

# Is an 'Asian NATO' Really On The US Agenda?

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There has been some talk concerning American intentions to forge an Asian NATO, i.e. a US led military alliance meant to advance its members' geopolitical interests in the region. During the Cold War, the US created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) which also encompassed France and the UK as well as regional pro-Western States such as Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Pakistan and the Philippines. However, such organization was dissolved in 1977.

Moreover, we also need to take into account the existence of the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty, better known to all as ANZUS. Both American allies fought together during the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and Operation Enduring Freedom (in Afghanistan). Canberra also supported and participated in the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, Australia is an important contributor to the National Missile Defense System. Therefore, one can practically take for granted that any potential Asian or Pacific version of NATO will include these two staunch American allies. Japan has become even closer to the US and an increased level of NATO-Japan dialog indicates that both parties have agreed to strengthen its political and military links.

In order to assess if Washington is indeed attempting to establish an alliance in the Asia-Pacific region (more or less analogous to its Atlantic counterpart) one must examine what the American motivation could be. Some top American politicians have been promoting such plans. For example, Rudolph Giuliani proposed that NATO should accept Australia, Israel, India, Japan and Singapore. Perhaps it is also what Senator John McCain had in mind when he recommended the establishment of an American-led League of Democracies, an euphemism which means that non European US allies had to be included in a global military coalition (against whom? One could add).

As we will see, there is plenty of reasons the United States will be interested in creating any such organization. American senior geostrategists must have paid a great of attention to:

- North Korea's nuclear program.
- The meteoric rise of China as an economic powerhouse. Or, as the US National Intelligence Council terms it, "the unprecedented transfer of wealth from West to East". China has already overtaken Germany as the world's third largest GDP. Beijing possesses the largest foreign currency reserves and the fact that most of them denominated in US dollars gives the People's Republic of China considerable leverage.
- Other regional economies have grown impressively, namely South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and Kong Kong. This means that Asia has

been and will continue playing an increasingly important role in international politics.

- The emergence of China has also expanded the 'Middle Kingdom's military, geopolitical, diplomatic and technological power. China is arguably the greatest power in East Asia. Beijing is improving and modernizing its military hardware and it seeks to develop competitive sea power projection capabilities in the long run.
- China and Russia have become closer cooperative partners through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Both powers have agreed to share their influence in Central Asia and prevent American influence from reaching further into the Great Turkestan. Moreover, both have carried out joint military exercises.
- Beijing has courted several regimes openly hostile to American power. In fact China is the primary destination of Iranian oil exports and the idea of building an oil pipeline connecting both has been explored. Furthermore, Myanmar has become one of closest Chinese allies. The 'Middle Kingdom' is large importer of Myanmarese resources (fossil fuels, gems, timber and so on) and Myanmar's ruling junta has allowed the Chinese to open and operate intelligence facilities there. The PRC, in order to ensure supplies of raw materials has become a key trading partner of many African countries as well.
- The resurgence of Russia as a great power is an important. The Kremlin has shown some interest in projects concerning the development of energy resources. For instance, in order to diversify its trading partners, Russia has seriously thought about providing fossil fuels to East Asia's largest economies (China, Japan and South Korea). Additionally, the Russian Federation plans to increase its share in East and Southeast Asia's arms markets.
- Even though South Korea still hosts a large number of US military personnel, Seoul (unlike Tokyo) has implemented a foreign policy which has been careful enough not to annoy Beijing.
- Although some American masterminded Color Revolutions were first successful in inciting regime change, it seems both the Chinese and the Russians have meticulously studied this *Modus Operandi* and Beijing was able to counter such methodology in Myanmar's Saffron Revolution and during the 2008 Tibet riots.

US top planners therefore have decided that the America has to augment its presence in Asia if Washington is indeed committed to achieve American hegemony (a.k.a. 'The New American Century'). Washington has stationed troops in South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Diego Garcia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Guam and Australia. Such military deployments, US policymakers seem to think, must be amplified through an Asian version of NATO.

