

FORMING INDIA-VIETNAM-JAPAN TRIDENT

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George Fernandes, then India's Defence Minister, stated in the year 2000 that "Vietnam and Japan are emerging as crucial strategic partners for India especially in the maritime domain."¹ Soon, the Indian Navy followed by sending its warships, tankers and submarines to Japan, Vietnam and other countries for bilateral exercises and gestures of goodwill. This whole activity was the beginning of India's naval diplomacy in Southeast and East Asia.

China, through its aggression and bullying has made more enemies than friends. It has territorial disputes with almost all its neighbouring countries and so far China has been assertive in laying its claim on those disputed territories. Repeated intrusion of land borders, contiguous maritime boundaries and violations of airspace of other countries by Chinese military forces have become the order of the day.

China started taking aggressive action in South China Sea from 1974 when it seized Paracel Islands from Vietnam after a brief battle. China followed the same tactic again in 1988 when it fought a naval battle with Vietnam over the possession of Spratly islands. Chinese PLA Navy ships sank a Vietnam's Navy ship carrying troops, killing 70 of them; afterwards China landed its marines and occupied 6 islands in the Spratly region. At the same time China has been quite crafty in declaring its intentions

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1. "Why the United States promotes India's great power ambitions," www.monthlyreview.org, vol. 57, issue no. 10, March 2006. See at <http://monthlyreview.org/2006/03/01/why-the-united-states-promotes-indias-great-power-ambitions>

While Japan and the Philippines enjoy security umbrella extended to them by United States, countries like India and Vietnam have to depend on their own military resources to defend their borders in case of war. It is a fact that when a country gets strong enough both economically and militarily, it has a tendency to resort to the use of force to settle disputes in its favour.

for peaceful resolution of those disputes, which is nothing but empty rhetoric. If observed closely, it can be noticed that China practises double standards in its policy of resolving disputes. On the one hand the Chinese state-controlled media and its leaders talk of resolving disputes amicably in order to maintain peace and stability in the region, but on the other hand its military forces continuously violate international laws and intrude into territory controlled by other countries as if they are trying to provoke the country into battle. For instance, Chinese diplomat declared that China would not cause trouble to any country in the South China Sea in "South China Sea Dispute Workshop." At

the same time, the Chinese Navy posted a territorial marker on Gaven Reef (Spratly Islands). It is no secret that China is perceived as a common threat to many countries in the Asia-Pacific region that mainly includes India, Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

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Recently, China held a naval exercise with Russia, with reports saying that China wanted to hold it near Japan in order to show its naval strength to Japan. However, Russia was not enthusiastic about the idea. But it has emerged that after the exercise was over, five Chinese warships made a circuit of the Japanese archipelago before returning to China. The manoeuvre was clearly intended to demonstrate Chinese naval might to Japan and the

United States and to show Russia it means “business” in the region.² Being a regional power, it is not only in India’s interest but also its responsibility to ensure the security of its partners and friends in the region in order to maintain peace and stability. Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh declared last June that India could be a net security provider in the region. So it is time we match our words with our actions. Although the ASEAN and East Asian nations have never stated it explicitly, but they want India to be a counterweight to China’s increasing footprints in the region. The question is whether India has the capabilities and, more importantly, the will to take up a bigger role in the region. Is it possible to be a security provider without any formal military alliance?

INDIA AND ITS TAKE IT EASY POLICY

International affairs experts and world’s prominent strategists have been talking about India becoming a rising superpower for quite some time now. But this idea still seems a bit far-fetched and appears more of a western propaganda of using India against China mainly because of India’s strategic location in the Indian Ocean. India surely is a strong regional power with one million plus strong military and good prospects for high economic growth; but its attitude is nowhere near that of a rising superpower. Our political corps and policymakers get jitters when reports of India’s tiny neighbours like Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan cultivating ties with China emerge. It does not behove a country like India to feel threatened by such small countries despite the fact that they share a far better relationship with India and are way too dependent on India for their own welfare. These countries tend to take India for granted sometimes, so New Delhi should exercise the option of using the “carrot-and-stick” tactic to deal with them and keep them under its influence.

