



RECENT US MOVES IN ASIA-PACIFIC COULD IMPACT CHINA-INDIA RELATIONS

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China has been wary of Indo-US relations since they began warming. It suspects that the US is intent on forging a grouping comprising mainly Japan, Vietnam, Australia and India, to 'contain China'. Now with US' re-energised interest in the Asia-Pacific region, evidenced by Obama's recent visit to Australia and accompanying diplomatic activity, China sees the diplomatic gains it has made in the region are receding. To retard US diplomatic efforts, Beijing will try and pressure countries in the region including India.

Couched inside an article, which was seemingly temperate in tenor, in the authoritative, official Chinese Communist Party (CCP) newspaper 'People's Daily', on November 15, 2011, was a veiled warning to India's political and military leadership. Referring to reports of India deploying 100,000 troops in the northeast, it hinted at the forces that China could deploy in the event of future conflict. For the authoritative Party newspaper to hint at the use of missiles in the context of India-China relations is very unusual.

Unlike other articles, this observed that India's "...action is completely not worthwhile. Currently, India has 40,000 troops in the disputed area, and if the further 100,000 is deployed, the total number of the troops will reach 140,000. In an era when precision-guided weapons are developing rapidly, everyone with common sense knows that concentrated troops could be eliminated easily." It added that "security would not be guaranteed despite the expenditure of US\$ 13 billion".

Interestingly, the article was first published by the 'Zhongguo Qingnian Bao' (China Youth Daily), the official newspaper of China's Communist Youth League (CYL) whose Chief, Lu Hao, is assessed to be on the career fast-track in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

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China's military doctrine and articles in China's military literature amply clarify that China anticipates any future conflict will be on its periphery and of short duration. China's armed forces envisage opening the first phase in future conflicts with a massive cyber and electronic-jamming operations offensive to cripple the adversary's military, financial and public utilities' cyber infrastructure; electronic-based equipment; and command communications. This will be followed by precision-guided missile attacks on military targets as well as military command and population centres to overwhelm and destroy the military and political leaderships' will and resolve. Ground-based attacks will follow in the final phase.

The Nov 15, 'People's Daily' article implicitly underscores the use of missiles. In the eventuality of India-China hostilities a role would also have been envisaged for Huawei and ZTE, the two Chinese telecommunications companies which together virtually entirely control India's mobile and wireless telecommunications. Other articles in the official Chinese media have publicised the major military exercises recently conducted by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the remote fastness of the Tibetan Plateau opposite India.

Later, on November 24, the 'People's Daily' published another article captioned 'India's undue worry about China results from inferiority complex'. The article, apparently in reaction to former Minister Jaswant Singh's article 'Asia's Giants Colliding at Sea?', was publicized by China's official newsagency, 'Xinhua'.

It claimed that "India jitters at the sight of China gaining prestige in Asia, in particular, in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and takes China's ever-growing regional influence in recent years as a strategic encirclement to target and contain India". It added "But one thing is certain: Today's

India, no matter how anxious it intends to lead the region and even the world, is far from potent and prosperous to act of its own accord—By currying favor with China’s neighbor, in particular, those who have brewed disputes with China, India would assume, it could instigate these smaller nations to engage in a gang fight against China and contain China’s growing clout in the region”. Commenting on India’s so-called ‘failure’ to adopt

outward looking ‘win-win’ strategies similar to China’s, the article seemed to reflect the opinion of at least a section of Chinese analysts when it said: “*Nowadays, it is no longer those who have only teeth and muscle that can finally loom on the horizon posing as winners, but those who are confident and courageous, and have a strong body with a sound mind, the latter more important for a great power*”. “*Jealousy*”, it added, “*can sometimes be put in the same breath of inferiority. India could trace its sense of being so self-abased to the brief border war with China in 1960s, when it was beaten by the Chinese army. And India has since eyed China with deep-seated distrust*”. Asserting that this distrust had “put sand in the wheels of its own progress”, it cited cross-border trade at Nathula as an example, describing it as “a picture of contrasts—ambitious tradesmen on the Chinese side vs. slackness of the Indian businessmen”. It concluded that “*to grow up to be a real power and stand as a sound competitor, India needs to, first and foremost, break through its own psychological fence*”.

