

Asia's air gets hot

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A major arms race in Asia is going on without any furor anywhere. As India test fires an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead keeping a close attention to China's military trend, it makes a major advance in its defense capabilities. Pakistan subsequently tested Hatf IV (Shaheen 1A) ballistic missile with a range of 2,500 to 3,000 kilometers, which would put almost all of India within reach. Shortly after that, India launched a rocket and put into orbit a microwave Radar Imaging Satellite (Risat-1). The security analysts ask if a new door opens for a new arms race in South Asia. The Agni-V missile fired by India has a range of 5,000km which would give India the capability to strike most major cities in China, Iran and South-East Asia. The word Agni comes from Sanskrit language which means 'fire,' the name given to a series of weapons India developed as part of its highly integrated guided missile upgrading project launched in 1983. V K Saraswat, the head of India's Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) which built the missile said, "I am announcing the successful launch of Agni V... making history and making our country proud in the area of missile technology." He also said that India is now a "missile power." The Indian security analysts considered it as a big moment for them as they see it as a major step to India's effort to become a regional power that can counter China's influence in South Asia.

The test opens the gate for India to join the elite group of countries that have long-range weapons that can carry nuclear warheads, which currently only the five permanent members of the UN Security Council like Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States possess.

South Asia is a home to two nuclear club members that is India and Pakistan and in close proximity to another major nuclear power - China. India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 in the name of peaceful explosion of nuclear weapons, and in May, 1998 New Delhi conducted a series of underground explosions. Pakistan also tested its first



A handout photo from the ISPR shows a Hatf IV Shaheen 1 medium-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile.

nuclear weapons at the same time, while China has been a nuclear power for decades. Despite both India and China have sworn off first use, both have built up formidable deterrents designed to retaliate against any attackers.

The alliance pattern in South Asia is: India-US alliance and Sino-Pakistan alliance. The development of defense capability by India is increasingly aimed at the Sino-Pakistan alliance. While India tests its ICBM, the United States kept quite a low voice and described India as a responsible nuclear state. It creates a dichotomy of great power policy, while US expresses deep concern over North Korea's nuclear test, it tacitly supports India in its nuclear way forward. Under the US-India nuclear deal, India receives nuclear fuel and technology that helps to enlarge its nuclear arsenal. The United States takes India as a 'valuable strategic ally' as part of its 'offshore balancing strategy' against China which is actually fanning the flame of disputes between the two countries. Currently China is clearly perceived by the American strategic analysts as the most important threat to US interests in the Asia-Pacific region, so Washington is pursuing a 'New Containment Policy' in the second decade of the twenty first century.

As the economic might of both China and India are increasing simultaneously, they have both set about building robust military complex to lend extra muscle to their growing strategic ambitions, and there are enough materials to spark worries given their complicated history. "China has the most active and diverse ballistic missile development program in the world," noted one US report. "China's ballistic missile force is expanding in both size and types of missiles." The two countries are not only engaged in competition in the air space but also engaged in a naval arms race as they both jockey for influence in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea waters around South Asia. Most of China-India interactions relate to the seas or the littoral areas. The two countries do not share a sea boundary, but that does not matter. As rising powers, their vital security interests have been expanding from their immediate peripheries to regional extremities and beyond. Their increasing capabilities are rebalancing the strategic scenario in Asia.

China is primarily worried about deterring the threats from the world's leading nuclear power, the United States, while India's strategic calculations focus on the threat from Pakistan and China. India's military buildup has

several overlapping motivations. But the most pressing motivation may be the fast moving China. The strategic logic creates the direct friction among India, China and Pakistan on several fronts. When India makes any development of its existing nuclear stockpiles focusing on China at least in rhetorical sense, it also has a chain effect on Pakistan. Pakistan considers modernising its nuclear house as a deterrent need against India. In almost every case India used the China card to justify its expanding nuclear weapons program, Pakistan used the India card and China used the US card. But the question comes on how many weapons would be enough to deter the countries from attacking each other. A lack of trust and doubts concerning China's rise have to some extent resulted in a "security dilemma."

The potential regional implications of nuclear competition are enormous and place a huge moral as well as legal responsibility on anyone who might consider taking that state down such a path. The risk of further inflaming the volatile international politics of Asia and potentially catalyzing the development of nuclear weapons by other states such as Myanmar would be a retrogressive step on the path to regional and global peace, disarmament and stability. Rather than moving away from the escalatory nuclear policies, such skewed priorities encouraging non-nuclear weapons states to break from their NPT commitments. The nuclear fallout in South Asia will have a catastrophic regional effects and we the small countries (in terms of geography) with huge population would not be able to escape from that destruction. The human cost would be terrible and the possibility of sparking a wider conflict in the region does not bear thinking about. A dispassionate look at the current tensions among the countries in Asia would surely conclude that the security concerns of each state must be acknowledged for peaceful coexistence of the countries in this region.