Instead of worrying about these small countries of little importance, India should focus more on the problem it is facing and may face in future from formidable adversaries like China and Pakistan. Both China and

2. “Chinese warships make circuit of Japanese archipelago,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, July 23, 2013, see at <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201307230082>.

Pakistan have been chafing India on border disputes for decades now by various tactics, this despite the fact that on paper they have been making efforts on resolving the border disputes amicably. If India wishes for peace, it is desirable and recommended for the regional security environment but India should not compromise on its national interests for that. A superpower believes in peace on equal terms if not entirely on its own terms.

CHINESE GAME OF FOSTERING PROXIES

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), through its mouthpiece, talks about the ostensible “peaceful” intentions of growing Chinese military power, but on the other hand Beijing’s “latent” material and “visible” moral support towards some states and non-state actors as a means to keep the countries in territorial conflict with Beijing occupied with other distractions is quite apparent. If examined closely, one can conclude that in the past this double-game strategy of China seems to have worked. China has fathered Pakistan’s nuclear weapons programme, including delivery systems, to target India. China is believed to have involved Pakistan’s scientists in a nuclear test at its Lop Nor nuclear test site in 1989.³ Chinese President Jiang Zemin, during his visit to India in 1996, admitted that China had supplied Pakistan with 5,000 ring magnets (ring magnets are essential for uranium enrichment) when presented with hard evidence. China’s assistance to Pakistan in this area continues unabated.⁴

While India was busy tackling the perpetual skirmishes by Pakistan’s military on international borders and making several painstaking efforts to curb the infiltration of militants from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) into Indian side, the Chinese built their structures along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) over the years without any Indian protest, simply because Indian authorities were preoccupied with Pakistan to such an extent that they failed to notice such developments on the Sino-Indian border that might pose a security threat to India in the future. By the time New Delhi realised

3. “China’s Nuclear Exports and Assistance to Pakistan,” <http://cns.miis.edu/archive>, see at http://cns.miis.edu/archive/country_india/china/npakpos.htm.

4. Bhaskar Roy, “China’s only win India Policy,” paper no. 5528, www.southasiaanalysis.org, July 16, 2016, see at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/1318>.

its mistake of ignoring developments on the Chinese side of the border, it was already too late. The Chinese had been successful in their pursuit to a great extent. Most of their infrastructure development works have been completed which includes high speed rail line, Karakoram highway (across POK) and several airports in Tibet which serves the dual purpose of civilian movement as well as military movement.

The Indian side has been inordinately slow in building its infrastructure. Roads needed by security forces along the frontier with China have been delayed by five to seven years⁵ and to add to the woes, the military forces face constant badgering at the hands of the Chinese army when they keep intruding into Indian Territory and forcing the government to dismantle any infrastructure building activity undertaken by the Indian Army near the border.

Data of the Border Road Organisation (BRO) till March 31, 2013, shows that only 16 of the 73 roads along the Chinese frontier have been completed. The most egregious delay is the construction of the 255 km road connecting Darbok-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie in northern Ladakh. The road was scheduled for completion in 2012, but is now slated for completion in 2016. The three-week long stand-off in April between Indian and Chinese troops southeast of Daulat Beg Oldie had exposed how the Indian Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) struggled on terrain that has no road while their counterparts in China had metalled roads just a few kilometres short of the stand-off location. The worst hit is Arunachal Pradesh. Out of the 21 roads allocated to the BRO, only nine have been

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5. "Roads along border areas delayed by seven years, Antony tells BRO to take help from govt. agencies, private sector," *The Tribune*, May 26, 2013.

It is true that China's policy towards India has not become as threatening as it is towards Japan and the Southeast Asian countries on territorial claims; it still holds its claims on Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin. Would Indian foreign policymakers wait for China to threaten India, or take measures to tell China where to back off? At the moment, India is conceding space.

completed, three of which have a length of less than 20 km each. In J&K, only three of the 12 allocated roads are complete, the rest has been delayed by several years with fresh completion dates being either 2016 or "beyond 2016" (Bannerji, 2013).

