

INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP IN ASIA ON INDIA-US RELATIONS

Author: Dr Hrishikesh M Bevanur, Ph.D

hrishimb@gmail.com

Asst. Professor, Dept of political Science,

Maharani Women's Arts, Commerce & Management College,

Maharani Cluster University,

Bangalore-560001

ABSTRACT

Much of the world has entered a phase in which conflict is predominately at the sub-national level, thus explaining the current prospect of interstate conflict within Asia. This conflict is in three areas: between China and Taiwan, on the Korean Peninsula, and between India and Pakistan. The potential for conflict is reflected in the regions arms sales. India, China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Pakistan were among the top ten leading recipients of arms transfer in the developing world from 1998 onwards.

Potential conflict over Taiwan remains the most likely scenario in which the United States could become embroiled in great power conflict. President Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) had asserted a more independent stance for Taiwan than his Nationalist party (KMT) predecessors. In 2001, President Bush stated the United States would do "whatever it takes" to help Taiwan defend itself, but later backed off from this assertion by warning Taiwan that the U.S. does not wish to see destabilizing declarations of Taiwan's independence that could provoke a conflict with China

Keywords: Conflict in Asia, China, Taiwan, Korean Peninsula, India and Pakistan, North Korea, Islamist Militancy, South Asia, terrorist groups

There are several key strategic issues in the Asia-Pacific region that are a concern to U.S. policy makers including, the rise of China, continuing potential for interstate conflict, the struggle against Islamist militancy, and Asia-Pacific arms expenditures.

Potential Interstate Conflict in Asia

Much of the world has entered a phase in which conflict is predominately at the sub-national level, thus explaining the current prospect of interstate conflict within Asia. This conflict is in three areas: between China and Taiwan, on the Korean Peninsula, and between India and Pakistan. The potential for conflict is reflected in the regions arms sales. India, China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Pakistan were among the top ten leading recipients of arms transfer in the developing world from 1998 onwards.

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Tensions on the Korean Peninsula had increased in July and October 2006 as a result of North Korea’s missile and nuclear tests. These events, along with the development of long range missiles, demonstrate North Korea’s desire to acquire new and increasingly lethal military capabilities. These tensions on the Korean Peninsula make it one of the world’s most likely areas of interstate conflict⁵.

India’s and Pakistan’s history of war and ongoing tension also make a future conflict on the sub-continent a possibility. The two states fought wars in 1947, 1965, and 1971. In 1998, border tensions mounted in the wake of nuclear tests by both India and Pakistan and the two states had a major border clash at Kargil in Kashmir in 1999. The two came close to war in 2001-2002 following the December 13, 2001, attack on the Indian parliament that was believed to have been carried out by the Pakistan-based terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Toiba and

Jaish-e-Muhammad. Due to the attacks these two groups were immediately placed on the United States’ terrorist watch list. Tensions increased in July 2006 after a series of train blasts in Mumbai killing 186 people. Mumbai police concluded that the attacks were planned by Pakistan’s Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) and carried out by the Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Toiba⁶. Such events placed pressure on the Government of India to respond. They also identify a nexus between terrorism and interstate conflict. Such situations or border conflicts such as at Kargil have the potential to escalate into full-scale war between these two nuclear-armed states⁷.

The Rise of Islamist Militancy

Radical Islamist groups in Southeast Asia have carried out a number of deadly bombings since 9/11, including the Bali bombings of October 2002 and October 2005 and the attack on the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in 2004 by the terrorist group Jemaah Islamiya (JI). While counter-terror efforts have been increasingly successful, JI is still believed to be conducting operations while the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf still remains active in the Philippines. A regional maritime security initiative has sought to prevent attacks against shipping or ports, particularly near the strategically important Straits of Malacca, a maritime gateway responsible for most of the world’s oceanic trade. Insurrection in the Muslim provinces of Southern Thailand is also a matter of concern, although its ties to international terrorist groups have not yet been established.

