the day (27th July) proposing a fresh dialogue with the US while reiterating its pledge not to attend the six-party talks involving the two Koreas, the US, China, Japan and Russia.

Obama said he was under "no illusions that the United States and China will agree on every issue", but insisted closer co-operation on a range of challenges from lifting the global economy to nuclear proliferation and climate change was vital for the whole world.

Speaking just weeks after the eruption of ethnic violence in China's Muslim-majority Xinjiang province, which left at least 192 people dead, Obama said: "We strongly believe that the religion and culture of all people must be respected and protected, and that all people should be free to speak their minds. That includes ethnic and religious minorities in China."

But he bracketed his criticism with acknowledgement of China's great "ancient culture" and the vibrant contribution of Chinese Americans to the US.



For the Chinese, Dai Bingguo, the state councillor, acknowledged the two states "could never be the same", and echoed his hosts by saying neither country could solve the world's problems alone.

"We are actually all in the same big boat that has been hit by fierce wind and huge waves," Mr Dai said of the economic and other crises.

The strongest message behind the scenes from Timothy Geithner, the US Treasury Secretary, and his staff was that Americans are learning to save more and spend less, meaning China cannot rely on exports to the US for its growth and will have to raise domestic consumption.

The Chinese, holding \$801.5 billion (£485 billion) of US treasury debt, meanwhile sought further explanations of what the Obama administration plans to do about the soaring deficits.

Though expectations are low for immediate breakthroughs on a variety of sticking points, even

committed China watchers have been surprised by the speed of the growth in bilateral relations.

The US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said the US and China are committed to fighting protectionism. He said the two countries shared an interest in ensuring that trade remained "open and rules-based". He was speaking after meeting Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan in Washington. Mr Geithner said the talks had concluded with an agreement from China to boost domestic consumption and reduce its reliance on export.

The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that both countries had the common goal of ensuring that Iran did not become a nuclear power. "China shares our concerns about Iran becoming a nuclear weapons state. The potential for destabilising the Middle East and Gulf is viewed similarly by the Chinese," Mrs Clinton said.

"There will be areas without a lot of traction," said Drew Thompson, director of China studies at the Nixon Centre think tank, running from the value of yuan to the Dalai Lama and intellectual copyright protection. "But if you don't start to build a relationship you will never achieve the progress that you want."

"There are a lot of things we can't get done without having China on board, and the Chinese are learning that they have a new role and they are leaving big footprints around the world. A certain responsibility comes with that," he added.

The dialogue marks a major step toward forging a positive, cooperative and comprehensive China-US relationship in the 21st century as agreed upon in London by Chinese President Hu Jintao and US President Barack Obama in April.

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India joins nuclear submarine world

India launched its first nuclear-powered submarine July 26, officials said, underlining the military advances made by the rapidly developing nation.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called it a "historic milestone in the country's defence preparedness" as the 6,000-ton INS Arihant (Destroyer of Enemies) was named in the southern city of Visakhapatnam.

The submarine, the first of five planned, is powered by an 85-megawatt nuclear reactor and can reach a speed of 24 knots (44 kilometers) per hour underwater, according to defence officials. It will be armed with torpedoes and ballistic missiles, and carry a crew of 95 men.

"We don't have any aggressive designs nor do we seek to threaten anyone," the Press Trust of India quoted Singh as saying at the launch.

"We seek an external environment in our region and beyond that is conducive to our peaceful development and protection of our value systems."

India is now part of an exclusive group of nations - including China, France, the United States, Britain and Russia - which own nuclear-powered submarines.

The vessel will undergo two years of sea trials in the Bay of Bengal before being commissioned for full service, according to PTL.

India previously leased a Russian-built nuclear submarine, and in 2005 it signed contracts worth \$3 billion (2.4 billion euros) to receive six diesel-electric Franco-Spanish Scorpene submarines.

The launch came as India marked the 10th anniversary of the brief but bloody Kargil conflict with arch-rival Pakistan in the disputed Kashmir region. More than 1,100 people, mostly Indian and Pakistani soldiers, died in the high-altitude offensive in the spring and summer of 1999 when Pakistan-based infiltrators crossed the icy frontier that separates the countries.

At a service earlier in New Delhi, Singh paid tribute to the Indian troops who died during the conflict. "They sacrificed their lives in defence of Indian unity and integrity," he said.

A year before Kargil, India conducted nuclear weapons tests and Pakistan responded with its own tests a few days later.