The recent events of intrusion by the Chinese PLA on the Indian side of the border and dismantling of structures and taking away of CCTV cameras installed for monitoring the situation at the border certainly points to the fact that the Chinese are unwilling to let India carry out any construction activity near the Sino-Indian border which would help India in strengthening its position.

Meanwhile, reports have emerged that the Chinese want another border protocol. Though no details have been made public by either side, it appears the Chinese want to pin India down with an agreement which will prevent India from fortifying its position. They may even demand that India restrict deployment of its air force in Arunachal Pradesh and close Advance Landing Strips (ALS). (Kapila, 2013.) It will be defeatist if India succumbs to the Chinese pressure, and New Delhi will have to pay a heavy price for that if another border confrontation occurs. However, the Indian Air Force (IAF) recently landed a C-130 super Hercules transport aircraft in Ladakh to strengthen its claim on the border issue. This act also acted as a morale booster for soldiers.

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Beijing perceives India's growing relations with Japan, Vietnam and other countries as detrimental to China's Asia vision. It is, therefore, even more important for India to strengthen economic, political, diplomatic, defence and strategic relations with these countries (Anees, 2013).

SINO-VIETNAMESE DISPUTE AND CAMBODIA AS CHINA'S PROXY

Vietnam and China used to share a very friendly relationship till the 1960s. China provided significant support to North Vietnam's People's Air Force and People's Army in terms of arms, training and essential supplies during the Vietnam War (also known as Second Indochina war [1955-1975]) which helped North Vietnam in defeating the South Vietnamese forces and its allies (mainly the US). In this war, the communist regimes of North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos fought together against South Vietnam, the US and its allies. In the late 1950s Vietnam started tilting toward the Soviet Union. However when after the war with the US, North Vietnam emerged victorious and succeeded in the Unification of Vietnam, the relationship between China and Vietnam started to worsen when Vietnam signed a 25-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1978 (Sino-Soviet ideological differences already had split the block) and subsequently invaded Cambodia and occupied it. This provoked tensions with China as China had allied itself with the Khmer Rouge government. The tensions were soon followed by a brief border war between China and Vietnam in 1979.

A territorial conflict over the possession of the Spratly islands shot up between several countries. The Spratlys, one of the largest island chains in the South China Sea, is claimed in whole or in part by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. Small military forces from the first five countries are stationed on 45 of its islands. Vietnam and China have fought a battle over the possession of Spratly Islands in 1988 (already mentioned).

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RELATIONS WITH CAMBODIA

Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978 after continuous vexation over the genocide of the ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia by Khmer Rouge, which forced them to flee to Vietnam and at the same time Cambodian guerrilla forces harassed Vietnamese forces on the border, taking advantage of the unresolved border issue between the two countries. Pol Pot's hatred for Vietnam was well known, China cashed in on the opportunity and provided Cambodia with support and military hardware, so that it could pressurise Vietnam on relocating the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam who were forced out of the country by Vietnam's government. The real motive behind Chinese help to Khmer Rouge was that China wanted to acquire all of Paracel Islands and conduct oil exploration for its own usage but Vietnam wanted to invite foreign companies for oil exploration.

The territorial dispute between Vietnam and Cambodia still exists, though both sides have been successful in demarcating some portion of their shared border. But the possibility remains that China could exploit the still unresolved border issue to create tensions between Cambodia and Vietnam. Hanoi understands that it faces a bigger security threat from China than Cambodia and therefore Hanoi has embarked on a mission to modernise its forces so as to prepare for any possible conflict in future.

VIETNAM'S MODERNISATION PLAN

Considering the renewed threat from China because of its dynamic modernisation plan, Vietnam too has started modernisation of its defence forces and is in the midst of it. Vietnam's People's Air Force operates the largest fleet of aircraft in Southeast Asia in terms of sheer numbers but most of its fleet is of Cold-War era and hence obsolete to quite an extent. Under its modernisation plan Vietnam has purchased fourteen Su-27 and twenty-four Su-30 fighters from Russia. Four pre-modernised Su-30MK were purchased in 2004 and twenty Su-30MK2 were purchased under two contracts signed in 2009 and 2010. Recently, Russia signed a deal with Vietnam to deliver a dozen Sukhoi-30MK2 multirole combat jets to Vietnam for a sum of \$600 million over the period of 2014-2015. Vietnam plans to acquire a total of 72 Su-30's by 2015.