The continued presence of terrorist groups in South Asia are a key source of instability, a threat to U.S. forces and interests, and could serve as a catalyst for interstate conflict. Al Qaeda and Taliban forces remain active along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions. Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, thought to be behind bombings and attacks in India, have raised tensions between India and Pakistan. There are

also allegations of links between Pakistan's ISI and other South Asian terrorist groups. India believes that these linkages facilitate the cross-border infiltration of insurgents into Kashmir. Some analysts have concluded that terrorist attacks could lead to a wider conflict in South Asia⁸. Some view the United States' relationship with Pakistan on a more tactical level and focus on the struggle against militant Islamists while the evolving relationship with India is viewed as a strategic partnership.

Asia-Pacific Arms Expenditures

Together, the U.S. and its regional allies spend far more on defense than any conceivable coalition of enemies. (See Table 1) The United States operates at extended distances in Asia. The projection of power over great distances can diminish power in both military and political terms. While eight of the world's top 25 spenders on defense are in Asia, it is the growing defense expenditures of China and India that are attracting them most interest. China is focusing its defense budget on acquiring C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) systems⁹. While the United States grows increasingly concerned over China's expanding military capabilities, it is also developing closer ties to India. India has one of the most rapidly expanding defense budgets in Asia. The country's defense spending for the 2007-12 period increased by approximately 44% over the previous five years. This level of expenditure, based on a 8% rate of economic growth represents 2.56% of GDP, as opposed to 2.33% under the preceding five year plan. The Indian Ministry of Defense was reportedly spending at the rate of 3% of GDP¹⁰.

Even though the percentage of GDP spent on defense in East Asia and Australia remained relatively constant, defense spending overall in the region increased. According to experts, "Though the Middle East has been the largest purchasing region in the world, it has been overtaken by modernization programs in India and China¹¹." Between 1995 and 2004 defense expenditures in the region fluctuated between 1.45% and 1.57% of GDP while rising at a nominal rate. The United States spends approximately 4% of its GDP on defense¹². The following chart illustrates that many of the top defense budgets in Asia belong to American friends and allies.

Table 4.1. Top Defense Budgets in Asia

Country	Expenditure in billions of USD in 2005, est.	World Expenditure Ranking
United States ^a	\$518.10	1
China ^b	\$81.47	2
Japan	\$44.31	4
South Korea	\$21.05	8
India	\$19.04	10
Australia	\$17.84	12
Taiwan	\$7.92	19
North Korea	\$5.00	23
Singapore	\$4.47	24

Source: "25 Top Spenders," *Defense News*, September 11, 2006.

ANALYZING COOPERATION IMPLICATIONS

The national security strategy of the United States was, according to President Bush, founded upon two pillars. The first promotes “freedom, justice, and human dignity — working to end tyranny, to promote effective democracies” while the second pillar confronts “the challenges of our time by leading a growing community of democracies.” This is part of a tradition in American foreign policy that Walter Russell Mead described as the American project. This project seeks to “protect our own domestic security while building a peaceful world order of democratic states linked by common values and sharing a common prosperity¹³.” After observing that the United States has “extensive interests throughout East and Southeast Asia” the 2006 National Security Strategy Statement of the United States of America (NSSS) pointed to the need to have sustained U.S. engagement, “maintaining robust partnerships supported by a forward defense posture supporting economic integration through expanded trade and investment and promoting democracy and human rights.” The NSSS also calls for institutional frameworks to be built on “a foundation of sound bilateral relations with key states in the region.” The NSSS also states that South and Central Asia constitute “a region of great strategic importance where American interests and values are engaged as neverbefore¹⁴.”