S. Korea to upgrade military communication network

South Korea will begin developing a digital command-and-control and sensor-to-shooter battlefield system next year, the Defence Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) announced July 28.

The plan was approved by the supreme arms procurement committee presided over by Defence Minister Lee Sang-hee, the agency said in a news release.

The development of the Tactical Information Communication Network (TICN) will be completed by 2012. Work will begin with two years of exploratory development and funding of about 181 billion won (\$146 million), said Yoon Chang-oak, chief of the agency's tactical communication and control business department. Over the subsequent eight years, about 4.8 trillion won (\$3.8 billion) will be spent to produce and deploy the TICN replacing the South Korean Army's SPIDER communications system, Yoon said.

"For the TICN development, we'll make the most of the made-in-Korea WiBro technology and other indigenous state-of-the-art information technologies with the help of local communications systems developers," Yoon said.

The SPIDER system can transmit only still images and voice data; TICN will allow for the integrated transmission of video, image and voice data more than 10 times faster, he said.

The agency will open a bid for the TICN development project in August and sign contracts with final bidders by the end of December, Yoon noted.

DAPA sources said companies that participated in the exploratory development phase, such as Samsung Thales, LIG Nex1 and Huneed Technologies, will likely be selected as preferred bidders for the full-scale development phase again.

The TICN exploratory development was overseen by the state-funded Agency for Defence Development. The network system consists of five sub-systems, including High Capacity Trunk Radio (HCTR), Tactical Multi-band and Multi-role Radio (TMMR) and Network Management System (NMS).

Samsung Thales was a main developer of TICN, taking charge of the development of NMS and two other sub-

systems. LIG Nex1 was in charge of TMMR, while Huneed was a main contractor for HCTR.

Source: www.defenselinks.com

Japan indicates end to era of declining defence spending

The latest annual economic policy guidelines of the Japanese government, led by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), are likely to reverse the downward trend in ever-decreasing defence budgets since 2003 should the party remain in power beyond general elections that must be held by 19 October.

The so-called 'Honebuto' guidelines, issued on 23 June by the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy, a key government economic panel under Prime Minister Taro Aso, marked a clear departure from the belt-tightening fiscal policy on defence budgets laid down by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

The Honebuto guidelines, for the first time, named North Korea as a possible threat and stressed the necessity to "appropriately deal with" Pyongyang's missile launches and nuclear tests, suggesting the country should develop a ballistic missile defence system.

In Japan the Honebuto system allows the prime minister's office to exert leadership in the development of budgets and to clean up state finances by rearranging top priority items.

The LDP's defence policy-making panel has requested the Aso administration to secure the Ministry of Defence's multi-year budgets for sea-launched cruise missiles, which are carried on Aegis-equipped destroyers and could be used to counter a hostile country's missile sites. The move comes as part of the country's new National Defence Program Guidelines for Fiscal Years 2010 to 2014, to be compiled by the end of this year.

The panel has also requested that an early warning satellite system be introduced to detect the launch of ballistic missiles, for which Japan currently relies on the United States.

The new national defence programme guidelines will include an increase in the size of the Ground Self-Defence Force to 160,000 the same level as 1995 from 155,000, which the previous 2004 guidelines laid down as a target.

Japan's national defence budget has declined for seven consecutive years. It totalled 4.77 trillion yen (USD 49.3 billion) for the fiscal year that started in April.

Indonesia and Malaysia seek to defuse maritime border dispute

The defence ministers of Indonesia and Malaysia met on 30 June to discuss ways of avoiding an escalation of tensions over the two countries' disputed maritime border off the east of Borneo.

Indonesian Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono and his Malaysian counterpart, Ahmad Zahid Hamid, told reporters after their meeting in Jakarta that they would work together to avoid a naval clash in the oil-rich Ambalat area of the Celebes Sea.

Warrier in June Malaysian naval chief Admiral Abdul Aziz was forced to apologise publicly after Jakarta revealed that its navy had almost fired on a Malaysian patrol vessel that had crossed into Indonesian territorial waters.

The incident followed a series of complaints by the Indonesian Foreign Ministry about alleged Malaysian incursions. At the time, Sudarsono announced he would seek joint patrols of the disputed area with Malaysia to avoid any repeat of the episode.

Following the bilateral meeting, Sudarsono said that patrols in the Ambalat area would have to be "extra cautious" in future, with Zahid adding that the two sides should hold more informal, as well as formal, discussions as a way of building trust.

However, neither minister said if or when joint patrols would be implemented.

