

IPRI STUDIES

Advancing Defence Cooperation in Asia Pacific: India's Emerging Role

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Abstract

The study examines the growing defence cooperation between the US and its key allies in the Asia-Pacific region which is being seen as a new alliance to contain the rapidly increasing power of China. India's active role in this game as America's strategic partner has been analysed in some detail. Pakistan's concerns in this regard are also discussed in respect of any negative implications of this development, particularly in the context of its close relations with China. At the same time the delicate balance that needs to be maintained in Pak-US ties vis-à-vis China is emphasised through the strategy of shaping and following a multi-dimensional and diversified foreign policy directed towards balanced relations with all the big powers together with stronger cooperation with Southeast Asian countries.

Key Words: Asia Pacific, Foreign Policy, Defence Cooperation, China.

Introduction

*T*he Asia-Pacific region is emerging as one of the world's leading regions in political, economic and defence fields. Its population is more than 50 per cent of the world's population. The region can be divided into four distinct sub-regions: Northeast Asia, Oceania, South Asia and Southeast Asia. The geo-strategic importance of this region has increased manifold due to the rise of China and shifting of US focus from other regions to this region. Today, the region is passing through a great transformation in the balance of power structure termed as 'rebalancing of power'. The US and its allies in Asia-Pacific are actively advancing defence and economic cooperation to meet the so-called 'Threat of China's Rise'.

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The core countries involved in this 'contain China' policy include Japan, India, Australia, South Korea, Singapore and Indonesia. Indian activism in enhanced defence cooperation with the US and other countries of Asia-Pacific has implications for Pakistan. Therefore, there is a dire need to critically analyse India's emerging defence ties with Asia-Pacific countries. It will help Pakistan in formulating a counter-balancing strategy against any negative impact of Indian activism in the region.

There has been a change in Asia-Pacific countries' approaches to security cooperation and regional order. The end of the Cold War, the resurgence of China, the Asian economic crisis, and the events of September 11, 2001, have all contributed to this development.¹ The key strategic issue in East Asia is the rise of Chinese power. For nearly three decades now the Chinese economy has been growing by 7 to 10 per cent annually, that is more than doubling every decade. China's defence expenditure has grown by an even larger percentage. Chinese leaders speak of China's "peaceful development", but some analysts believe that China cannot rise peacefully. It will seek some form of hegemony in East Asia which might lead to conflict with the United States and Japan. The decline of Japan is another factor that has caused a shift in the balance of power between Japan and China in recent decades.

The maritime domain has become a major source of conflict in the Asia-Pacific region. Robert Kaplan argues that "East Asia, or more precisely western Pacific, is quickly becoming the world's new centre of naval activity," which is entirely different from the post-World War II Eurocentric security calculation. China's silent push for strategic primacy in the East Asian region has led to military build-up and modernization by other regional countries. Indeed, to match China, all regional countries are engaged in improving the quality and quantity of their military programmes.²

Significance of Asia-Pacific

Southeast Asia is a maritime crossroad and an arena of strategic great power interaction. The US grand strategy has been consistent since the first Bush administration in preventing the rise of a peer competitor. American strategies are derived from its nature as a maritime world power which

¹ Acharya, Amitav and Evelyn Goh, ed., *Reassessing Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: Competition, Congruence, and Transformation* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, August 2007).

² Joseph Nye S. Jr. "Work With China, Don't Contain It," *New York Times*, January 25, 2013.

China's recent seaward expansion and its reemergence as East Asia's indispensable maritime power is threatening to undermine.³

Three of the most important straits, i.e., the Malacca Strait, the Sunda Strait and the Strait of Lombok are situated in these waters. The Malacca Strait is the world's busiest shipping lane equivalent to Suez or Panama. Three regional littoral states Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore are adjacent to these choke points and thus are able to exercise potential control over a significant percentage of the entire world's maritime trade.⁴

The United States views the rapid growth in China's economic and military power with apprehension. Its decision to rebalance its forces so as to deploy 60 per cent of its combat ships in the Asia-Pacific region by 2020 should not have come as a surprise to keen observers of Asia-Pacific region. It has built a web of strong alliances around China's periphery with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia and India.⁵