The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) discussed the need to shape the choices of those countries at strategic crossroads and “hedge against the possibility that a major or emerging power could choose a hostile path in the future.” The QDR goes on to state that “of the major and emerging powers, China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States.” The QDR also expresses concern with China’s strategic arsenal and growing power projection capabilities. It asserts that the United States will “seek to ensure that no foreign power can dictate the terms of regional or global security.” It also calls for “prudent hedges against the possibility that cooperative approaches by themselves may fail to preclude future conflict. A successful hedging strategy

requires improving the capability of partner states and reducing their vulnerabilities¹⁵.” One key section of the NSSS focused on “strengthening alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends.” The document observes that “the war on terror is a battle of ideas.” While pointing to democracy as the long-term solution, the document identifies four short term objectives viz., prevent attacks by terrorist networks, deny weapons of mass destruction to terrorist allies, deny terrorists sanctuary, and deny terrorist control of any base of operations. The QDR states that “The ability of the United States and its allies to work together to influence the global environment is fundamental to defeating terrorist networks.”

These strategic themes were highlighted by the former National Security Adviser Steve Hadley when he outlined “three basic insights” into the Administration’s strategy toward East Asia in April 2006. The first point expressed the importance of “traditional allies, nations that share the values of democracy and freedom.” While pointing to the need to resolve “long-standing irritants” in relations with Japan and Korea, Hadley also pointed to “strengthened ties with key allies and friends.” The second insight focused on “working with partners” to “develop cooperative and creative approaches to regional and global challenges” such as the war on terror. The third insight noted that while the U.S. welcomes China as a responsible stakeholder they want China to “change policies that exacerbate tensions ... such as their non-transparent military

expansion; their quest to lock up energy supplies ... and their support of resource rich countries with poor records of democracy and human rights¹⁶.”

The U.S. Strategic Response to the Evolving Correlates of Power in Asia

The United States has undertaken a number of initiatives at the strategic level to address rising regional security concerns. These include the Trilateral Security Initiative between the United States, Australia, and Japan, the opening of a strategic relationship with India, efforts to develop enhanced cooperation with ASEAN, and some structural changes in the U.S. government to be better configured to bureaucratically deal with the region.

Trilateral Security Initiative (The United States, Japan, and Australia)

The United States, Japan, and Australia met in Sydney on March 18, 2006 to establish the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue. The three nations agreed to work to “maintain stability and security globally, with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region.” The Joint Statement noted that this will add to the strong security relationships that already exist among the three states. The dialogue discussed the “emergence and consolidation of democracies and strengthening cooperative frameworks in the Asia-Pacific region” as well as “welcomed China’s constructive engagement in the region.” It also noted the need to enhance cooperation with ASEAN, South Korea and “recognized the importance of reinforcing global partnership with India”.¹⁷ Regarding the Trilateral Security initiative, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated “all of us in the region, particularly those who are longstanding allies, have joint responsibilities and obligations to try and produce conditions in which the rise of China will be a positive force in international politics and not a negative force¹⁸.”

Relationship with India

India and the United States issued a joint statement in March 2006 that identified their desire “to increase mutual security against the common threats posed by intolerance, terrorism, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction”, and expressed their hope that their efforts “will have a decisive and positive influence on the future international system¹⁹.” While India and the United States continue to share concern over Islamist militants, they may not view China in the same manner. Some viewed the Bush Administration’s efforts to support India’s rise as a regional Asian power and develop a strategic relationship with India as an effort to develop a “counterweight to China”.²⁰ Some analysts expressed concern that the United States may not fully appreciate India’s desire to act as a full partner and not as a subordinate in America’s Asian geostrategic designs. While strategic circles remain concerned about China’s growing power, others are less concerned. India will likely remain sensitive to being perceived as subordinate to American policy towards China.

U.S.-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership Initiative

U.S. policy towards Southeast Asia generally focused on counter terrorism since the period after 9/11. U.S. diplomacy sought to broaden U.S. engagement with ASEAN under a new initiative. The United States and

ASEAN launched the U.S.-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership initiative in November 2005 in order to “foster cooperation.” Key components of this partnership included political, security, economic, social, and educational cooperation. Initial projects included post-tsunami assistance, research scholarships, artistic and cultural cooperation, a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, work on FTAs, and the development of a science and technology agreement²¹. Some analysts highlighted the need to operationalise the partnership. In the words of one expert “getting the partnership out of the ‘vision’ stage is critical²².” There may also be potential to work with the ASEAN Regional Forum to discuss common approaches to regional security issues.