The military-to-military relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia has improved since the two sides began cooperating, alongside Singapore, in the policing of the Malacca Strait.

However, Ambalat remains a potential flashpoint, with both Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta having recently awarded exploration and production contracts to oil and gas companies without having first settled the disputed maritime border.

Source: Jane's Defence Weekly

Indo-Pak talks at the NAM Summit: Real progress?

KATE SWANSON

ON 16 July at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit, the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani met for the second time after the Mumbai terrorist attacks. The informal yet important meeting was speculated to be a major step to ending the diplomatic deadlock that has plagued relations between India and Pakistan since 26/11. The 45-minute discussion between Singh and Gilani was preceded by several meetings between the foreign secretaries, and followed by an officially issued joint statement.

Although the very act of both the meeting and corresponding joint statement is an important step forward for Indo-Pak relations, it begs the question whether any real progress has been made because of this public dialogue.

While searching for meaning in the wake of the talks, several issues arise. First, the vagueness of the Prime Ministers' joint statement must be considered. The joint statement made several broad recommendations, suggesting terrorism was the main threat to both countries and that they should work together to combat this and related problems. It outlined an agreement to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence, and reaffirmed both countries' intention to promote regional cooperation. It also mentioned, however, that action on terrorism need not be linked explicitly to the Indo-Pak dialogue process. Furthermore, while it appears as though the Mumbai attacks had been discussed during their meeting, the only mention of these events were Singh's comments that the attackers needed to be brought to justice, and Gilani's corresponding pledge that Pakistan would do everything in its power to ensure just that is accomplished.

While the statement does appear to be a platform from which India and Pakistan can move forward, little was concretely established from which progress can actually be made. Acknowledging these vague remarks alone, however, is not enough to fully comprehend what took place, and instead should be taken in light of the contrasting and more direct statements issued separately by each Prime Minister as well as their respective foreign secretaries.

Independently, India talked tough on terrorism. Foreign Minister SM Krishna called for a visible response from Pakistan regarding the Mumbai attacks, and Singh pushed the members of NAM to establish a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Both leaders specifically explained it was imperative that perpetrators of



terrorism and those who aid them were brought to justice. Singh stated that the starting point of any dialogue must be the issue of terrorism and that "so long as Pakistani territory continues to be used for perpetrating acts of terrorism...against India... dialogue process, even if it starts, cannot move forward." This directive stance against terrorism was in stark contrast to the compromising and perhaps soft approach voiced through the joint statement and raises questions about the impact of Singh's contribution.

Gilani, on the other hand, made little mention of the ongoing saga of the Mumbai attackers, stating only that if real progress was to be made in Indo-Pak dialogue, the issue of Jammu and Kashmir must be resolved. Pakistan's foreign secretary also sidelined 26/11 issues, calling instead for a return to the eight-point composite dialogue. As neither Gilani nor his foreign secretary made any mention of terrorism, one could question the extent to which compromise made via the joint statement held any real value outside of polite rhetoric.

Full understanding of the talks, however, cannot take place without consideration of the underlying issues by which Indo-Pak dialogue has been constrained - terrorism policy and persecution of specific individuals responsible for the Mumbai attacks. These key issues between India and Pakistan were not explicitly discussed, which makes for a troubling end to what was to be a productive step forward. No doubt Hafiz Saeed, Zaki ur Rehman

Lakhvi and the rest of the LeT were on everyone's minds and without substantive action regarding these issues, there appears to be little reason to believe that things may finally move forward between India and Pakistan.

Perhaps we should take the release of the joint statement alone to symbolize the success of the meetings, as it signifies the willingness of the two countries to collaborate and marks a vast improvement in Indo-Pak relations as of late. And, despite the joint statement being vague, the ideas within still looked like a step in the right direction, providing both countries follow through. However, while many argue in favour of such positives produced from the Singh-Gilani discussion, if the response from India's Congress Party is any indication of the general feeling within the country, the joint statement has been seen as a step back, in light of its soft approach to terrorism from Pakistan and its willingness to restart dialogue in the absence of anti-terrorism talks. Furthermore, these potential breakthroughs should not cloud memories of Pakistan's past behaviour, especially regarding 26/11. Actions speak much louder than words, and therefore praise for any developments should not be made based on speculation, but rather only when proof of action is available that demonstrates an actual step forward in Indo-Pak relations. The joint statement, therefore, deserves no praise, as it does not demonstrate real progress between India and Pakistan.

Source: IPCS, New Delhi.