The ultimate goal of an Asian NATO would be to prevent China from becoming a formidable challenging power. As a result, US strategists have concluded that America needs to

preserve its position as the world's top sea power so that it retains the ability to control strategic sea lanes (like the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea) and to enforce a naval blockade in case war breaks out. The aforementioned means that Asian economies would have to make meaningful concessions to the US if they want to keep their flows of seaborne foreign trade uninterrupted.

As a result of the Iraqi and Afghan quagmires, it is arguably that the US has understood that even if America is the world's leading power, it is still unable to unilaterally make its interests prevail. Thus, Washington has realized that it will need several allies to maintain its position unrivaled. So the Americans have been busy trying to deepen their strategic cooperation with traditional allies (Japan, Australia, New Zealand and so on). Moreover, the US has been attempting to seduce India and embed it into an Asian NATO, something that would dramatically alter the whole balance of power in Eurasia.

For the British Empire, India was its most prized possession because it was hugely profitable and, more importantly, its geographic position was strategically significant. According to the CIA World Factbook, India became the world's twelfth largest economy in 2008 thanks to its GDP growth. Moreover, India is strategically located in the southernmost part of the Eurasian landmass and its territory is considerably large. Furthermore Indian population is an important asset because the country has an internationally competitive professional class. Last but not least, it must not be forgotten that India has a stockpile of nuclear weapons.

It seems that India has abandoned its Cold War foreign policy of non alignment. Indeed, it looks like Delhi has been slowly moving toward the Anglo-American orbit and its allies. Some members of Indian political establishment are openly hostile toward China. For example, then Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes claimed China was "India's enemy No. 1", such statement confirms that at least some senior politicians in Delhi truly believe the People's Republic of China is some sort of strategic rival even though most of them do not openly express that viewpoint because of diplomatic repercussions.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is an Indian political force which, among other things, advocates for a more aggressive foreign policy and it also supports a strongly nationalist agenda. If the 2008 Mumbai attacks were indeed a covert operation run by the CIA franchise called ISI (which has been resorted to in Chechnya, Afghanistan, the Balkans or wherever plausible denial is needed) one of its objectives would be the political empowerment of Indian forces (like the BJP) much more willing to accept an Indo-American alliance than the current Congress-led administration.

It is revealing that the Dalai Lama (who is still probably a CIA asset) keeps operating unimpeded from Dharamsala (nicknamed 'little Lhasa'), India, which demonstrates that Delhi is politically eager to check China's rising power. Moreover, India is also interested in gaining access to Tibet's abundant deposits of natural resources, particularly fresh water and uranium.

A few years ago, India was willing to engage Iran in negotiations in order to enhance its own energy security. Nonetheless, it seems Washington was successful in undermining those talks. One can only wonder what Delhi was promised or given in return. It is also remarkable that the US plans a transfer of nuclear technology to India.

Furthermore, India has also sought closer ties with other American allies. For instance, Delhi

has become a large buyer of Israeli-made arms and defense systems.

On the other hand, India is an observer State in the SCO. Yet, Delhi has not requested full membership allegedly as a result of American diplomatic pressure. India is an important purchaser of Russian-manufactured military hardware, including aircraft and tanks. Besides, Russia and India are collaborating in the development of a fifth-generation stealth fighter.

Russia and India had a close relation during the Cold War. The Kremlin knows that both powers do not have mutually exclusive national interests, which is not something that can be said when one examines Sino-Indian relations. Moscow and Delhi share a desire to counter Islamic unrest in Central Asia. President Medvedev recently announced that the Russian Government will consider sharing nuclear technology with India to boost bilateral ties, an effort clearly meant to outbid the Americans.

In short, the Americans are very much interested in creating an 'Asian NATO'; nevertheless, such organization would be meaningless unless India could be included. That explains why the US has demonstrated a certain willingness to make several concessions to India in order to gain the latter's geopolitical and strategic loyalty. It is unknown at this point if Delhi will join such alliance. Perhaps India's political elites are still deciding whether they will align with the Atlanticists (the Americans and the Europeans), with the Eurasians (the Russians plus the Chinese) or with... neither. After all, Delhi can just play them off against one another in order to extract as many concessions as possible from both without having to take sides. However, if India opts to side with any of those bands, that will send strong geopolitical shockwaves throughout Eurasia.

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