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Chen Guangcheng and US-China relations

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A report from the official Chinese news agency Xinhua in Beijing on May 2 stated that, "It is informed here Wednesday that Chen Guangcheng, a native from Yanan County of eastern China's Shandong Province, entered the US Embassy in Beijing in late April and left of his own volition after staying there for six days."

This mundane pronouncement marks an end to the drama and speculation that Chen's escape from house arrest had sparked. The issue has indeed been resolved before the scheduled start of the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue on May 3 and presumably with the blessings of the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who is currently in Beijing.

An article in the Global Times appearing on the same day commented on the irrationality of the Western press in making Chen out to be a cause célèbre. It further emphasised the inadvisability of American interference on the issue, which would not only violate the taboo of non-interference in China's internal matters but could possibly set a precedent wherein every Chinese citizen dissatisfied with the handling of his "petition" would seek the help of the US embassy. The article ends with a line speculating on the decision by the US on



Chen Guangcheng is seen in a wheelchair at the Chaoyang hospital in Beijing.

the matter, which could possibly satisfy both Chen and the Western media. It is to be wondered if the departure of Chen from the US embassy "of his own volition", will be explanation enough.

According to the New York Times, US officials have confirmed that Chen had indeed been transferred to a medical facility and united with his family. Although the report speculates on whether or not Chen will be granted asylum, such a prospect is now extremely unlikely. Especially since other sources indicate that Chen had never sought asylum in the first place and that, apart from assuring his personal safety, Chinese authorities have also agreed to relocate him to a safe place where he can attend university. Chinese websites have reported that during an interaction with journalists, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Liu Weimin deemed the US involvement in the affair highly irregular and amounting to interference in China's internal affairs, which will never be acceptable to China. Liu further stated that China has asked the US to apologise for the incident, conduct a thorough inquiry to punish those responsible and ensure that such incidents do not reoccur.

Some observations can be made on the nature of the US-China relationship based on the developments in the Chen Guangcheng affair. First, both countries are clearly keen to maintain stability in the bilateral relationship. Contentious issues will therefore not be permitted to jeopardise the relationship. Second, the balance of power in the bilateral relationship is certainly shifting in China's favour. The quick resolution of the matter indicates that China will not countenance any perceived interference in its internal affairs and this is a position that the United States has had to accept. This is reflected in Liu's remarks on American understanding of China's demands and concerns. While demands for an apology, an investigation and assurances that such incidents do not reoccur may be taken with a pinch of salt, it is evident that the United States had no cards up its sleeve to bargain with. That US embassy officials have been quoted as characterising this particular case as "extraordinary" with little expectation of such a "repetition" suggests that the US is obviously unwilling and unable to bring to bear any sort of pressure on China. The human rights issue can thus be said to have been delinked completely from the larger bilateral relationship. At some level, this attests to the erosion of the "principled position" the United States has sought to maintain in its foreign relations. A divorce between American national interest and the ideology of political liberalism, as espoused by the United States, seems increasingly imminent. What can be expected in the future is perhaps a co-piloted US-China relationship, wherein the pre-eminent global power will have to give up the lead and learn to be led instead.

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Post Arab Spring realities

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THE drama unfolding in Arab world resembles a classic tragedy. The fear part is that a bunch of weakened, nearly-failed countries in the Middle East and North Africa would be a severe strategic threat for the regional and international orders. In most cases when Arab Spring-inspired demonstrations erupted, the natural inclination of most of the regimes was to repress them with decisive force. But there were restraints. The death toll has consequently remained below the threshold that might necessitate international action, while the atrocities which include torture, mutilations and rape have been conducted in a manner that enables plausible deniability. Despite some protestations to the contrary, these atrocities are not incidental or mistakes but are an integral part of the regime's modus operandi. The international community was now better informed of the regime's actions, and it was capable of taking forceful corrective measures. While the diplomatic course has proven futile, moral and political clarity on the part of the transatlantic alliance may require some operational ambiguity.

