

India and the Emerging East Asian Security Architecture

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Security in the traditional sense of the term constitutes only a partial facet of its overarching depiction. A comprehensive concept, a holistic view of security must include social cohesion, emotional integration, well being of the people, inclusive development and not the least any more, collective progress in the world and a more humane, pluralistic, equitable and just international order. It is argued that East Asian security architecture would be more sustainable if the lead nations of the region work collectively towards attainment these objectives. The shadows casted by rising China in the region and the role play of Japan and India in engaging her along with United States, shall define the future contains of East Asian security order in time to come.

A Nobel Laureate in economics was asked when the present economic ice age would end. He said, "I don't know. If I were candid enough and you ask me what is going to be the security architecture in the next twenty years in East Asia, I should say: hard to tell." But we can explore the tantalising possibilities, the dangerous minefields, the promising challenges, the frightening pitfalls and the hopeful signs, and we may also take a holistic view of what we call 'security.'

Historical animosities, lingering bitterness of the past, unresolved territorial disputes, strategic competition, new ambitions and new suspicions continue to hobble relations among Asian countries, yet it is also the region with the greatest promise. In 1820, China and India alone accounted for nearly a half of the world output. Today they are back on that track although they are still some 50 per cent behind in that race. In 2006, Asia made up over 37 per cent of the world GDP calculated on purchasing power parity. By the same standard the European Union had dropped from a little over 23 per cent to a little less than 19 per cent and USA from over 21 per cent to about 19.7 per cent. In the 1950s, American contribution to the world output was nearly 60 per cent.

We know the demon of economic recession is stalking the world presently and we shall have to take account of that in our deliberations, but first let us celebrate the rise of Asia. Money has moved – from the West to the East,

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although the capital flows are from both sides to each other. China owns nearly a trillion dollars with the U.S. Treasury bonds, \$739.6 billion, to be precise. Japan anywhere between \$500-600 billion. A large part of Korea's foreign exchange is invested in the United States. We have witnessed a historical shift in the loci of economic activity from USA and Europe to the extended or Greater East Asia—now stretching all the way from India to China, ASEAN, Korea to Australia and New Zealand. East Asia particularly, China, has become USA's most reliable bank.

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Gunnar Myrdal wrote about the Asian drama but his was an inquiry into the poverty of Asia and of, if I may be allowed the liberty of mixing a Chinese word with an English adverb, ruhaness of the states in Asia. Now the Asian drama has been about their fast economic growth, their emergence as centres of manufacturing and production of goods, about the alleviation of poverty and the assertion of the state, about increasing wealth and prosperity, despite all the social problems they are still grappling with.

There could be no more eloquent evidence of it than the recent visit of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to China. She virtually pleaded with the Chinese leaders to keep their huge kitty in Washington's Central Bank and expressed gratification over China's confidence in the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank. Quoting Sun Zi, she said in Beijing, "tongzhou gongji (when in one boat help each other)". And she added for good measure "I do not think, it's realistic to expect that we will see a global recovery without Chinese and American cooperation and leadership."

The Pentagon says U.S. looks to China for support on Afghanistan. The recent U.S.-China military talks included Pakistan also "a level of dialogue that we hadn't had before" was the euphoric comment of the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence, David Sedney on February 28. And (I should be forgiven if I quote the Chinese Foreign Minister at some length) speaking at Washington's Institute of Strategic Studies Yang Jiechi said,

"China and the United States now have more common interests and a broader foundation of cooperation on a series of major and pressing issues facing today's world. The strategic significance and global influence of China-U.S. relations have further increased and their relations in the new era should be broader and deeper."

The two countries should work together in an all-around way to raise bilateral relations to a new and much higher level of cooperation in the twenty first century on the basis of mutual respect, seeking common ground, while shelving differences and cooperation for win-win results. Over the years, he

said, close communication and frequent exchanges between the two countries “have given a strong boost to the sustained, sound and steady growth of our relations.” He hoped that both sides will work together and launch the proposed "China-U.S. Strategic and Economic Dialogues" mechanism at an early date so that through continued discussions on strategic, overarching and long-term issues of mutual interest, they will further enhance mutual trust and cooperation.