Structural Changes

One of the ways in which the US Dept of Defence adjusted to the changing strategic environment in Asia was through reorganization of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld went to Congress in August 2006 to seek Congressional approval for a reorganisation of the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy which includes a new Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia and Pacific Security Affairs²³.

SHAPE OF DEFENCE RELATIONSHIP IN ASIA

American military forces in Asia fall under one of two military commands, the U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Central Command are two of nine Unified Combatant Commands and two of five Regional Commands. While the Asia-Pacific falls under Pacific Command, parts of South and Central Asia are part of Central Command. Figure 1 illustrates the geographic division of responsibility for U.S. regional commands.

Pacific Command

The United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) based in Hawaii has an area of responsibility (AoR) that covers approximately 50% of the earth’s surface and some 60% of its population, including the world’s two most populous countries and the world’s most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia. Of the 43 countries and entities in the PACOM AoR, five are U.S. treaty allies²⁵. Pacific Command’s AoR spans an area from Alaska to Madagascar and from India to the South Pacific. The U.S. Pacific Command has service components and subordinate unified commands, including U.S. Forces Japan, U.S. Forces Korea, Special Operations Command Pacific, and the Alaskan Command. It also has Standing Joint Task Forces assigned to it. Operationally, the Pacific Commander reports directly to the Secretary of Defense and the President²⁶. Figure 2 illustrates the USPACOM area of responsibility (AoR). The USPACOM, established as a unified command on January 1, 1947, is the oldest and largest of the United States’ unified commands.

Central Command

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) is a unified combatant command area including the Middle East

and parts of East Africa as well as Central Asia. CENTCOM's AoR includes some 27 countries as well as the waters of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and western reaches of the Indian Ocean. South and Central Asian states in CENTCOM's AoR include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan²⁷.

U.S. Asia-Based Military Units and Locations

While United States military forces are spread across the region, the largest concentrations are located in Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Afghanistan. Efforts are currently underway to enhance the flexibility of U.S. forces in Asia and to make those forces more deployable to zones of conflict as they arise²⁹. There appears to be strong support for the retention of American military bases both at home and abroad. According to a poll conducted by the Chicago Council of Global Affairs, some 68% of Americans felt that America should have "about as many as now" (53%) or "more bases" (15%). Some 65% of Americans polled believe that U.S. military presence in East Asia should be maintained, (57%) or increased. 8% opposed to, and 30% that feel it should be decreased. 62% of South Koreans believe they "should have" American bases as opposed to the 29% that feel they "should not have" American bases. 59% of South Koreans feel U.S. military presence in East Asia should be increased and 15% feel it should be maintained. In Japan, 57% believe they "should have" as opposed to 34% who thought they "should not have" American bases. Support in Afghanistan appears less strong though it too increased 5% since 2004. Afghanistan has 52% in favor and 39% opposed to American military bases. Some 66% of Indians feel the United States is "very or somewhat [important]" in resolving key problems in Asia³⁰.

Global Posture Review and U.S. Asia-Pacific Forces

The orientation of American military forces in the Asia-Pacific region is, along with U.S. forces elsewhere around the globe, undergoing significant reconfigurations. This was brought into focus by the Global Posture Review (GPR) as early as 2001 and reshaped the U.S. military "footprint" around the globe. The official name of the GPR is the Integrated Global Presence and Basing Study (IGPBS). Many of the United States World War II bases were retained to contain the spread of communism. With the end of the Cold War, their role shifted as they became instrumental in the projection of American power. Current reductions in deployed forces are occurring everywhere, especially within the Middle East and Asian-Pacific regions.³¹

