

DELHI DIALOGUE IV

INDIA AND ASEAN: PARTNERS FOR PEACE, PROGRESS AND STABILITY

14 FEBRUARY 2012, HOTEL TAJ PALACE, NEW DELHI

Session 3: The Evolving Security Architecture in the Asia-Pacific

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1 The centre of gravity of the world economy is shifting towards the East. Nothing illustrates this better than the current state of the economies of Asia, Europe and America. Asian economies are powering ahead with rates of growth ranging from 3 to 8 per cent. Europe is saddled with high unemployment, anaemic growth, huge sovereign debt and a crisis of confidence in the euro. America is making a weak economic recovery and in a state of political paralysis.

2 Money creates power. As Asia becomes the most dynamic region of the world, it is very likely that the contest for influence in our region, the Asia-Pacific, will intensify. It is, therefore, important for us to identify the key trends and to consider what we can do collectively to enhance the prospects of peace and cooperation and to minimise the prospects of misunderstanding and conflict.

Key Trend No. 1: Re-Emergence of China and India

3 One of the most important developments of our time is the simultaneous rise of China and India. Historians have pointed out that it is more accurate to use the word "re-emergence" than "rise" because until a few hundred years ago, China and India accounted for more than half of the world's economy. As an Asian, I celebrate the fact that, after centuries of stagnation, these two great civilizations and peoples are once again joining the top table of the world.

4 It is not surprising that as these two countries grow in wealth, they would also seek to modernise their armed forces and their capacity to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity. As China and India develop, their interests will become more global. It is, therefore, natural for both China and India to aspire to develop a capacity to protect those global interests. To take an example. Both the Chinese and Indian navies are no longer focused only on coastal defence. Increasingly, their mission is also to protect their sea lines of communication.

5 Should the world be concerned by this development? Is there an arms race between China and India? I do not think there is an arms race between China and India. I also do not think that the world should be alarmed. The world should be concerned if India and China begin to view each other as adversaries. There can be no peace in Asia unless there is peace between India and China. ASEAN's agenda is to encourage India and China to expand their points of convergence and reduce the deficit of trust between them. We support the view of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao that the world is big enough to accommodate both India and China.

Key Trend No. 2: Obama's Pivot to the Asia-Pacific

6 The second key trend is President Obama's so-called pivot to the Asia-Pacific. The issue is not whether the US has ever left Asia. Clearly, it has not. The issue is whether President Obama has brought about a paradigm shift in US foreign policy. I would argue that he has. Let me explain.

7 For the first time in US history, President Obama has elevated Asia and the Asia-Pacific, above Europe, the Middle-East and Latin-America. For the Obama Administration, the no. 1 priority in US foreign policy is the Asia-Pacific.

8 To the best of my knowledge, China is the only Asian country which has expressed reservations about the new US policy. The

reason is obvious. Many commentators and security analysts have chosen to interpret Obama's policy as targeted at China. Is the Obama policy anti-China? I would answer it this way. I would say it is not anti-China, but pro-US. Obama's policy is not to contain China, which cannot be contained anyway. It is to protect US interests and to ensure that militarily, economically and culturally, the US remains the pre-eminent power of the Asia-Pacific. There is, of course, a danger that in the execution of the Obama policy, it may take on an anti-China dimension. Let me give an example. If the US were to propose a NATO-type multilateral arrangement between itself and its treaty allies in the region, namely Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines, this would be viewed negatively in Beijing. For this reason, I would discourage Washington from considering any such proposal. The region does not want a new Cold War between China and the US. The region wants them to live at peace with each other.

Key Trend No. 3: ASEAN's Role in Regional Architecture

9 The third trend I wish to highlight is ASEAN's central role in regional architecture. There is much misunderstanding about the rationale for the choice of ASEAN to drive the regional bus. ASEAN is driving the regional bus not because it is the biggest driver or the most skilful driver, but because it is the most acceptable. Given the deficit of trust existing between China, Japan, India and the US, there will never be a consensus among the big 4 to allow any one of them to be in the driver's seat. The suggestion by some for the bus to be co-driven by the Big 4 or a committee of 8 major and middle powers is a recipe for disaster. ASEAN knows that it is a privilege, not a right, to drive the regional bus. Our driving licence can be taken away if we were to drive the bus recklessly.

10 What is ASEAN's vision? ASEAN's vision has Nehruvian roots. In the 1930s, Pandit Nehru envisioned bringing the countries of Asia together in a project which he called the Federation of the East. In 1947, he convened, in New Delhi, a Conference on Asian Relations. Nehru was ahead of his time and his project could not be fulfilled in his lifetime. However, like Pandit Nehru, ASEAN wants to build a peaceful and prosperous Asia-Pacific. ASEAN uses its FTA policy to enhance economic linkages and deepen economic interdependence among the

countries of the region. However, ASEAN knows from the experience of Europe, prior to World War I, that economic interdependence is not a guarantee of peace.

11 ASEAN is, therefore, promoting dialogue, confidence building measures and preventive diplomacy. ASEAN is using the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting + 8, and the recently expanded East Asia Summit, to achieve this vision. The East Asia Summit can be said to be a realisation of the Nehruvian vision.

12 ASEAN appreciates India's support for its central role in the region's institutions and processes. We would like to see India play a more pro-active role in these forums.

The Shangri-La Dialogue

13 Singapore has made a small contribution to transparency, inclusiveness and confidence-building, by convening the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, in partnership with the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS). The dialogue is a track 1.5 process. It brings together the region's defence ministers, chiefs of armed forces, directors of intelligence agencies as well as well-informed scholars and analysts. The Shangri-La Dialogue has proven to be a useful vehicle. Singapore appreciates the support which India has extended to it from the very beginning.

Conclusion

14 The Asia-Pacific region is at peace. There are a few potential flash points, such as the Korean peninsula and the South China Sea, but they are manageable. The re-emergence of China and India will have a profound impact on the prosperity and security of the region. The recent decision by President Obama to make the Asia-Pacific the no. 1 priority in US foreign policy is to be welcomed, provided it does not become anti-China in its implementation. ASEAN's agenda is to promote regional economic integration and political cooperation

through dialogue and confidence-building. ASEAN's mission is to transform Nehru's vision into a living reality.

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