A new web of power relations is emerging in Asia today in response to China's rise and perceived relative decline of the US. The region's countries are increasingly bolstering mutual ties ushering in a new era with profound implications for America's engagement with the region. The "hub and spoke" model of alliances between the United States and Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines is being eclipsed by a broader, more complicated and more diffuse web of relationships in which Asian countries are the primary drivers. As India and other centres of power also emerge, the region itself is transforming from an Asian-Pacific to an Indo-Pacific region. This developing web should provoke a new American grand strategy, one that increasingly leverages relationships with like-minded countries to share the burden with the United States of managing China's rise, thus preserving a balance of power in the region.⁶

US Power Shift from other Regions to Asia-Pacific

Writing on "America's Pacific Century" in *Foreign Policy Magazine* (October 11, 2011) Hillary Rodham Clinton, then US Secretary of State, highlighted the following points⁷:-

³ Naval Postgraduate School Report, "Implications of Sino-American Strategic Competition on Southeast Asia's Post-Cold War Regional Order," MONTEREY CA, December 2003.

⁴ "The Straits of Malacca," booksnow1.scholarsportal.info/ebooks/oca8/sepehr/.../400185.pdf (accessed April 2, 2013).

⁵ Javed Hussain, "Pakistan and East Asia," *Nation*, April 2, 2013.

⁶ Joshy M.Paul, "Asian Powers Scrambling for Regional Space," *Japan Times*, October, 24, 2011.

⁷ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, October 11, 2011,

- The future of politics will be decided in Asia [Pacific], not in Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the centre of the action. The Asia-Pacific has become a key driver of global politics.
- Strategically, maintaining peace and security across the Asia-Pacific is increasingly crucial to global progress, whether through defending freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, countering the proliferation efforts of North Korea, or ensuring transparency in the military activities of the region's key players.
- US alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand are the fulcrum for US strategic turn to the Asia-Pacific.
- US alliance with South Korea has become stronger and more operationally integrated, and will help facilitate combined capabilities to deter and respond to North Korean provocations.
- US has expanded her alliance with Australia from a Pacific partnership to an Indo-Pacific one, and indeed a global partnership. United States and Australia agreed to explore a greater American military presence in Australia to enhance opportunities for more joint training and exercises.
- US has renewed and strengthened her alliances with the Philippines and Thailand.
- US has developed a new partnership with Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, the world's most populous Muslim nation, and a member of the G-20. It has resumed joint training of Indonesian Special Forces units.

Advancing Defence Cooperation in Asia Pacific

US, Japan and Australia

Japan and Australia are allies of the United States and have strategic stakes and interests in the security field. In terms of Japan-Australia bilateral defence cooperation and exchanges, the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, the first such joint declaration in the realm of security with a country other than the United States, was announced at the Japan-Australia summit meeting in March 2007. It has been making steady progress since then and has now reached the stage of more concrete and practical cooperation. At the third Joint Foreign and Defence Ministerial

Consultations (“2+2”) in May 2010, the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) and its Procedural Arrangement were signed.⁸

Role of Australia as a Key Player

Australia has long standing and solid relationships with Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia and particularly with Singapore and Malaysia through the Five Power Defence Arrangement. Its relations with Korea and Japan have also strengthened in the past couple of years. The Japanese Ground Defence Forces have come to Australia to participate in Skill at Arms competition. This is a significant step forward in Australian ties with the Japanese from where they were even ten years ago, and there are some more good prospects in the future.⁹

US and Australia signed a new partnership agreement on November 8, 2010, to provide improved intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations, known as AUSMIN, will explore areas such as greater US naval presence and port visits in the region, more military-to-military training opportunities and the pre-positioning of US humanitarian assistance and disaster relief equipment in Australia. AUSMIN is the premier forum for strengthening the Australia-United States alliance and it is held on a reciprocal basis every year and 2010 marks its 25th anniversary as well as 70 years of formal diplomatic relations between Australia and the United States.¹⁰

US President, Barack Obama during his visit to Australia in November 2011 announced the shift in its focus to Asia Pacific region after more than a decade of intense involvement in the Middle East. The trilateral cooperation between Japan, the United States, and Australia has been increasing.¹¹ At the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2012, the 2nd Japan-U.S.-Australia Defence Ministerial Meeting was held and a Joint Statement by

⁸ “Chapter 3-Multi-layered Security Cooperation with the International Community,”

http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2012/35_Part3_Chapter3_Sec2.pdf (accessed April 4, 2011).