The priority for China and the United States at the moment, Yang said, is to tackle the international financial crisis through intensified cooperation and work together to maintain and promote world financial and economic stability. He said China and the United States share important common interests with respect to climate change, energy and the environment and have broader prospects to cooperate in such fields as counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, military-to-military relations, science and technology, culture and health. Both sides should respect and accommodate each other's core interests and make every effort to minimise potential disruption and damage to the relations.

“It is of particular importance to look ahead to the future and vigorously promote and support exchanges and cooperation between the young people, so that the cause of China-U.S. friendship will endure and prosper further”.

Our celebration of the rise of Asia may have to be tempered as we examine other developments that cast a shadow on East Asian countries' perceptions about their security that could impact the future security architecture in East Asia.

It is my sense that there major Asian powers would share the dais, perhaps extending beyond the Asian to the world platform. They will set the agenda either in cooperation or as rivals. China, Japan and India are destined or fated to be the balancing powers of the fulcrum of Asia.

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Let us examine the reality of the shadows that these countries cast over Asian security. China is the second largest spender on the military, Japan the fourth and India the tenth. For over a decade now, there has been a yearly double-digit increase in Beijing's defence expenditure. Since the real figures are not confirmed, it is believed to be almost twice as much as the publicly stated figures. Japan has a robust military programme and so has India. In any case, all the three countries will continue to modernise their armies into the twenties of this century. All three are now focusing on a faster development of their navies. India has one old aircraft carrier and is struggling to acquire another (old) one but refitted from the Russians. China does not have one

presently but the odds are that they will have one within a decade or so. China is striving hard to develop blue water navy. Japan has the protection of the flotilla of aircraft carriers of the United States, but is also rapidly modernising its navy. Also, the three countries are developing apace their air force.

The threesome are now hurtling towards space, racing towards the moon and positioning themselves for the next phase in human exploration and perhaps even habitation of those glittering things on our firmament. Nor are they unaware of the military implications of these experiments. In January 2007, the Chinese shot down a satellite missile in space, ringing alarm bells in the world. Now both India and Japan are in the race to achieve the same capabilities, of course Japan in close cooperation with USA.

On January 6, 2009, two destroyers of the Chinese navy streamed into the pirate-infested Somalian waters. Not for six centuries, have China's warships moved beyond the Asia-Pacific region for a military operation. Japan has just followed suit and ordered its own warships to proceed there. And we know that India too is operating in full strength in the Indian Ocean. This international cooperation is welcome to meet the dire threat of piracy in the Indian Ocean. Reportedly, some 240 of the 1,265 Chinese ships that passed through the Gulf of Aden last year came under piratical fire. However to quote others, 'the first shot fired at the marauders will signal the green light on Beijing's global objectives.'

China's warships have been confined to the Asia-Pacific region for a military operation.

So where will all this lead to and what would it do to the security structure in Asia? Will it result in heightening tensions and erecting higher barriers to cooperation? We have talked about three major Asian powers. That is not all. We cannot discount two others, one a half-Asian power, a Eurasian power, Russia. It may seem less powerful today but has managed to halt its decline and is on the up rise again and possesses lethal nuclear weapons power sufficient to destroy the world with its brahmastra; and the other a trans-Atlantic power, mightier than all the others, leaving a heavy footprint in Asia, presently somewhat troubled and hobbled, both by military overstretch and economic slowdown. Yet, take one U.S.-nuclear-powered carrier group-USS Enterprise with a flight deck almost a mile in length and a superstructure 20 stories high, concentrating more military power in one naval group than most states can manage with all their armed forces. America has seven of these battle groups. It also has military presence in large parts of Asia, from Afghanistan, Pakistan to the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, and parts of Central Asia, besides, if we might mention, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain.

We might also acknowledge that, to use the American lexicon, many countries including in Asia, found it useful to have this beast around, this distant neighbour, to manage their problems with their next door neighbour, like Japan in regard to Russia and China, Pakistan in regard to India, South Korea in regard to North Korea as well as China and Japan. Even China perhaps finds American presence in Japan a surer insurance against (its fear of) Japanese militarism. Such examples could be multiplied the world over. When Kautilya was asked, “who was the enemy?” “The neighbour,” he replied. “Who was the friend?” “The neighbour's neighbour”, he said. In a way, the explanation for the tolerance of U.S. hegemony may lie in these aphorisms.

Anyway, even as it is, there is no dearth of flash points in the region under our scanner. The region I am talking about is Greater East Asia. So I am necessarily excluding Pakistan and Afghanistan. I am also leaving out by and large a detailed discussion of India-China relations for it is too broad a subject to be compressed in this framework. India-China would require an entire discourse by itself.