In 2004, the Bush Administration announced that, as a result of the Global Posture Review, it planned to withdraw up to 70,000 troops from Europe and Asia over the course of the next decade³². In 2004 it was projected that 20,000 of the 70,000 would be withdrawn from Asia³³. This move challenged conventional wisdom since the mid-1990s that the deployment of 100,000 troops in the Asia-Pacific theater was politically significant³⁴. Some security experts have cautioned that the new smaller "footprint" facilities will remain dependent on larger bases located elsewhere such as Yokosuka in Japan. It has also been determined that a move to diversify support facilities may be in part driven by increasing uncertainty over the disposition of allies and friends in future conflicts, whereas the previous emphasis on forward presence focused on maintaining regional stability, the new basing structure is more concerned with preemption and power projection³⁵. Such an

emphasis may have a negative impact on regional states' perceptions of American power and America's commitment to friends and allies in theregion.³⁶

The posture review process builds on existing infrastructure for power projection in Asia, particularly with the operating bases in South Korea and Japan. This shift is driven by the need to increase the flexibility of U.S. deployed forces for contingencies in the country and beyond. The shift is also being driven by changes in U.S. relationships with key allies and from a growing recognition that coalitions may be more fluid in future conflict.

Guam and the Pacific

There are close to 6,500 service personnel on Guam. The shift of 8,000 Marines from Japan began in 2008³⁷. The Navy also shifted submarines from the Atlantic to the Pacific theater, with additional submarines based in Guam, Hawaii, San Diego, and Bremerton. This build-up was increased to 31 nuclear powered attack submarines in the Pacific by 2010³⁸. The QDR recommended the shifting of an aircraft carrier from the Atlantic to the Pacific. With Guam as an American territory it had the political advantage that forces based there are not subject to the restrictions of foreign governments that may or may not wish U.S. forces based in their country to participate in future conflicts in Asia. The follow up studies have focused on cross cutting global issues and analyzing capabilities such as logistics, mobility, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance³⁹.

The Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site, formerly known as the Kwajalein Missile Range, on Kwajalein Island in the Marshall Islands supports the operational and developmental testing of theater ballistic missiles, strategic ballistic missiles and theater and strategic missile interceptors. It also assists NASA space operations and experiments while supporting the Strategic Command near earth surveillance, deep space surveillance, satellite tracking, and new foreign launch coverage⁴⁰.

U.S. SECURITY INTERACTION IN ASIA

An assessment of America's regional alliance and security relationships reveals that there are some areas for concern and that those efforts to restructure these relationships, while generally moving in the right direction, need to continue to adjust to the shifting geopolitical realities of Asia. Some regional observers remarked that the United States is increasingly insecure, not only as a result of the post 9/11 environment but also because of the "China threat". This perceived American vulnerability and uncertainty about America's future role in Asia is leading some Asian analysts to predict that the United States will enter into a "new phase of inner absorption, if not increasing isolationism⁴¹." Such perceptions undermine America's leadership position in Asia and may encourage regional states to look less to the United States as a guarantor of regional security.

Another Asian perspective is concerned with rising American primacy and an exercise of American power that it is increasingly moving away from a multi- polar approach. From this perspective, American primacy post 9/11 has led America to engage multilaterally not as a "meeting of the minds" but as "a means or process" for "engineering consent".⁴² Some believe that regional states are uneasy with the external posture and focus of the

United States. "Many of our closest allies in the region are uncomfortable with the manner in which the administration has exercised America's extraordinary primacy in world affairs, so much so that one can imagine a range of scenarios in which even our friends in Asia resist future Washington initiatives".⁴³ Regional experts expressed concern that ongoing operations in Iraq, as well as other developments in the Middle East, have led to a lack of attention to key developments in Asia.

SUMMARY

This article has discussed the strategic importance of major actors in the Asia-Pacific region including India and its implications for the United States. From the study, it can be concluded that a central tenet of the U.S strategy has been to rebalance the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region. The rebalance is reflected in a variety of force structure decisions in alliances and partnerships in the region. This is where US-India strategic relations assume significance. This article focuses on the potential implications of the evolving India-U.S. defence and strategic co-operation for the Asia-Pacific region.