India plays an important role here as the Indian Air Force trains the Vietnam's People's Air Force pilots to fly the Su-30.

Vietnam plans to deploy a modern submarine fleet by 2016-2017 and has placed orders for six Kilo-class conventional fast attack submarines with Russia. Vietnam also has on order four Dutch Sigma-class Corvettes.⁶

Meanwhile in order to strengthen its defence ties with Vietnam, India has extended \$100 million credit line to Vietnam to purchase military equipment. The money would most probably be used in purchasing four

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6. Carlyle Thayer, "Strategic Posture Review: Vietnam," www.worldpoliticsforum.com, see at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12623/strategic-posture-review-vietnam>

patrol boats.⁷ This no doubt would beef up the military ties between the two countries to some extent, but India needs to go further. The Indo-Russian jointly developed cruise missile “Brahmos” has been on the top of Vietnam’s demand list but so far India has not committed itself to provide the sophisticated missile because both Russia and India would not want to antagonise China by offering a state-of-the-art missile to a country which has arms embargo imposed on it. But if India, with Russia’s support, can find a way to deliver these missiles to Vietnam, it would be in India’s interest. Indian decision makers are worried about antagonising China, whereas China has helped Pakistan in every possible way not only to develop nuclear weapons but also provided it with various weapon systems which could deliver them.

JAPAN’S GROWING PROXIMITY WITH VIETNAM

Japan has vested interest in the resolution of the Spratly Islands dispute in Vietnam’s favour. As the island is located close to Japan’s oil import lanes, having control of the sea lanes in the hands of a hostile country could have calamitous effect on Japan’s national security and economy. Additionally, Japan is also keen on developing some of the oil blocks in the region which is possible only if Vietnam controls the islands.

Japan’s eagerness to forge closer ties with the fast-growing Southeast Asian countries as a part of efforts to revive Japan’s economy is quite evident from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s recent visit to Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. Deepening cooperation with Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is strategically important for Japan to keep China in check, which has become assertive in East China and South China Seas.

The relationship between Vietnam and Japan reached a new level post October 2006 when Vietnam’s Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung officially visited Japan and opened a new phase of cooperation towards “strategic

7. “India offers Vietnam credit for military ware,” *The Hindu*, July 28, 2013. See at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-offers-vietnam-credit-for-military-ware/article4960731.ece>

partnership between Vietnam and Japan for peace and prosperity in Asia.”⁸ Vietnam signed a strategic partnership agreement with Japan that called for high-level visits and the establishment of a ministerial-level Joint Cooperation Committee. The following year, Japan and Vietnam adopted a 44-point agenda covering seven substantive areas of cooperation: high-level policy dialogue, economic relations, legal and administrative reform, science and technology, people-to-people exchanges, cooperation in multilateral forums and engagement on issues involving climate change, environment, natural

resources and technology. In December 2008, the two countries signed Vietnam– Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (VJEPA). Lately, Japan has been pursuing the strategy of using countries like Vietnam and Mongolia who have diplomatic ties with North Korea to pressure Pyongyang in reducing tensions and returning Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea.

Japan is currently the largest contributor of development assistance to Vietnam, its second-largest trading partner and its third-largest investor. Japan’s military has so far been careful to offer assistance only in non-combat-related areas like disaster relief, anti-piracy and health care. But even these limited steps build ties between military forces. One plan now under negotiation is to train medical personnel from Vietnam’s navy next year to care for the crews on that nation’s newly purchased Russian-built submarines (Fackler, 2012).

Japan’s Ministry of Defence said it has planned to double its military aid programme next year to help Indonesia and Vietnam. Vietnam could also be among the countries that Japan would allow to buy its submarines and other defence-related equipment, but maybe at a later stage (Fackler, 2012).