China’s growing suspicion about the nature of Indo-US relations have undoubtedly been heightened in recent weeks. Following the unveiling by the US of the ‘AirSea Battle’ concept, Beijing closely monitored US President Obama’s visit to Australia, the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the accompanying unprecedented US diplomatic activity in the Asia-Pacific region.

US flirtation with Yangon would have especially irked Beijing. Myanmar, long known as a country close to Beijing, will for the first time in fifty years on December 1-2, 2011, receive a US Secretary of State. Hillary Clinton is scheduled to meet opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi during the visit. In another apparent snub to Beijing, Myanmar’s new Defence Chief, Gen

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Min Aung Hlaing, travelled to Vietnam on November 14, on his first trip abroad instead of to China as his predecessors had done. These developments follow the sudden cancellation—since restored—by Yangon of a US\$ 3.2 billion project for construction of a dam by a Chinese company.

In the Philippines, Hillary Clinton pointedly referred to the South China Sea as the ‘West Philippine Sea’, the name officially adopted by Manila.

While there she reaffirmed USA’s interest in the right to free navigation and neutrality of the sea lanes in the South China Sea as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes between China and the other claimant nations.

A White House briefing at the commencement of US President Obama’s tour to Australia set the tone for his visit. The White House spokesman said, inter alia, that “a core message of this entire trip” is that as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan end the US is “refocusing attention in a substantial way on the Asia Pacific region” and “that the United States is going to play a larger role and a long-term role in shaping the future of the region”. He added “it’s a part of the U.S. sending a signal that we’re going to be present, that we’re going to continue to play the role of underpinning security in this part of the region. Part of that context is a rising China. That’s one part of the context for the future of this region”.

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Addressing the Australian Parliament he referred additionally to US support for human rights, freedom and liberty. He said, “if this vast region and its people teach us anything, it’s the yearning for liberty and progress will not be denied.... It’s why the people took to the streets — from Delhi to Seoul, from Manila to Jakarta...It’s why men of peace in saffron robes faced beatings and bullets, and why every

day – from some of the world’s largest cities to dusty rural towns, in small acts of courage the world may never see – a student posts a blog; a citizen signs a charter; an activist remains unbowed...”. The references to human rights violations in China and to the Tibetan issue are almost explicit.

In another setback to China, maritime security and the South China Sea issue were commented on in varying degrees of specificity by sixteen of the eighteen leaders at the East Asia Summit, including Australia and India. Cambodia and Myanmar were the

two exceptions. The speakers included ASEAN members Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand, as well as Australia and India. All these countries referred directly to the South China Sea. Reports suggest there was consensus on a number of issues. The main principles spelt out by the speakers from Singapore, Philippines and Vietnam included the importance of protecting the freedom of navigation in the maritime domain in general and in the South China Sea in particular; the importance of adherence to the rule of law in approaching and settling disputes; and the applicability of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea and the importance for all nations to abide by its terms. Nearly all speakers underlined the importance of a peaceful resolution and of the need for progress on a code of conduct, which was agreed to by ASEAN and China in 2002. Several stressed the importance of protecting legitimate commerce in the maritime domain and particularly in the South China Sea, and many called for a multilateral resolution of the conflicting territorial claims by the parties themselves. Indicative of Beijing’s concern at India’s stance, was that Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao raised the subject during his meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit.

A day prior to the Summit, the official ‘Global Times’, a subsidiary of the ‘People’s Daily’, described efforts to include the South China Sea as bringing ‘great pressure to China’ and warned ‘it is now expected that China will take some countermeasures’. It accused the US of ‘encouraging China’s neighboring countries to challenge China’.