⁹ “Sergei De Silva-Ranasinghe, Australian Military Expands Indo-Pacific Profile,” Interview with General David Hurley, the chief of the Australian Armed Forces *Diplomat*, March 13, 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/author-spotlight/2013/03/13/australian-military-expands-indo-pacific-profile> (accessed April 5, 2013).

¹⁰ Donna Miles, “US, Australia Agree to Cooperation Initiatives,” American Forces Press Service, November 8, 2010, <http://www.army.mil/article/47817/> (accessed April 5, 2013).

¹¹ The White House Press Office, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” November 17, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament> (accessed April 4, 2013).

the Japan-U.S.-Australia defence leaders was issued for the first time, in which the three participants agreed to deal with diverse security issues in the Asia-Pacific region.¹²

Australia has become increasingly important in the Asia Pacific which is closely linked to Australia-US alliance and its position in the region may increase further with the US focusing more on this region.

Australian Defence Cooperation with UK

Australia and UK signed a Treaty for Defence and Security Cooperation on January 18 2013 to strengthen their long-standing relationship. The treaty formalised the longstanding and extensive defence cooperation between the two countries. The treaty covers cooperation in cyber security, defence reform, personnel exchange, equipment, and science and technology. Both the countries will explore the possibility of co-operation in building frigates for the Royal Navy's new type 26 global combat ship — that could also meet the needs of the Royal Australian Navy.¹³

Advancing Defence Cooperation with Southeast Asian Countries

Southeast Asian countries are now increasingly welcoming major powers, including the United States, to be involved in regional security matters in order to withstand China's claims in the disputed waters of South China Sea. China has territorial disputes with Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia over the resource-rich Spratly and Paracels islands. Recently, Japan has made major overtures to the region, especially to the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Japan will gain greater strategic depth in the ASEAN region through its agreement with the Philippines on maritime security.¹⁴

Increasing security ties through greater military engagement in the region is only one part of the United States' re-balancing efforts. The United States will increase the number and scope of its military exercises with regional partners. Three new exercises are planned for 2013, including a humanitarian and disaster relief exercise that will be hosted by Brunei; a

¹² Ministry of Defence Japan, "Japan-Australia Defense Cooperation and Exchanges," *Japan Defense Focus*, no. 35, December 2012, <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/jdf/no35/specialfeature.html> (accessed April 5, 2013).

¹³ Minister for Defence — AUKMIN 2013 Communiqué, January 18, 2013, <http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/2013/01/18/minister-for-defence-aukmin-2013-communication/> (accessed April 5, 2013).

¹⁴ Joshy M.Paul "Asian Powers Scrambling for Regional Space."

counterterrorism exercise co-sponsored by the United States and Indonesia; and a maritime security exercise co-chaired by Malaysia and Australia.¹⁵

Relations have worsened between China and Japan over the islands in the East China Sea, while Vietnam and the Philippines are among strong critics of Chinese claims in the South China Sea disputes. Tensions in Asia have soared over North Korea's nuclear test last February. Singapore has given the green light for the temporary deployment of four littoral combat ships. The first, the USS Freedom, was last reported on its way across the Pacific.¹⁶

India's Emerging Role in Asia-Pacific

Increasing Defence Cooperation with US

In order to implement US policy of strategic re-balancing in the Asia-Pacific region, the Obama administration is closely working with India to develop increased defence co-operation. This was stated by US Defence Secretary, Leon Panetta, during his fourth trip to the Asia Pacific region in November 2012. He added that the rebalancing was a very important part of the new Defence strategy.¹⁷

In a joint statement issued in November 2010 after talks between the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and US President Barack Obama, both the countries reaffirmed the importance of maritime security, unimpeded commerce and freedom of navigation. The two leaders also resolved to further strengthen defence cooperation through security dialogue, exercises, and promoting trade and collaboration in defence equipment and technology. It was noted that India-US defence cooperation had strengthened mutual understanding on regional peace and stability by developing their capacities to meet humanitarian challenges such as terrorism and piracy.¹⁸

¹⁵ US Department of Defense, "Remarks by Secretary Panetta at ASEAN Meeting, Siem Reap, Cambodia," November 16, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5152> (accessed April 5, 2013).