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8. “Overview of Vietnam-Japan relations,” Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency, see at http://www.vietrade.gov.vn/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1034:ov

TIME FOR INDIAN REALPOLITIK

In the last few months, New Delhi has taken a number of initiatives to set up durable bilateral ties in the Asia-Pacific region. The Indian Defence Minister visited Singapore, Australia and Thailand recently, The Australian visit being the maiden visit by an Indian Defence Minister. Japan's Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera will be visiting Vietnam and Thailand soon to boost cooperation on Maritime security. It is quite evident that India and Japan are trying to forge stronger relationships with the same countries as their interests converge. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh appointed a special PM envoy for Japan which would try to speed up the discussions on various issues of cooperation between India and Japan. India should try and see if it can bring these countries together and form some sort of multilateral partnership.

The group of decision makers which believes in status quo and who have prevailed for a long time are totally unwilling to tinker with India's foreign policy tenets, non-alignment policy being the foremost of those. It was relevant only during the Cold War period and India, in fact, followed this policy only till Jawaharlal Nehru's reign. Technically, New Delhi diverted from the path of non-alignment from 1972 itself when it signed the treaty of friendship with the USSR. This policy should have expired with the end of the Cold War but because Non-alignment policy was a legacy of Nehru, political leaders, especially from the Congress, felt that it needs to be carried on without pondering over its relevance in the post-Cold War period.

The current case of possible US military intervention in Syria is quite relevant for India. Had Syria been a country with no allies like Iraq, the US would not have debated much over taking military action on Syria. But because Syria has the backing of Russia, China and Iran, the US cannot think of attacking Syria and getting away with it. The same applies to India. In 1962 when India was one of the leaders of Non-Alignment movement and was attacked by China, no country came to India's rescue even when India's prime minister wrote letters to the heads of other countries for help. However the possibility of war with China becomes less if India has some

allies on its side which can put pressure on Beijing and can also give added advantage to India while conducting negotiations over border disputes.

EXPORTING DEFENCE EQUIPMENT

As of 2011, official figures show that India's global export of defence-related equipment is about \$150 million. Most of India's defence exports are of low-technology items. Except for a few helicopters and small transport aircraft, which have recently been exported by the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) to countries like Ecuador and the Seychelles, respectively, Indian defence exports mainly consist of spare parts, clothing items, parachutes and accessories, communications equipment, night-vision devices, transport vehicles and various types of ammunition.⁹ India supplies defence equipment mainly to Asian and African countries. The reason why India is not able to make any place for its products is because of absence of a clear defence export policy. This in turn affects India's own quest for indigenisation of weapon systems.

CHINA AS THE UNITING FACTOR

Recently, Chinese companies have started constructing a facility for natural gas exploration in the East China Sea in an area which happens to fall under Chinese maritime zone, but the Japanese fear that their activities are likely to cross over to the Japanese side. Japan has been willing for a joint exploration but Beijing has stalled the talks and now it is going ahead with the exploration on its own. This step is likely to stir more tension as the boundary is not marked clearly and Tokyo has been requesting Beijing not to approve any project in an area where territorial claims by both countries are overlapping. The dispute over Senkaku Islands continues.

With India, China's stance has not been as aggressive as it has been with Japan but repetition of intrusion keeps taking place. China has not shown any intent of backing down from its claim on Indian territories, the question over Chinese occupation of Indian territory is seldom raised in discussions.

9. "Global insider: Indian Defence exports constrained by lack of clear policy," [www.worldpoliticsreview.com](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/13196/global-insider-indian-defense-exports-constrained-by-lack-of-clear-policy). See at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/13196/global-insider-indian-defense-exports-constrained-by-lack-of-clear-policy>

China opposes any sort of economic activity carried out by Vietnam or by any country on invitation by Vietnam in the South China Sea. It warned Vietnam and India against any unilateral oil exploration activity. Though the fact is that the allocated oil block comes under Vietnam's jurisdiction.

With respect to Vietnam, the Chinese approach has not been any different. China opposes any sort of economic activity carried out by Vietnam or by any country on invitation by Vietnam in the South China Sea. It warned Vietnam and India against any unilateral oil exploration activity. Though the fact is that the allocated oil block comes under Vietnam's jurisdiction.