The regional context

The reality of democratic uprisings in the Arab world is much more complicated than the narrative makes it out to be. Beginning with Tunisia, spreading to Egypt and then to the Arabian Peninsula, the last year have seen widespread unrest in the Arab world. Three assumptions have been made about this unrest. Firstly, it represented broad-based popular opposition to existing governments, rather than representing the discontent of fragmented minorities in other words, that they were popular revolutions. Secondly, it assumed that these revolutions had as a common goal the creation of a democratic society. Thirdly, it assumed that the kind of democratic society they wanted was similar to European-American democracy, in other words, a constitutional system supporting Western democratic values.

Building a political base requires modifying one's agenda. But when you start modifying your agenda, when you become pragmatic, you start to lose your supporters. Optimistic mass people will soon face the problem of disappointment throughout the region a problem built into that very region.

Somehow there are great expectations about democracy in the region and around the world. Mass people are enjoying the traditional honeymoon period of freedom, during which all but the bitterest enemies of democracy will give their fate the benefit of the doubt. And then, sometime at the end of this year, things will get interesting.

The Islamists have the benefit of decades of organisation, but the Arab Spring constitutes the first significant instance of modern organised Islamism moving from radical to less radical postures. The will of the people is an untested principle in the post-Arab spring era. The abortive attack on the region is a



reminder that the rule of law is far from assured in North Africa and the Middle East following the Arab Spring. In Libya, clan rivalry and the presence of militant groups is an obstacle to the emergence of a national government with effective control of the territory. Countries in the region today range along a continuum from proto-democracies with an Islamist tinge to failed states and repressive dictatorships. Ultimately, stability in the Middle East rests upon how regional players like Turkey answer their own populations' demands in a responsible and timely manner.

The blind side: The consequences

The Arab Spring has introduced new variables into a strategic context that was always precariously stable, at best. The long-standing Saudi-Iranian rivalry may spill over into new arenas, while countries such as Turkey, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates might be inclined to seek local

allies in their attempts to safeguard their interests and balance risks. Without effective law enforcement, Libya, the Sinai, and elsewhere in the region are becoming a playground for organized crime and terrorist groups and promising to become a hub of political and communal instability affecting Israel, Turkey, and Iraq. The risks in North Africa stemming from state failure should, in short, be given higher priority the transatlantic policy dialogue.

Some suggest that the Islamists will soon be replaced by secular and Western-oriented parties because of their economic failures. This is far from certain. However, Optimists could argue that setbacks are

incidental to the larger forces shaping what is a truly revolutionary outcome in the region the end of Arab autocracy.

Triangle: The United States, Europe and the Arab uprising

Western world seem at a loss as to how to craft an appropriate response to the countries of North Africa who are said to be in 'transition.' Undoubtedly the uprising in the Arab world has created an historical opportunity for Europe to assist the process in a significant way. Turning the region to its southeast into a stable, democratic, and economically sound area is obviously in Europe's interest. The EU must not be a passive spectator rather should be innovative. The masses that went to the streets in Tunisia, Egypt, the Gulf states, and Jordan confronted their regimes in the name of the values that Europe wanted these regimes to adopt. Whether or not EU-created instruments such as The European

Neighborhood Policy of 2004 and The Union for the Mediterranean of 2008 contributed to the uprising in the Southeast Mediterranean, it is now a duty of the West, and especially the part of the EU that is geographically adjacent, to sustain the nascent process emerging in North Africa and the Middle East.

On the other hand the United States is seen as a declining power, a bully, an ally, or a partner of convenience in the region. When democratic forces arose in Tunisia and Egypt, it is alleged that the United States only joined the parade when the outcome was irreversible. The US now faces serious challenges to both of its primary strategic objectives: advancing regional stability while enhancing its own influence. Its laudable objective of serving as an honest broker in some of the Middle East's most intractable conflicts inevitably collides with the reality of having to deal with internal challenges to its own stability.

The way ahead

The question remains whether the new surge in rhetoric, enthusiasm, and bureaucratic structures will given the tepid performance of the past decade translate into a capable civilian surge capacity on the ground when the world decides it needs to manage the next conflictive crisis. It is not too late to rescue a great idea: will the movement on political, economic, and social reform give birth a democratic Arab world? Arabian civil society deserves all Europe's attention and support. Human rights groups, civic initiatives and independent media need increased, continuous, and accessible assistance. The political opposition needs encouragement, expertise, and funding to develop its strategy for change, and the democratic movement has to be treated as Arab world's recognised representative in all European and international forums. The demographic youth bulge and the refusal of oligarch to surrender their control over resources were the actual impetuses of the Arab Spring. It must now move from piecemeal to comprehensive, from half-hearted to decisive. It is the only chance to prevent the looming permafrost in Arab world and give its brave citizens a hope of lasting spring.

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