Coming back to the theme, I can identify a number of flashpoints that would not, or need not, lead to war but could generate bitterness and conflicting situations. Among them, I would put my finger on North Korea, Taiwan, East and South China sea, or more particularly Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands and the Paracel and Spratly Islands, and the India-China border and the Tibetan issue. I shall not say much about the last two, as I have said earlier. I mention only one thought. Tibet is China's problem, not India's. After all the tom-tom of development of Tibet, the fact remains that the Tibetans both inside and outside remain unreconciled. They are under intense pressure and they believe that their cultural autonomy was not being preserved.

About North Korea, one does not know what to say—its unpredictable predictability or its predictable unpredictability its deafening rhetoric, its dynastic “communism”—an odd relic of the nineteenth century, its impoverished people, its fleeing populace, its brutal repression, its infinite capacity for mischief. Both the Chinese and Americans appear to be at their wits end as to how to deal with this maverick who enjoys all the Hollywood movies himself but would not let his people share, and instead wants them to live on his slogans. China, if it wished could choke him off (incidentally a Chinese analyst who said that Kim was ill suddenly disappeared from public view). Now Russia is also extending its contact with North Korea hoping to keep it under some leash. Hopefully their efforts would succeed. But North Korea remains a potentially dangerous place in this region.

Taiwan is in a different category, without dwelling into its history, we shall take a note of the various anomalies in their relationship and development. These are replete with the ironies of history. Taiwan became an outpost of the fleeing Kuomintang from the mainland with a posture of implacable hostility to

Chinese Communism on the mainland, waving its own flag a white sun with a blue background on a crimson field against the Red Flag as the real legitimate government of China. Today, baring a small outfit, the KMT is the friendliest party Beijing has in Taiwan. Instead of being a poor relation, China has emerged as the largest market for Taiwan and the largest investment destination. Beijing through a deft and flexible shift in its strategy has drawn Taiwan into a closer embrace. The patience is rewarding. The two countries are even negotiating a free-trade agreement. Over a hundred billion dollars worth of investment has flown from Taiwan into mainland China. And in the current recessionary period, China has offered financial assistance to Taipei. The new Chinese policy obviously is to draw Taiwan so much closer in its embrace that it would eventually drop like a ripe apple into the lap of Beijing.

China has emerged as the largest market for Taiwan and the largest investment destination.

But that is where the rub lies. Unification is farthest from the minds of most of the Taiwanese, even of President Ma Ying Jeou. The Taiwanese have demonstrated they do not desire conflict with China, but they have shown no desire for unification either. They had drifted poles apart from China in their political system even while they have moved poles together in economic cooperation. In a statement on March 14, 2009, Ma Ying Jeou, referring to the Chinese anti-secession law said that Taiwan and China should handle their ties in a peaceful and equal manner. "I think the anti-secession law is unnecessary and unfeasible," he said. "China cannot make unilateral decisions, and it should not handle (relations) with non-peaceful means." To add to this complexity the U.S. naval protection is available to Taiwan, even though USA tries to keep its options ambiguous.

For China, Taiwan is a core issue and an emotional one, and possibly internally divisive too. It is a classic case of the rise and ebb and possible rise again (in the future) of a hotspot in East Asia.

The hunger for resources and the anticipation of future demand is goading countries to seek not only new regions but also new zones. The hidden treasures in the belly of the Sea, minerals and oil and what not, drives them to refurbish their claims to territories long forgotten and to secure themselves under the advancing tide of claims to exclusive economic zones. These competing claims cause fiction, acrimony, pregnant with the possibilities of conflicts which nobody wanted.

In East Asia, I would mention two such spots – the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea and the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands in the East China Sea. The former, low coral islands and reefs, some 280 kilometres South-east of

Hainan, with promising oil deposits and other minerals, are the bone of contention between China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei. At present, there is a gentleman's agreement to avoid raising the issue of ownership, but for how long will the restraint last?

The Japanese and the Chinese have been quarrelling over the Senkaku islands (Diaoyutai for the Chinese), a group of five generally low-lying coral islands, again supposedly the depository of oil basin and perhaps other minerals. Again, the two countries decided not to raise the hatchet over these for the present and see if they could develop them jointly. Yet they keep issuing warnings about the other's unacceptable activity in that zone. And America has declared that its security umbrella over Japan extends to the Senkaku Islands.