It appears that China is trying to keep the other countries from carrying out any energy exploitation activity in order to safeguard the resources for own usage. China's dispute with both Japan and Vietnam, although appearing to be about possession of islands, is actually about the energy resources that are believed to be around these islands. India may not be a direct party to these disputes, but nonetheless India has its own national interests at stake in both the disputes.

INDIA'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH VIETNAM

India has been a traditional friend and partner of Vietnam. Both countries signed the strategic partnership agreement in 2007 to further bolster the military relationship. India has shown renewed vigour in establishing military ties with Vietnam. This partnership remains strongest in political, defence and security cooperation in light of the challenges posed to both countries by a rising China, with India serving as Vietnam's second major supplier of military training and equipment after Russia.

The oil pipeline that links Myanmar and China started operating from July 27, 2013. This is being considered by many as a breakthrough by China in its pursuit of energy diversification and reducing extreme dependence on Strait of Malacca for its oil and natural gas imports. The 793-kilometre pipeline connects Bay of Bengal with southwest China's Yunnan province

and is expected to transfer 12 billion cubic metres of natural gas to China annually, according to a news release on the website of China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). (Watt, 2013) A parallel 771-kilometre pipeline that will carry Middle East oil shipped via the Indian Ocean is under construction. So though it has offered benefit to China in terms of security of its oil tankers passing through Strait of Malacca, the advantage is still very limited in its nature as the Chinese oil from Persian Gulf would still have to pass through Indian Navy-dominated area of Indian Ocean. But our eastern flank requires further exigency as it needs to be strengthened more.

Vietnam has already extended its backing to India's effort for oil exploration. India should help Vietnam in return for its support by extending all possible support for Vietnam's military modernisation in order to deter China from establishing hegemony in South China Sea. All the while waiting for the US to lift arms embargo first and then follow other countries is not going to benefit India.

Taking a cue from China's strategy of establishing multiple routes for Oil and gas imports, India should also augment its oil exploration activities in Vietnam's controlled area in South China Sea. Vietnam has already extended its backing to India's effort for oil exploration. India should help Vietnam in return for its support by extending all possible support for Vietnam's military modernisation in order to deter China from establishing hegemony in South China Sea. All the while waiting for the US to lift arms embargo first and then follow other countries is not going to benefit India. The US is expected to lift the various sanctions imposed on Vietnam in time to come as it will try to engage with Vietnam in its effort to contain China. India should take the lead. India should not hesitate in offering its defence equipment to Vietnam just out of the fear of antagonising China. A good example is the case where France's naval defence shipbuilding company, DCNS SA, has sold its landing grid to China which allows helicopters to land on or take off from ships without crew assistance even in bad weather, despite objections from Japan. France maintains that the equipment is not

for military use and does not violate European Union's ban on arms export, but one needs to keep in mind that such a technology could easily be used for military operations.

India has not been very vocal about its interests in the South China Sea, but New Delhi has taken many important steps towards consolidating its position in the area. Like the US and other countries, India too has declared its support for peaceful resolution of conflicts and continued freedom of navigation in international waters. India has also pursued deepening maritime relations with several claimant states, notably Vietnam, with the Indian Navy gaining permanent berthing rights at Nha Trang port and offering the Vietnamese training in submarine warfare.¹⁰

AREAS OF COOPERATION

Natural Resources: Vietnam and India have world's fourth and fifth largest deposits of rare earth minerals, respectively. Japan depends heavily on import of rare earth minerals for its electronic and automobile industry from China which supplies about 90% of Japan's rare earth mineral needs. But following the territorial dispute, China suspended the supply of rare earth minerals for about a month which had a severe impact on Japan's industries. India too has agreed to supply about 7% of Japan's total requirement of rare earth minerals which is a step forward in ending China's monopoly on it.

Vietnam is a resource rich country and India and Japan both depend upon exports to meet their energy needs. Vietnam has several oilfields which could be developed by both Japan and India. India's ONGC Videsh tried to develop an oil block but pulled out of the project. India and Japan will have to step up their efforts in developing these oil blocks to strengthen their energy security.