China’s ire was evident in the ‘People’s Daily’ warning Australia against being “caught in the crossfire”. Song Xiaojun, a military commentator with China Central

China views the recent US diplomatic activity in the region as an effort to ‘contain China’ and forge an ‘anti-China alliance’. The official ‘Global Times’ reflected this when it quoted Major General Peng Guangqian of China’s Academy of Military Sciences as saying that the US was trying to use Australia to contain China in a “pincer” movement. He added that it would be a historical setback if the US was trying to provoke a “21st-century new cold war”.

Television and former PLA Navy Communications officer, cautioned that “Chinese strategic missiles can reach Australia”. Reports simultaneously surfaced that China is contemplating establishing a military base in Timor Leste, Indonesia’s neighbour. Timor Leste, which is the recipient of Chinese fiscal development assistance, is yet to approve the proposal.

An intriguing sidelight was the disclosure by Xie Jingwen, Deputy Chief of the Tracking System for China’s space program, of Australia being among China’s global network

of ground stations. The disclosure was first carried by HongKong’s ‘South China Morning Post’ about two weeks before it was reproduced in ‘The Australian’ on November 16, seemingly timed to coincide with the commencement of US President Obama’s two-day Australian tour. Later the same week, Canberra confirmed China’s claim that the station was used to track the Shenzhou VIII, launched this month as part of China’s plan to build a space station. China’s Satellite Launch and Tracking Control General (CLTC), which uses the Mingenew station, is an arm of China’s Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (COSTIND). While China’s space program has the use of four international facilities to help track its satellites, in Pakistan, Kenya, Chile and Namibia, the Mingenew station in Australia is the first such facility in a Western nation that is a close ally of the US. The Mingenew station, which is 400 kms north of Perth, is part of the PioraNet global network of strategically located ground stations that sell services to space agencies on a commercial basis.

The issue gained prominence because of the accusation by Des Ball, an Australian expert on space-based espionage, that the Chinese are using the facility to locate Australian and US warships in the region. He claimed that the “ground station would help China’s space-based listening devices to more precisely locate the electronic emissions from aircraft carriers, destroyers and other navy ships” and particularly carrier battle groups operating in the western Pacific and Indian Oceans.

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Pertinently, India has received other warnings in the context of the dispute in the South China Sea. Official media articles critical of the US-ROK military exercises in 2010, bracketed Japan, India and Vietnam as countries that were drawing closer to the US to 'contain' China. Earlier articles had observed that history had imposed limits on the extent to which China's relationship with Japan and India could develop. Some suggested that China would have to ultimately use military means to settle outstanding border disputes and while doing so would choose one of two bigger nations, namely India or Japan and, that in such a case, India will likely be the first choice. On July 22, 2011, an Indian Navy amphibious warship, 'INS Airavat', received a broadcast on an open radio channel while off the Vietnamese coast from someone identified merely as the "Chinese Navy". The broadcast said the ship was entering "Chinese waters," and instructed it to leave. More recently, a few weeks ago, reacting to a commercial contract for off-shore oil exploration signed between India's ONGC and Vietnam, China warned India against proceeding with off-shore oil exploration plans. Another warning was subsequently addressed to all foreign companies operating in the area.

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analysts have indicated that Beijing's priority continues to be to maintain stable Sino-US relations. Shen Dingli, a Professor at the Centre of American Studies in Shanghai's Fudan University appeared to aptly sum up Beijing's perspective when he said: "At the moment, we lose, but in ten years, the U.S. will lose". At the same time, Beijing is not likely to resile from its stance on the South China Sea issue. It has already announced plans last week for exercises by the PLA Navy in the western Pacific and separately offered to fund and participate in a regional maritime force to preserve safety of the sea lanes.

In this backdrop, China can be expected to try and dilute perceived US 'anti-China' efforts by exerting pressure on some countries in the region and especially India. China's demand last week, that Government of India prevent Indian Buddhists from organizing an international religious conference in Delhi where the Dalai Lama is scheduled to speak, is an instance. The recent 'People's Daily' articles and other Chinese official media articles reinforce Chinese actions and, therefore, assume significance. India should be prepared for a period of increased tension in India-China relations and guard against yielding ground despite growing Chinese pressure.



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