

REPORT FOR THE PARIS-BERLIN-MOSCOU WEBSITE

THE RUSSO-SINO-INDIAN ALLIANCE

There is some controversy, understandably, over the exact status of the strategic partnership that has been in the works between Moscow, Delhi and Beijing in the last few years, one of whose manifestations was the trilateral foreign ministers meeting that took place in June 2005 in Vladivostok.

The government of Vladimir Putin expressed a strong commitment to that project promoted by the former Prime Minister and leading Asia-expert Evgeny Primakov. While the relationship between Russia and India is traditionally close and trusting, the history of Sino-Russian interactions is much less serene but the common fear of U.S. hegemonic aggressiveness have pushed the two giants together, especially since signing the bilateral treaty of friendship and cooperation in 2002.

India and China have had even greater difficulties with one another and the issue of their very long common border is not yet settled though substantial progress has been made in a climate of general cordiality. China's long-standing friendship with and support for Pakistan continue to alienate New Delhi although to a lesser degree since India's relations with both China and Pakistan have improved.

If at the regional level, India and China remain rivals for preponderance, on the larger global theater, it is in their interest to cooperate in order to instore and maintain together an order of their liking on the Asian scene while preventing excessive extra-continental, especially Anglo-American interference. They both see the need to limit the costly arms race that inevitably results from their reciprocal ambitions. Yet, is the conjunction of three strong or strengthening bilateral relationships adding up to a trilateral alliance? The New Asian Order (NAO) and eventually, the new world order depend upon the answer to that question.

Though many problems and uncertainties remain, there are four areas in which important developments have taken place that involve the three nations. Cumulatively they are conducive to the formation of some kind of strategic partnership in the months and years to come.

SECURITY COOPERATION AND THE US STRATEGIC DOCTRINE

The almost indispensable cement for international alliances is the perception of a common, powerful and aggressive rival or enemy. In this case the strategic doctrine of the USA, presented in 2002 by President George W. Bush, in keeping with the “Project for a New American Century” (PNAC) concocted by a group consisting of some of his closest advisers, back in 1997, poses a clear and direct challenge to the strategic ambitions of the three nations and a threat to their fundamental interests, if not their national security.

The leitmotiv of the American neo-conservative policymakers is to prevent any state in the world becoming powerful enough to claim global leadership or even exercise uncontested regional preponderance. Russia is openly targeted by Washington D.C.’s establishment in its former Soviet sphere of influence, in its Siberian hinterland and in its sensitive border areas, from the Baltic to the Caucasus and from Central Asia to the Kurils. NATO military bases are being set up around the periphery of the Russian territory and China likewise is already encircled by American allies and surrogates, i.e. South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, now Vietnam, possibly Nepal and Mongolia as well as the Central Asia Republics of Kirghizstan and Tajikistan where the Pentagon maintains certain military facilities and in many cases troops and equipment as well. These neighbouring springboards can be used to foster and support internal unrest and subversion.

India is not officially on the U.S. “hit-list” or real or potential rivals but is on the contrary touted as a friend and a ‘strategic partner’. However that perception from Washington is centered upon India agreeing to fit into the superpower’s scheme of things, i.e. acting as a counter-acting factor to China, opening its market to American business and cooperating, actively or passively with the Pentagon’s military and naval deployment in the Indian Ocean, the Central Asian region and South East Asia which are all parts of India’s strategic “backyard” or buffer zones. In particular, the space-based missile defence system planned by the Americans as part of the ambitious blueprint for the militarisation of space in order to achieve “full spectrum dominance”, which has been forcefully criticised and denounced by China

and Russia, is expected by the Bush administration to find support in New Delhi against its promise to shield India against hypothetical ICBM “terrorist” (Pakistani or Chinese?) attacks.

The USA is currently in a very difficult position worsened by the rapid decline of its ideological prestige, economic prosperity and political influence. Faced with the prospect of humiliating defeats and stuck in “blind alleys” abroad as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea and Venezuela, the Bush regime desperately needs to enlist some major new ally against the emerging powers of the developing world and India, partly in view of her long-term problem with her Muslim neighbour Pakistan, is regarded by “NeoCon” strategists as a likely confederate. However Washington has not given up its long-standing policy of pressuring India through its influence on inimical neighbours, mostly Pakistan and to a lesser degree Bangla Desh and Nepal in order to force compliance if need be, under threat of fostering domestic and external troubles from Kashmir to the North Eastern regions where Anglo-Saxon Intelligence agencies and covert operatives are traditionally quite active. Faced with the dilemma of reacting positively to American overtures or antagonising the ageing but still formidable superpower, India has chosen, intentionally, to respond warmly but not unconditionally to the entreaties coming from Washington without letting that interfere with the vital need to weave closer bonds with the other Asian great powers, especially China, Russia and Iran.

The participation by India as an observer (along with Iran and Pakistan) to the conference of the “Shanghai Six” (SCO) foreign ministers’ meeting in July 2005, illustrated New Delhi’s desire to interact dynamically with the key promoters of that Eurasian security pact which is clearly intended to oppose the USA’s designs in the region, as shown by the call issued at that meeting for the Pentagon to close its bases and withdraws its forces from the Central Asian states. The first government to act on this joint statement was Uzbekistan’s which effectively served an eviction notice to the American forces stationed at the Khanabad Air base in that same month.

IRAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

The SCO embodies the will of China and Russia to cooperatively protect their interests in the Central Asian region which is of vital concern to both powers. Russia welcomes India’s participation in this security and economic,

energy-centered dialogue, not only because of its old friendship with Delhi but also because India's membership will help the three powers to work out an Asian joint security system, by balancing out China which is the predominant partner in the SCO.

India also has ancient historic and cultural bonds with the Central Asian Republics with which its commerce is bound to grow while it is vitally interested in their oil and gas reserves. It can also help offset Pakistan's growing influence which inevitably has an Islamic, rather fundamentalistic overtone about which both Moscow and Beijing harbour major misgivings. China is less keen to let India into the SCO but wishes, on the other hand, to be associated with the SAARC which can only happen if there is a "quid pro quo". India is also close to Iran, geographically, culturally and economically and like China and Russia, is vitally interested in the stability, sovereignty and prosperity of Iran, outside the U.S. system of alliances.

Taken together, Moscow, Beijing and Delhi are critical economic and strategic partners for Iran and, should that country be directly exposed to a new western imperialistic military adventure, the three former states would find it necessary to help Tehran defend itself in order to avoid a repetition, on a larger and even more catastrophic scale, of the Iraq occupation scenario. Indeed since the end of 2004, China has multiplied its signs of support (including open military backing) to Iran while Russia has increased its nuclear cooperation program and boosted trade relations with Tehran. India, as usual has acted on a lower key fashion but, despite U.S. pressures, has also spectacularly heightened the level of its economic transactions with the Islamic Republic with which it has rather close and cordial military ties as well.

The soon to begin construction of the Iran-India liquefied gas pipeline, which will flow across Pakistan, promises even closer cooperation between New Delhi and Tehran and has the additional consequence of associating Iran with the Central Asian republics, within the supply network that will link more and more the energy producers to the largest consumers on the continent. To that effect, Russia is building an OPEC-like consortium of gas-producers, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan where the major reserves are located, under its leadership which can wield considerable clout in a scenario of shrinking fossil fuel reserves and rising energy prices.

THE SIBERIAN OIL INTERESTS

One of the critical aspects of the Russo-Chinese cooperation system is the development of the infrastructure, transportation and delivery of oil and gas from Siberia to China. At the Gleneagles summit of the G-8 on July 7th and 8th 2005, President Putin confirmed plans to build a Transneft pipeline, capable of carrying 20 million tons of oil annually, upto the Chinese border terminal at Skovorodino, from where it will be transported by rail into China. An additional 10 million tons per year are to be sent by rail to the planned tanker terminal near Nakhodka on the Siberian Pacific coast.

All in all, the system will be capable of pumping 50 million tons to the Far-East but in designing it, the Russians have given priority to the Chinese demands, virtually ignoring the competing Japanese proposal and thus reflecting the geopolitical reality in the region. In the Russian Sakhalin peninsula the Indian ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corp.) investments in oil and gas fields, amounting to 2,5 billion dollars should lead to similar agreements between Moscow and New Delhi but those have not yet been made public. Thus a wide energy supply network is indeed being spun between the three countries which should be the strongest catalyst for the economic cooperation and strategic partnership. With its vast oil reserves, crucial location astride Eurasia and extensive expertise in nuclear technology Russia is likely to play a growing role on the power generation scene of the twenty-first century.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Inevitably the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy in the last several years attracts both admiration and envy, not to say concern. Beijing is perceived as a rising power bent on attaining global hegemony in the next two or three decades and its now poorer and less dynamic neighbour Russia has to worry about that prospect while India is afraid to have to play second fiddle to an increasingly self-confident and assertive China. However these feelings do not alter the need for trade and economic cooperation where many complementarities exist. While energy, raw materials and high technologies, particularly for space exploration and defence, are Russia's

most obvious contributions, the exchanges between India and China are increasing at a pace which reveals the enormous potential for commerce and joint investments. The Shanghai Cooperative Organisation plans to establish a free-trade zone or common market covering its member-countries. A similar ambition has been voiced within the SAARC and the two regional associations could then eventually form together a greater Asian economic community.

Among the various joint initiatives being considered in Beijing and Delhi, some of the more significant ones could lead to the establishment of an Asian Development Fund, on the basis of the vast foreign exchange holdings accumulated by the two countries (more than 850 billion U.S.\$ to date). China already is the second largest trade partner of India and, if present growth rates persist, it set to become the first within less than ten years..

With regard to energy, irrigation, aerospace and shipping technology, rail transit and telecommunication-related projects there is every reason to include Russia in that prospective Fund since it would be a primary source, not only of financing but also of know-how in the construction of railroads, aircraft, shipping vessels, oil and gas pipelines, highways and canals, to mention only a few possibilities. In turn several Asian states such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan (all major creditor-nations) and the ASEAN-member states would be likely to join that Fund.

All said, there is much at stake for Russia, China and India not to work together in various areas vital to their mutual security, economic development and technical progress. Old suspicions and rivalries will not disappear but they need not cancel out the impetus for collaboration in a broader frame of reference allowing for friendly competitive emulation.

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