Civil Nuclear Cooperation: With the sky-rocketing price of crude oil and the persistent use of coal for power generation, countries are finding it difficult to provide electricity to their respective citizens at an affordable price. Exhaust gases not only pollute the surrounding environment but

10. Cheitig Bajpae, "Reaffirming India's South China Sea Credentials," www.thediplomat.com, August 14, 2013. See at <http://thediplomat.com/2013/08/14/reaffirming-indias-south-china-sea-credentials/>

also contribute greatly towards global warming. In the past we have seen how the whole of Japan was under the chronic problem of air pollution in the 1960s when industrialisation was at its peak. Recently in Beijing too people are suffering from the problem of air pollution. Automobiles will continue running on petroleum in the foreseeable future and its consumption is likely to increase. But in order to get some sort of grip on pollution, countries have been looking desperately to replace conventional fuels used for generating electricity with renewable sources of energy and clean sources of energy.

With the current trend in the energy sector, the world is only going to witness more and more usage of nuclear material

for power generation. Japan is in the process of finalising nuclear deals with both India and Vietnam to help them with their respective nuclear energy programmes. India is likely to gain much from this deal as India has to spend a large amount of its foreign reserves on purchasing crude oil. India is looking to increase the share of nuclear fuel in total power generation in the country and this deal will surely help India a lot. India also has signed a nuclear deal with Vietnam to help Vietnam in developing and maintain nuclear power plants, though India is a late entrant to the club with the US, Russia already expressed its willingness to sign a deal with Vietnam. At a time when Japan is still struggling to restrict the flow of contaminated water into the ocean, the Japanese government is already under extreme pressure from its citizens who are demanding abolition of nuclear energy power plants in Japan in order to avoid another incident similar to the Fukushima nuclear disaster. On September 15, 2013 Japan switched off all its nuclear power plants for a second time. The question over the safety of nuclear

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power is moot but the fact of the matter is that nuclear energy is the only form of clean energy at the time which is capable of electricity generation on a large scale.

Defence equipments: India can offer to sell its indigenous Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) and Light Attack Helicopter (LAH) and Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) to certain countries at a price which is cheaper than its competitors. The strategy should be to carve out a market share for oneself before one thinks about making huge margins of profits. The international arms market is highly competitive and as of now India's share in it is negligible. India can sell various short and medium range missiles (Prithvi and Brahmos) to Vietnam not only to help Vietnam bolster a credible military power but also to slowly start expanding India's own defence product market. This would enable India to partially recover the huge amount of money it spends in the development of these products, and would also bring in competition and encouragement in India's domestic market for companies to develop more varieties of weapons and delivery systems. India's plan of going for indigenous weapon systems is not going to work out unless India not only buys from private companies but also backs them up in the global competition for arms sale.

Vietnam is looking for submarines to arm its Navy, for which both India and Japan can make offers. Japan has already hinted that it may offer to sell its submarines to Vietnam at a later stage. India too can follow suit. It will not only help the defence ties between India and Vietnam but also help the Indian shipbuilding company, which has started making submarines for the Indian Navy, by gaining more expertise in making submarines.

Economic Investment and Trade: Both India and Vietnam are developing economies and have a highly profitable market potential. Japan on the other hand is an export-oriented economy and is in need of markets where it can invest and simultaneously sell its products or use them as hub for its exports. Japanese companies had a huge investment and market in China which in a way helped China to achieve the growth rate it has today, but after the territorial dispute spilled on in the economic domain, Chinese citizens out of their nationalistic fervour damaged Japanese factories and also boycotted