¹⁶ Wong Siew Ying "PM Lee Warns Miscalculations in Asia can Set Back Region," *Channel News Asia*, April 3, 2013, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/pm-lee-warns-miscalculations-in-asia-can-set-back-region/625432.html> (accessed April 4, 2013).

¹⁷ Leon E. Panetta, "America's Pacific Rebalance," Project Syndicate, December 31, 2013, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/renewing-the-us-commitment-to-the-asia-pacific-region-by-leon-e--panetta> (accessed April 14, 2013).

¹⁸ The White House Press Office, "Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Singh of India," November 8, 2010,

India as a linchpin of US Asia-Pacific Strategy

President Obama told the Indian parliament in November 2010 that the relationship between India and America will be one of the 21st century's defining partnerships, rooted in common values and interests. He admitted that there were obstacles to overcome and questions to answer on both sides, but the United States was making a strategic bet on India's future — that India's greater role on the world stage would enhance peace and security, that opening India's markets to the world would pave the way to greater regional and global prosperity, that Indian advances in science and technology would improve lives and advance human knowledge everywhere, and that India's vibrant, pluralistic democracy would produce measurable results and improvements for its citizens and inspire others to follow a similar path of openness and tolerance. This statement signifies Obama administration's active support for India's Look East efforts, that include a new trilateral dialogue with India and Japan and a new vision for a more economically integrated and politically stable South and Central Asia, with India as a linchpin.¹⁹

India-Japan Defence Cooperation

Defence cooperation between India and Japan is dictated by the Joint Statement issued during then Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Tokyo in May 2006 and the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation issued during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit in October 2008. A. K. Antony, the Indian Defence Minister visited Japan and met his Japanese counterpart Toshimi Kitazawa in November 2009. They condemned terrorism and resolved to fight the global menace together. They agreed to accelerate discussions to further promote defence exchanges and cooperation through a Defence Action Plan, as envisaged between the Prime Ministers of the two countries in October 2008. Recognising the need for securing the sea-lines of communications, the two Ministers welcomed the reinforcement of cooperation in the field of maritime security and the inauguration of Japan-India Maritime Security Dialogue. They stressed the

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/08/joint-statement-president-obama-and-prime-minister-singh-india>

¹⁹ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, October 11, 2011,

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/10/175215.htm> (accessed April 2, 2013) & "India Linchpin in US Strategy in Asia-Pacific: Clinton," *Outlook India*, October 13, 2011,

<http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=738127>, (accessed April 5, 2013).

need for strengthening Service-to-Service exchanges and holding bilateral exercises.²⁰

The 2nd India-Japan 2+2 Dialogue was held in Tokyo in October 2012. The two sides held talks on boosting cooperation in key areas, including maritime, cyber and outer space security, apart from exchanging views on regional and international security situation. Japan has been holding similar consultations with the US and Australia.²¹

In an interview on December 29, 2012, Japan's new Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, has sought to expand the Japan-US security partnership to India and Australia as it faces a bitter territorial row with China. "It is important to regain the region's power balance," he added²². According to a media report (June 14, 2012), India was aspiring to play a leading role in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and it has deployed several of its ships in the area, including a fleet of four vessels which entered a Chinese port as part of their sailing mission in South China sea. Along with the deployment in South China Sea and North West Pacific, Indian Navy has deployed its ships in Seychelles, Mauritius and Maldives in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and INS Tabar has been put on convoy escort duty and anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden area. Earlier in the deployment, the fleet also conducted the first ever bilateral maritime exercise between India and Japan, codenamed 'JIMEX 12'. The Japan-India Maritime Exercise was conducted to commemorate 60 years of diplomatic relations between India and Japan.²³

Australia-India Dimension

The US containment policy toward China is well underway, with US presence in neighbouring Japan and Australia, a US-friendly India and now the promise of increased US presence in the South Pacific region. The US choice of befriending India to counter Chinese dominance has also had ramifications for US-Pakistan relations. In this regard Australia's position with respect to both China and Pakistan was recently affected by the

²⁰ Pranmita Baruah, "Changing Contours of the Japan-India Defence Relations," *Global Politician*, April 3, 2010, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/default.asp?26267-japan-india>, (accessed April 5, 2013).