The United States changed its security policy towards Asia-Pacific region from balance of power to power advantage. The advantage was demonstrated in the following manner: (1) U.S. obtains more influence in Asia-Pacific region, compared to Russia and China; and (2) India wins the dominant position in the Indian sub-continent, compared to the other South Asian countries. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the eminent American strategist, recognized India as "the strongest state in Asia-Pacific region and to some extent the regional hegemon." But, at the same time, he thought that, "as a geo-strategic player, India is not – at least, not to the same degree as either Russia or China – a source of geopolitical concern." However, this kind of judgment undervalued India's position and capability. The U.S. recognised India as the largest democracy in the world. India's economy increased by 6% annually in the 1990's and has a growing information technology industry. The United States is India's largest trading partner, its biggest investor and its biggest provider of advanced technology.

Additionally, Indian Americans play an important role in shaping the United States' Asia-Pacific regional policy. During his trip to the Asia-Pacific region in March 2000, President Clinton had visited India for seven days while stopping in Pakistan only for a couple hours. It was obvious that the U.S. has strategically prioritized India as part of its Asia-Pacific region policy framework, compared to Pakistan, which experiences political turbulence and has only one-seventh of India's territory, Washington regards New Delhi as the largest democracy and a potentially important economic partner. Nevertheless, the United States is unlikely to discard its Cold War ally, Pakistan. The United States needs Pakistani support and cooperation as an Islamic 'frontline state' in the war against terrorism, because it is not just part of the solution, but also part of the problem.

In sum, against the backdrop of its preferential values in favour of democracy and its long-term benefits, including the comparison of power between different countries in Asia-Pacific region, the United States changed its strategic policy of focusing on the balance-of-power during the Cold War to define and implement a new policy in Asia-Pacific region: The United States changed its security policy for the Asia-Pacific region. This primarily demonstrated the United States' increasing focus on the Asia-Pacific region or, more accurately, in the emergence of an integrated military strategy for the Europe-Atlantic region and the Asia-Pacific region. India and the Indian Ocean are expected to play an important role in such a geo-strategy. In the closing days of

the Clinton administration, the containment of China gradually increased in importance as a factor influencing America's Asia-Pacific strategy. In addition to causing trouble on the Taiwan issue, the strategy of containment included reliance on Japanese and Indian forces, especially by enhancing India's capabilities to contain China. Given the fact that counter-terrorism has become the primary issue in American strategy, the United States intends to use the war on terrorism to implement its military strategy in the Asia-Pacific region in addition to strengthening homeland security. Within this context, India and the Indian Ocean constitute the bridge for the United States in its regional military strategy.

The change in the United States and India's relationship is also affected by Pakistan, China, and Russia. While Pakistan has attempted to balance Indian superiority by seeking external ties, India has perceived this as a way of upsetting the natural balance of power in South Asia. For America, Pakistan's role in the United States' military strategy is especially important. As Pakistan is a traditional ally of the United States and a frontline state in fighting terrorism, without a more normal India-Pakistan relationship, the India-US relationship will remain highly sensitive to Indian perceptions of Washington's relationship with Islamabad. It is widely accepted both in the United States and in India that China is likely to pose a long-term strategic challenge to them. Some believe that the future role of China in the Asia-Pacific region will be stable and defensive, rather than destructive and offensive. Others assume that, based on aspects of its strategic culture, China may undertake an offensive foreign policy at the point of time when Chinese leaders think the international balance of power is in their favour. The United States and India have mutual interests, but different policies, in terms of the nature of their future dealings with a rising China, the divergences on issues such as Taiwan and human rights, and border problems and non-proliferation between China and India. The rise of India, the growing importance of South Asia and the emergence of an Asia-Pacific perspective have become exceedingly important to the United States' balance of power calculations.

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