Japanese goods. So in the given circumstances, India and Vietnam present favourable conditions for Japan to make investments which would in turn help all the three countries achieve their economic goals.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: With the incidents of sea piracy rampant near Somalian coast and Malacca Strait, it is imperative that the three countries come together and undertake coordinated patrolling and joint escorting missions. For a country like India, illegal arms trafficking via sea and maritime terrorism is a proven possibility. The materials for making bombs and assault rifles for 1993 Mumbai blast were sent via sea and the attack of 26/11 again on Mumbai took place through the sea. Recently there were intelligence reports of terrorists numbering in excess of 30 would come to India via sea from Sri Lanka. With all such possibilities looming over the security of Indian coastal cities, it is necessary that India in coordination with other powers of the region increases patrolling in the region so that the possibilities of another deadly terrorist attack could not be repeated. Indian National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon has proposed a "Maritime Concert" in which the region's major maritime powers would have collective responsibility to protect the domain.¹¹ There have already been several demonstrations of this kind of cooperation, including China, India and Japan coordinating their anti-piracy patrols in the Indian Ocean within the framework of the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) mechanism, and the establishment of an Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) in 2012 (Bajpayee, 2013).

MULTILATERAL SECURITY COOPERATION IS EXPEDIENT FOR INDIA

Maritime security requires multilateral cooperation. For a dynamic region such as Asia-Pacific, multilateral and bilateral cooperation networks of groups with compatible and complementing vested interests become more necessary to maintain balance of power in the region. Forging strong bilateral ties within a multilateral cooperation network adds to the overall

11. Cheitig Bajpayee, "Reaffirming India's South China Sea credentials," *thediplomat.com*, August 14, 2013. See at <http://thediplomat.com/2013/08/14/reaffirming-indias-south-china-sea-credentials/>

strengthening of the network. Among the predictions between a multi-polar power structure and choosing sides between the “big two” (United States and China), India will have to figure out which one will be more beneficial to its national interest. India needs to give up its outdated philosophy of non-alignment.¹² According to the views of prominent strategists, the choice for the later, i.e., re-emergence of a bipolar power structure would be like a second cold war in the making, on the other hand, a multi-polar power structure would ensure peace and stability not only in the region but also in the whole world to a great extent. So far New Delhi has abstained from being part of any multilateral construct aimed against any particular country and at the same time has started strategic dialogues and cultivated strategic partnerships on bilateral basis.

CONCLUSION

In international politics there is no such thing as right act or wrong act. One needs to take an action and justify it by all means, stating that under the circumstances, the action taken was the best option and in the interest of all. India's is one such case where the country most of the times remains entangled in the debate whether the action taken will be good or bad. Although in a democracy issues are supposed to be debated and then reach a consensus, in India the debate mostly ends up in a deadlock between those who are for and those who are against. This does nothing else but projects a weak image of the country and exudes the inability of leaders to reach some agreement. New Delhi can learn from recent revelation about the United States' worldwide snooping programme. Instead of feeling guilty over its act of spying on other countries (including allies), the US openly justified its action citing cases where terrorist attacks were allegedly thwarted because of the PRISM spying programme.

New Delhi can make an impact on regional politics and swing things in its favour only if it has the confidence to back itself up. Having capabilities which could pose a challenge to others, or which could neutralise challenges

12. “Can India become a great power?” *The Economist*, March 30, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21574511-indias-lack-of-strategic-culture-hobbles-its-ambition-be-force-world-can-india>

posed to it by others, is the better way of achieving confidence. But when one has limitations on its capabilities, forming a group of like-minded countries is recommendable as it enhances the combined capabilities of the group.

No doubt, India has carved a niche for itself in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) due to its rapid naval modernisation, and this will go a long way in augmenting India's strategic relevance in the Asian maritime domain. India's plan of having three active carrier battle groups by 2022 trumpets its intentions of becoming a dominant force in the region.

Asia is going to witness more interstate rivalries, especially in the maritime domain, in time to come. With such a plausible scenario, expanded maritime role of India is prudent not only for safeguarding its growing maritime interests but also to maintain the freedom of navigation in international waters as India's dependence on seaborne trade will keep rising amid India's rise as a resource consuming power. It is pivotal as well as the responsibility of India to protect the other countries from the emergence of interstate security threats which is rooted in China's rise as an assertive and aggressive maritime power. This coupled with the US's hesitance to get involved in disputes in the region gives the impression that United States superpower posture is eroding fast and it will be left to India's ability to play a constructivist maritime role in the region to justify its strategic significance.

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