The barriers against use of war as a tool of national policy are higher.

All these so-called hotspots would not necessarily lead to actual conflict. It is well understood now, and in the words of a western analyst, today the barriers against the use of war as a tool of national policy are far higher: nuclear weapons, public opinion, international law, instant communication and transparency all militate against conflict. Yet conflicting situations cannot be ruled out. These situations can be acerbated when placed in the background context of clashing nationalisms, Chinese nationalism, Japanese nationalism, Indian nationalism, Korea nationalism and many others. Since the theme of nationalism is very well known, I shall not dwell on it.

The provocation for conflict and the emerging security architecture would further have to be tempered by two other developments with very considerable security implications: the internal discord and external worldwide economic meltdown. I may examine the latter first. How the global recession would shape a China in transition remains in the lap of the future, but certainly China is in recession, so is Japan and so is India.

I am willing to buy Mr Wen Jiabao's assertion that they have the wherewithal to meet the challenge, but all countries would be emerging weaker from this crisis. It would be a long time before the Americans go on a buying binge again of the kind that they were indulging in earlier, and the adjustment all around is going to be painful.

Utilising their massive foreign exchange reserves, Beijing may be scouting the world, securing oil and gas and mineral resources for its future needs, but at home alarmingly rising unemployment, equally alarming fall in demand, increasing levels of corruption, collapsing industries, bankrupting enterprises, fleeing owners of companies, reverse migration to the village mounting the pressures on land, are all becoming grimmer.

Ironically, the emerging scenario will prove to be more beneficial for security prospects in East Asia, for this would limit attempts to play the big brother. Add to this the increasing internal brittleness of the political and social structure. India may soon be saddled with a much-fractured central authority where decision-making may become more perilously complicated. In Japan, you had a lame duck Prime Minister, a quarrelsome ruling party and a divided Parliament adding to the accelerating economic and political gloom. The problems of an authoritarian regime are somewhat different, but the fact remains that the tight hold of the Central authority in China is being whittled down bit by bit. Beijing is also piling up huge social problems. The pressures on the Chinese Communist Party leadership to undertake some political reforms are mounting. Deng Xiaoping had at one time offered the prescription of *dang zheng fen kai* (separate the government from the party). But it has remained an unfulfilled promise. The Party would surely be subjected to gathering gusts of dissatisfaction in the coming years. I am not going beyond that.

The security architecture may remain similar to the one presently prevailing, but the limits to power have become more visible.

The weakened States of East Asia would have greater opportunities of cooperation. Even America's reduced influence could be more beneficially used for purposes of cooperation rather than contention. Let us face the fact: USA and China have become more dependent on each other than before. Over the long run, China could revive and expand the domestic market, but in the near future, they need as desperately as America itself the revival of the U.S. economy. And America's desperation to keep the Chinese dollar reserves in USA is patent.

I feel cautiously optimistic about the emerging security structure in the next few years. All the countries of the region, and indeed outside, would be licking their wounds for a number of years. They would be learning the lesson that over reliance on any one country or any one system is in the end self-stultifying.

Security, may not be a mirage, but can at best constitute a partial facet of the total reality.

There is a danger of too much inward looking in the coming years, but there is also a new opportunity of extruding cooperation at every level.

The Eurasian Economic Council must interact with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The SCO would have to look up to ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan and Korea) for any meaningful security arrangements in East Asia. ASEAN remains the core of the East Asian security structure almost by default, for it suits China and, of course, ASEAN too.

But the East Asian Summit that includes India, Australia and New Zealand is breathing a life of its own. It is bound to outstrip ASEAN + 3 virtue of its size,

range, resources and potential. If it was not allowed to do so, it could adversely impinge on East Asian security.

We need now to take a holistic view of security. International security, regional security, state security cannot be divorced from economic and social security. Security in the traditional sense of the term may not be a mirage, a chimera, but can at best constitute only a partial facet of the total reality. It may still be important but is insufficient by itself. A comprehensive concept, a holistic view of security must include social cohesion, emotional integration, well being of the people, their identification with the system, inclusive development, and also, not the least any more, collective progress in the world and a more humane, pluralistic, equitable political, economic, financial and social world system. East Asian security architecture would be more sustainable if it assists these objectives. 