²¹ "India, Japan Hold Talks to Increase Cooperation in Key Areas," *DNA*, October 22, 2012, <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/1755022/report-india-japan-hold-talks-to-increase-cooperation-in-key-areas>

²² "Japan Eyes Security Ties with Australia," *News International* (Rawalpindi), December 29, 2012.

²³ "Indian Navy Expanding Presence in Indian Ocean," *Outlook India*, June 13, 2012, <http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=765576>

former's decision to lift embargo on exporting Australian uranium to India²⁴ despite India being a country which has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Pakistan, also a non-signatory to the NPT, regards this treatment as unfair since it is barred from purchasing Australian uranium. This discrimination is likely to undermine Australia-Pakistan relations.²⁵

India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Australia to enhance space cooperation. The MoU seeks to increase collaboration in civil space science research, technology and capability development and educational activities.²⁶

India and Southeast Asia

India and Southeast Asian countries agreed, during ASEAN-India summit held in New Delhi in December 2012, to strengthen cooperation in strategically crucial areas of maritime security and freedom of navigation, a move to counter the increasing assertiveness of China in resource-rich South China Sea.²⁷

On the other hand, India has decided to continue its hydrocarbon exploration activity in two offshore blocks given to the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claimed by Vietnam, notwithstanding China's protest. During the visit of Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang, to India on October 12-15, both countries signed a memorandum of understanding for joint oil exploration activities in the South China Sea, besides initiating a strategic dialogue. China had raised its objection against Indian exploration projects, claiming they are in its "indisputable" area.²⁸

Lessons for Pakistan

Pakistan should critically analyse these developments and make necessary adjustments in both her foreign policy outlook as well as outreach to Asia-

²⁴ "The US Asia-Pacific Strategy and Australia," Politact, December 11, 2011, <http://politact.com/vantage-point-analysis/the-us-asia-pacific-strategy-and-australia.html> (accessed April 4, 2012).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "India, Australia Ink Pact to Enhance Space Cooperation," *Economic Times*, October 17, 2012, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-10-17/news/34525762_1_space-cooperation-australian-high-commissioner-space-science-research (accessed April 5, 2013).

²⁷ "India and ASEAN to Strengthen Cooperation in Maritime Security," Brahmand, December 21, 2012, <http://www.brahmand.com/news/US-working-with-India-to-develop-increased-defence-cooperation/10384/1/10.html> (accessed April 3, 2013).

²⁸ Joshy M.Paul, "Asian Powers scrambling for regional space."

Pacific region. Pakistan may explore possibilities of cooperation with East Asia in the field of security since its own security and economic well-being are linked in many ways with the security situation in East Asia. In this respect, Pakistan could also revive her defence cooperation with Southeast Asian countries especially with Malaysia and Indonesia. Pakistan recently participated in an international naval exercise AMAN-13 in the North Arabian Sea from March 4-8, 2013. The American destroyer USS William P. Lawrence was amongst the ships taking part along with vessels from Australia, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Turkey, UAE, Britain and Italy. Joining this exercise was a good step by Pakistan as such participation helps build bridges and saves countries from isolation.

In view of the crucial importance of Pakistan's strategic partnership with China for its security, Pakistan cannot be a part of the US grand design in Asia to contain China. This consideration then will define the contours of Pakistan's need to maintain its traditional friendly ties and cooperation with the US as it has been the case all along since the beginning of Pak-China strategic cooperation. Therefore, there is a dire need to develop a multi-dimensional and diversified foreign policy to ensure balanced relations with all big powers and avoid the 1950s and 60s policy of putting all of our eggs in one basket. ■